

Y-BLOCK SHOOTOUT TIPS PART 3: SEE WHAT IT DOES

by
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This is the next of four additional installments, intended to help those Y-Block enthusiasts who would like to do more at the dragstrip than just show their ride off and/or find out how fast it can go down the track. Show your ride off, enter a Bracket you can have fun in, win some rounds by forcing others to make mistakes, and go home with more than just a smile on your face. While this first article is written from my own perspective, the second and third segments will be a compilation of facts from most, if not all, previous Y-Block Shootout competitors, as well as serious Y-Block Performance specialists that I've come in contact with over the past couple of years. They will have information on sharpening your skills and fine tuning your ability to win rounds and/or events at any track. And they are, of course, timed as a lead-in to Y-BLOCK SHOOTOUT 2000, which historically happens over the Labor Day weekend at the Ford EXPO Meet in Columbus, Ohio.

I'm writing this with the utmost respect for well-preserved 40-year old Y-Block iron, and especially for those who have made them run and win consistently, at speeds beyond my wildest dreams. To put it into perspective, the SHOOTOUT started, and continues, as a contest for the quickest/fastest Y-Block, but has developed from the roots, to make it more fun for all the competitors. Based on the EXPO event's Bracket Racing format, Y-Block buffs put up additional awards based on round wins and reaction times, allowing everyone a shot at winning a little something to take the bite out of the cost of the tech ticket. Keep in mind, the core group is there to win, but the fundamentals of Bracket Racing level the playing field. I've seen the fast, as well as the slowest Y-Block entries take a piece of the awards, and make their mark on the EXPO field as well.

Unlike Class Racing – where you have to run on an established class index or record handicap system (which has evolved into a cubic \$ operation today) – in Bracket Racing, you select the elapsed-time “dial-in” to run on, based on what your car does, and are handicapped against everyone else's “dial-in”. That's the allure of Bracket Racing – anyone can have an equal chance of winning. Most tracks structure their Brackets according to how quick the cars run in the ¼-mile, and the Ford EXPO Meet even adds a Nostalgia Bracket (13.99 & quicker). But if you haven't been down the track, or it's been some years since you've tried it, I recommend going to a Test & Tune session. It's cheaper, and the atmosphere is a bit more laid back. Tech isn't as critical of your vehicle, you can concentrate on what you're doing, and learn about what happened, after you've made a few passes. It's all heads-up, no handicap, so you can make your own fun during the course of the session by finding a friend, or someone who runs close to your times, and pair up with one another if the track permits it. They usually do, unless there's a ton of cars on hand. The main thing is to see just how consistent your car runs the way it is – but you have to concentrate on being consistent about what you are doing.

Bracket Racing involves four main areas. I.) How consistent your car is in elapsed time (and mph); II.) How to determine your dial-in; III.) How you react to the starting line “christmas tree”; and IV.) How you take the finish line. This time we'll only look at the first area and see how consistent your elapsed time is. We'll be more specific in the next installments, explain how to be more consistent, and basically how to become a real obstacle to the hard cores, and take pleasure in putting somebody's high-dollar thunder machine out of eliminations in front of a crowd some Saturday night or Sunday afternoon. All the years I've covered the strips as a NHRA/IHRA photojournalist, the quicker cars seemed to have the advantage of running down the slower cars – but that was before I raced my 17-second '56 Mercury (now runs high 15.0's). If I could run my number, and cut a respective light on the start, I could cause more “unforced errors” on the 10 and 12-second pieces. My best victim to date was an 8.90 Hornet, who blew by me at 150 mph, but .003 too late. On the other end of the spectrum, three years ago, I watched a racer who broke his dragster during time trials re-enter and win the Non-Electronics Bracket in his 23-second motor home. Impressed him so much, he made a habit of it and took the Track Championship that year in overall points with that monstrosity. If he could do it, anyone can.

Before you take your Y-Block vehicle to the track, give it good once-over. Check all your fluid levels, put plenty of air in the tires, especially radials. Charge your battery, clean the terminals and properly tension your belts. Put in a fresh air filter and a set of plugs, especially if you're not sure – there's nothing more embarrassing than popping all the way down the track. Pack a few tools, belts, hand cleaner, etc. “just in case”. Not to scare anyone, having a 4-speed car, I always go to the track when I know someone in our group who trailers his street car – that way, I have a way home “just in case”. And you MUST take a log book for recording the pertinent facts like air temperature, engine temperatures, pressures, rpm's, e.t.'s and mph's, etc. These can be obtained from Jegs, Summit, or if all else fails, make your own or write me for pages – I made and keep a log book for a blown 7-second Dragster/Altered operation that has spaces for data you don't normally think about. They are usually free for the asking if you patronize their shops. After you're at the track, unload any excess baggage, spare tire, jack, tools, etc, because weight takes more time to get down the track. Fill out your Tech ticket and go through Tech and pay attention to what they say is a concern. Hub caps off (safety). They might be easy on you the first time, but make any required rule changes before you bring it back. The quicker you can run, the harder they look – if they're worth their salt. They will put a track number on your windshield and side window so the tower can identify you. If you don't like their white shoe polish, bring your own. The speed shops and parts houses have some that comes off easily. The track stuff may take some water and elbow grease. If you take pride in the way your car looks, you might want to have some of the “good stuff”.

