

TIPS for the Y-BLOCK NATIONALS & SHOOTOUT at EXPO FORD by Bob Martin

Part 2 of 2: More Basics of taking your Ride down the Track

In part 1 of 2, we took an overview of the event, went through Technical Inspection, got called to the lanes, explained pairings, got taken through staging and making passes, and explained the time slip so you could choose your ET Dial-In. Now, coming up on the event, we'll cover starting line reaction, how changing your reaction affects your ET/Dial-In, the important aspects of making the complete pass, and taking the finish line, all with the intent of winning the race(s). But first, I'll hit the high points from part 1. **Technical Inspection** doesn't have to be a stumbling block that keeps one from bringing their ride to the event. Most of us pay attention to the details that tech is concerned about – our safety. The tires have good tread, the carburetor linkage has good return spring(s), the lug nuts have good thread engagement, and the battery is secured properly without bungee cords and wire ties. Seat belts, long pants, coolant overflow catch-cans, and removed hub caps/beauty rings are mandatory track rules. If this is your first time at the drags you might be dinged for simple infractions. I was dinged locally for a maximum of 10" of rubber fuel line with a promise to have it corrected "the next time". But since this item was tied to a potential of blow-torching my ride if the fan blade came apart, etc, I switched to stainless braid covered lines over stock steel. More safety issues kick in with performance, and the EXPO Class or Bracket you declare (not the Y-Block Shootout) is your statement of performance. Most of us "Street Cars" fall into the EXPO "Street". But this year, it has been bracketed to 13.00 & Up (until last year it was 14.00 & Up), so there are Safety issues to consider – that's why I recommend taking your car to your local track – so you know what it runs. 16, or 17-seconds & up doesn't get a lot of attention. If you run slicks, you might be expected to have a drive shaft loop. But at 13.99 the loop is mandatory – and you also need an approved helmet. Cars running in the quicker Pro and Super Pro classes should get an NHRA rule book and be prepared. A minimum **Race Kit** should include a tire pressure gage, white shoe polish and a damp towel (for changing your Dial-In), and a portable radio to tune into the tracks PA system for your call.

REACTON. I'll assume that you have made enough passes to be able to determine your Dial-In. Now re-look at your time slips and study your reaction time – the time it took your front tire to break free of the stage beam AFTER the green light came on. Since you are "anticipating" the start by "reacting" to the last yellow light to get the car moving before the green light turns on (.500-second after the last yellow light), you are literally "taking a run at the tree". Theoretically, if your tire breaks the beam EXACTLY when the green light comes on, you cut a perfect ".500" light. Less than that (.499 or less), and you left before the green light came on, and you will get a red "foul" light, and be disqualified for leaving too soon. If your time slips show reaction times between .500-and-.525, you have an excellent driver/car reaction, and .525-to-.550 is good. .550-to-.600 is "acceptable" in the sense that you have an even chance to beat an "equal" opponent in the early rounds. If your slips show .600-or-worse, you should "adjust you or your car to the tree". If your reaction is bad enough, you could try leaving sooner (when you see the second yellow light "go off" for example). The more "advanced" (and time consuming) methods are adjusting your timing (more timing for more low end power), or adjust your valves (tighter valve lash for more low end power). I've seen less roll-out accomplished by letting air out of the rear drive wheels to reduce the effective diameter/increase gear ratio (but it also got more red lights). You could put smaller front tires on the car for less roll-out (if you had smaller tires on hand), or put more air in the front tires for less rolling friction/less roll-out. The easiest is to roll deeper into the stage beam for less roll-out. Depending on the car, every 2" deeper can result in .005 to .010 quicker reaction or more. If you find that you need to roll in so deep that you turn out the pre-stage bulb (over 6" or so), you will need to shoe-polish "DEEP" on both side windows to let the starter know your intention. Otherwise, he won't turn Auto-Start off (if it's on), and the tree will start its automatic timing sequence as soon as both cars are staged. Bottom line, do whatever you have to do to get the reactions you are comfortable with. **Reality Check:** After you alter your starting technique to adjust for reaction, you should re-check your ET. If you stage deeper on the starting line, that same 2" shorter run at the tree will produce a slower ET by .003 or .005 (or more) on the top end. You have to try this to see what happens in your combination. But say, if you want to stage deeper in the final rounds of eliminations for a better reaction (for a better chance to win), REMEMBER that you may have to compensate for what it will do to your ET. Do it before you leave the staging lanes, after which you are not allowed to change your Dial-In.

