

Y-BLOCK SHOOTOUT TIPS PART 5: FINE TUNING YOUR ABILITY TO WIN

by
Bob Martin

The previous two installments gave the complete overview of the fundamentals of Bracket Racing for those Y-Block enthusiasts who might want to do more at the dragstrip than show off their rides. They also covered tips for “free horsepower”, as well as specific tips on car/driver consistency, determining your dial-in, staging, and taking the finish line. This time we will cover lived and learned tips from racers past and present. I originally thought I could wrap this series up in three articles timed for the Annual Y-Block Nationals & Shootout in Columbus Ohio over Labor Day weekend at the Ford EXPO meet at National Trails Raceway. But the tips keep coming in, I know I’ll pick up even more at the Shootout, and I still want to submit a reality check on the relative cost of speed. So there will be more, and I promise to keep it / them interesting.

If it’s your first time at the track as a racer, or if you go with your friends to another track, do yourself a favor and get there early and walk the side of the track and take a good look at the equipment. Are the yellow bulbs on the starting tree all the same color. Harry Hutten got caught once when a Pro-Mod took out the tree and they replaced one of the opaque yellow bulbs with a clear yellow bulb. Threw his timing sequence off. At the other end of the track, find out just exactly where the finish line is. Do the photo cells line up with the yellow line – or with the cones? Are they straight across? Are both lanes on the same line? Might make a difference on how you take the finish line. Harry found them different at a Michigan track once. Look for the turn-offs. Plan on taking the last one to avoid accidentally cutting someone off and getting T-Boned.

I can’t stress enough about keeping records – even if you only race once a year at some special event. Whether you scribble something on your time slips, fill-in the pages of a Jegs or Summit Log book, or come up with your own hoo-haa, write it down! You can’t guess – very few racers guess any more, and that’s what you’re up against – be better than they are! And for every change you make to your car, you have to start another set of records for comparison. When you/your car are consistent, stop making changes and go race somebody and beat them. With that said for the last time (promise), I’ll start with general tips (encountered by most everyone), and then roll into specific tips from racers in a specific performance Brackets.

A take-off on the above record keeping – get your between round routine down pat. What you do / check, how you cool, what fluids / fuel you might have to add, and pay attention to how long everything takes. Because, when you are winning and getting deeper in eliminations, time between rounds gets less and less. Pit somewhere near a speaker or stay tuned to the radio frequency the announcing system uses (if they have one), because you don’t want to miss your call to the lanes. If it ever happens and you see your Bracket going down the track without you, you will either be too late (if they have closed the lanes), or at best, you will be in such a rush that you will be so far out of your “loose” routine that you won’t be able to cut a good light – or most probably red light. Having said that, concentrate on running your race, and not your opponent’s. Don’t give in to his mind games. If he takes his good time staging, wanting to show everyone how bad he is, just do your thing and stage promptly – they just might put the stopwatch on him and turn his day upside down. You might want to give his way a glance, maybe at his front tire, or whatever you want to gauge him by at the finish line if its going to be close.

Take advantage of your opponent’s mistakes. If you are pre-staged and waiting for him and he stages too fast and accidentally rolls in too deep, stage immediately and don’t give him the opportunity to correct himself. The Auto-Start will catch him in 2.5 seconds and you should be able to drill him on the tree. If he red lights chasing you and you see it, remember that he just gave you a free ride, and to run it out all the way through for a check on your next round dial-in. Editor Bruce Young has only had street racing experience (to date), but he made it a point to never show his opponent everything. I can relate that to Drag Racing. If, for example, something simple goes wrong with your car, like your accelerator linkage comes apart in the lanes, don’t panic. Don’t let anyone see your problem. If they start your Bracket and you don’t have time to fix it, just idle on up to the line and stage. Give your opponent the opportunity to red light against you. I’ve seen this work first hand and the racer then fixed it for the following round and went on to win his Bracket. I’ve also seen a “broken” racer just sit on the line in the stage beams because something was wrong and the other driver looked over at him in bewilderment, took his mind off what he was doing himself and accidentally red-lighted. Happened to one of the drivers on our race team. He still hasn’t lived that one down! If you have lane choice, and you know that your next opponent has been dead-on in his lane, and are not so sure about yourself – take his lane. You have nothing to lose – you’ve already lost mentally! Mess him up also! If you do break something serious during time trials, talk to tech and see if you can race an alternate car / tow car. Don’t give up!