Before heading to the lanes, take a few moments and watch how some of the other racers do their routine. Especially notice how the cars stage and how they start moving while the tree is coming down – before the green light comes on. Avoid the water box if at all possible with street tires. If you can't, and you don't have posi-traction, you have to make two burnouts to clean both tires. One tire will spin on the first, and the other will (usually) spin on the second with the first tire clean and dry. Don't go crazy here – remember your friend with the trailer – it could be a long day if you spin much over 4000 rpm. All you need is clean tires. If you have gauges, before you pull into the staging beams, look at your temperature – remember, it's important. From here on, everything's important. Make sure your tires are “in the groove”, the clean rubber tracks that the other cars have been laying down. You don't want to break your tires loose on the start. With street tires, this may be easier said than done. Things will happen quickly now. Never mind the car with open headers in the other lane impatiently waiting for you. Don't panic; take a deep breath and CONCENTRATE! Roll into the pre-stage beam and think. The Stage beam is six inches away. Be deliberate on these six inches. You want to stage consistently the same way every time – your elapsed time depends on it. Roll forward the six inches with your left foot on the brake and watch the stage light comes on bright (no flickers). This is important. Two and a half seconds after both cars are staged, the electronics lock in, and the tree starts down. That gives you two and a half seconds to get ready to leave. If you have an automatic, you can foot-brake the car and torque up the converter slightly to pre-load the driveline. If you have a 3 or 4-speed, you have to get the rpm's up for an easy launch, say 2200-2800 so you won't break loose on the launch – and not roll forward. Sorry, you only have two feet. If you don't have a line loc. be smart. Now, did you do all this in two and a half seconds? I think not, especially on your first try.

Here's your first starting line tip. Be the first one through the burnouts and into the staging beams while your opponent is doing his thing. That way you can stage and pick up maybe 15 second to think about it and get ready. If you have an automatic you can wait for him. Don't bring up the converter until he's staged. If you have a stick, pause in the pre-stage beam until the gasoline in you tank settles down. Pulling up and staging fast, the moving gasoline might roll you through the beams. With everything settled down, and your opponent is still playing around, you can easily roll the six inches and settle it again. Try this way first – it gives you more to remember if you find yourself having to stage last – 2 ½ seconds to showtime.

Back to the tree. Both cars are staged and ready and it starts coming down. There are three amber lights and then a green light and a red light. The bulbs light in half-second intervals to green – unless your front tire breaks out of the stage beam before it turns green – then it will turn red because you “left too soon”. Don't worry about it – you have to find the read light. More about this in the next issue. Back to the tree. I've found that since you have to pick a point and leave somewhere, leave when the last amber light turns on. It is .500 of a second from green. This gives you and your car .500 of a second to get moving - as much as a foot – the distance it takes your front tire to move from where the beam is hitting it in the front, staged, to when the beam leaves the back of the tire as it rolls forward. Tire size has a bearing on this. A perfect .500 light occurs when your front tire breaks the stage beam exactly when the green light comes on. Been there, done that – don't count on it. It can also go .500 red. Been there, done that also. A .550 light is a decent light, a .520 light is a good light, and a .50 anything light is a great light. Conversely, you can get away with a .600 light now and then (when your opponent cuts a worse light), but you really don't want to go there, consistently. The sharpshooters will have you for lunch. But it only takes a little experience and understanding to make .550s and better a reality.

Back to the track. You're rolling now in low gear, you have to shift. You know your car better than I do, so, if it's bone stock, maybe 4200-4500 rpm. If you don't have a tach, use you speedometer. Whatever you do, do at least three runs the same way and see how consistent your et's turn out. Performance Y-Blocks have gone to 8000 rpm. Don't even think about it. That's why they trailer them to the track – so they've got a way home. If you don't have a tach and get hooked (like the rest of us) buy a tach – a shift-light tack would be nice. Makes life at the dragstrip a little simpler. Through the speed traps – don't let off early - run through the traps, take a look at your tach (or speedometer) and then bring it down safely. Wait a minute, where is your opponent? If he's in front of you, fine. If he's behind you, look for him. You don't want to make the turn off in front of him – when he may be in trouble. That will only happen once in your lifetime. This is a racetrack, not a scenic park. Bad things have happened to good people. I've seen ugly things happen in front of my camera lenses.

Back to the return road. Stop at the timing shack and pick up your time slip. Now, this is important. What they just gave you is a bunch of numbers on hardcopy. Did you remember your tire pressure, your engine temperature, your shift points, what rpm you went through the traps at? The first thing you do when you get back to your pit area is get out your logbook and write everything down. It will help keep you consistent. Let it cool down if it needs it and do it again. Look how many cars are in the lanes and keep track of the time. If at the end of the day, you can put down three similar runs within .1 of a second, you have a better combination than I have, and you might plan on paying attention to the next two installments – and coming to Columbus for the Y-Block Nationals. Or go to any of our other Events (Birdsapalooza (TX-May), Carlisle,(PA-May), and the Texas All-Ford Shootout (TX-Oct) listed on the Y-Blocks Forever Website. And while you're at it, John Mummert and I are keeping records on what Y-Block vehicles are turning at the tracks. Write me for a profile sheet or download one from the Webbsite and return a filled-out copy with a picture. Jim Culver (Webmaster) and I put the information on the site, and for tower announcers and covering medias, while John is compiling the information for his soon-to-be-published Y-Block book. Be part of the Website and let other Y-Blockers know what they can expect from their similar rides.