With the ET/reaction procedure nailed down, it's time to think about what has to happen – or what may happen – between the start and finish lines. Can you be consistent in EVERYTHING? Same fluid temperatures; leave

at the same rpm; at the same spot to the tree (within ¼”); without tire spin (or with the same tire spin); shift at the same rpm and be confident everything will go as planned. If so, you have the right mind set. If not, you’re human like the rest of us. One of the worst things that can happen is a poor launch – that you can feel – because your ET is drastically affected by what happens in the first 10 or 20 feet. Have you “saved” something in case it happens? Running a stick car, I save 500 rpm (and am still 500 rpm below red line if I have to use it). Another “worse” thing is a missed shift. If it happens in the 1-2 shift, you don’t have much choice but to turn up the other gears. If it happens in your last shift, your only hope is to run it out and hope your opponent lifts and you can beat him to the line. Once you are in your final gear before the finish line, you are either going to overtake a slower car, or outrun a faster car. Overtaking a slower car, especially if you catch him well ahead of the finish line, gives you opportunity to let off the gas and “play with him”. **DON’T GET CAUGHT IN THAT TRAP!** If you let off the gas, your car will lose its momentum, and he might get away from you and take the line before you can recover. Instead, keep your accelerator on the floor and ease your other foot on the brake.

FINISH LINE. There’s really only one rule to remember when it comes to the Finish Line – you have to take it! You have to be the first one to cross the Finish Line. If you don’t, you run the risk of “giving the line” to your opponent - and if he doesn’t “break out” (run under his established Dial-In), you just “gave him the win” without a contest. Be confident that you have chosen YOUR Dial-In correctly, and **TAKE THE FINISH LINE!**



Feistritzer winning at the Finish Line / 2001 EXPO Nostalgia

The **ONLY** exception would be if you had **NO CHANCE** of taking the line before your opponent crosses it – then, “dump him” by backing off and hoping he is breaking out of his Dial-In (and you not yours). The assumption here is that you cut a better light than he did and the only way he can take the line from you **IS** to “break out” and lose. The more you race, the more confident you will feel at the finish line. And the better you choose your Dial-In and cut good reactions, the less decisions you will have to make at the finish line. A good reaction can make up for running off your Dial-In. Running right on your Dial-In can make up for a poor reaction. A good reaction **AND** running right on your Dial-In will win the race – if you take the finish line. **TAKE THE FINISH LINE!** It’s easy to see when your opponent is close to your ET/speed. Even when you are overtaking a slower car, it’s still easy to judge the outcome. But when your opponent is much quicker and faster, you have to take your concentration off what you are doing, find him, judge him, and make a decision of what to do about it. Whatever you have to do, **REMEMBER TO TAKE THE LINE!**

RECAP & STRATEGY BRAIN FOOD. If you have a street car, and don’t frequent the tracks, like most of us, or ever – you might not get enough time trials to be comfortable with choosing your Dial-In. That’s why I recommend coming up on “Casual Friday”. Regardless, you can still get a lot of help from fellow Y-Blockers, and if you should beat the one who helps you – that’s racing and you learned well. If you are not consistent, for whatever reason, you can “dial soft”, and choose a Dial-In you can hit easily, knowing that you will have to touch the brakes near the finish line. However, this strategy is best for “the faster car”, that is, one that can catch the slower car, put a fender on him, and pace him to the finish line. Word of caution that it’s easy to be “pushed out” by the slower car that can run its Dial-In. If your time slips have relatively close ET’s, choose a Dial-In a “couple of hundredths” quicker than you can run, go flat out and keep your foot on the floor. That’s the method I prefer – less to think about and do about. Remember that theoretically, if both drivers have the same reaction and run their Dial-In, they will hit the finish line at the same time. But if one of the competitors has a reaction and Dial-In error of just one tenth of a second (.10) than the other, it will result in a one car length error at the finish line – and call for some decisions to be made. **Time Trials:** Try both lanes during time trials so you “see” the relative difference in the lanes – also check the time slips to see if there is any real difference in reaction and ET between lanes for your car. **Eliminations:** During eliminations, before you stage, check the scoreboards at the end of the track to make sure they entered your correct Dial-In. Once you have staged, the number that’s entered (on the boards and in the computer) is the one you are handicapped to run on. **Second Chance:** For the Y-Blockers that enter **Sunday’s EXPO Classes**, in 2002, the track started allowing \$15 “Buy-Backs” into the second round. That is, if you lose in the first round, you can “Buy-Back” into the second round for \$15. Cheap!

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