Bruce also said he was “addicted to my tachometer ...and the oil pressure gauge”. Those two gauges are a must if you make a habit out of racing. Temperature gauges have a place in Bracket Racing as well. You want every run to be

under the same circumstances, and engine temperature is critical. Warm it up if it cooled off between rounds, and cool it down if it's too hot after a run. If you ran a previous number at a certain temperature, duplicate it. It makes a difference if the temperature was going up or coming down when you read it. If you know which way it was going, and what it does to your performance, then you can literally make an "on-the-fly" correction with different shift points. Once you leave the lanes and head for the starting line, your dial-in can't be changed. And remember to look down the track and check the clocks for your correct dial-in before you stage. If someone in the tower makes a mistake on your dial-in, if you stage to it, you bought it when you staged!

The transition from day to night racing has a direct impact on your reaction time. As the skies get darker, your eyes can see the lights quicker and you might have to make a correction on how you leave the starting line. If you can consistently cut .530 lights or better in the sunlight, you will have to make some sort of correction for the dark or risk a red light. A dark cloud or overcast skies during the day can also have a similar effect. Some say to wait until the last yellow glows bright. Yeah, right! Remember that your eyes can't see .030. But I've seen racers, including Harry, play with his sun visor or put tape on the windshield so they only see what they want to see. Another "trick" was to use colored glasses, like yellow. Whatever works for you. Night racing also requires that you have a minimum of one working taillight. Should not be a problem for a sharp Y-Block ride. Is your charging system up to snuff? Have you made good use of star washers for effective grounding on 40-year old iron? Another thing to watch for at the track is the flag – for wind. Blowing down the track (tail wind) it will pick you up (mph and ET). Blowing up the track (headwind) it will slow you down. Be aware of what the wind is doing and correct your dial-in accordingly. However, Mother Nature has a way of changing at the worst possible time. At least it happens to your opponent also – usually. Safety rule #1. If you ever get out of shape during a run, for any reason, lift, get out of it, and bring the car back under control. Forget that run. You can make another time trial, or worse case, race another day – if you keep yourself and your ride in one piece. Drive smart!

Rick Martin went over some of his best tips for the 317 Lincoln Y-Block, and they relate to the Ford Y's as well. His biggest power gain in his 4635# '54 Lincoln (16-17 second performance) came from installing Tri-Y headers. He picked up .49 seconds right now – accompanied by upping his jets by four sizes. He also experienced gains in performance and consistency with a '57 centrifugal distributor (or a Ford Y-Block distributor with a Lincoln gear). Similar to Ford Y-blocks, he also picked up gains by swapping intakes, heads and gears. He replaced his 3.31 gears with 4.27's from a '49 Lincoln with OD – they fit all the way through '57's. Likewise, the Lincoln truck intakes took the big bore carbs, and the '56 and '57 heads had bigger exhaust valves and ports. Even the '57 stock cam was a step up from the '54, but you need the one that is drilled to oil the rockers.

If you've been following the Southern Ohio Y-Block Reports in Bruce Young's Y-Block Magazine in the years past, you have been able read how Harry Hutten has taken his 4200# '60 Mercury 312 from 15.85, all the way down to 14.97. He is now fairly consistent in Drag Racing fundamentals, but still gets tripped up with something new, or something he forgot about, and we've all been learning right along with him. A recent discovery was found in the stock 40-year old steel fuel line from his pump to his carburetor. During a routine carburetor swap, he noticed some brown speckles in his float bowls and found out that the line was rusting from the inside out. It has since been replaced with a stainless braided line, and he feels lucky that he caught it before it caused a fuel flow problem during his NSCA Shootouts. Since Harry races at many different tracks, he has found that they all have slightly different rollout at the starting line, which directly affects your reaction. You just have to adjust to it as it happens. "Never count on usual staging procedures at different tracks", Harry warns, and "never count on lane choice". Harry picked up noticeable gains when he installed an electric water pump and electric radiator fan, but he cautions that the more efficient you get, the gains may be more imagined. They also demanded more power, and he ended up swapping out his generator for a high-output alternator. The higher output improved not only his cooling ability, it also helped his ignition. And don't forget to stay hydrated. We've both fallen victims to this trap. You can get so busy between rounds on a hot day that you forget to drink and eat. When you start to get woozy, you're probably low on fluids. Gatorade will pick you up quick, and water will top you off. And thank the early Fords for cozy wings. It gets terribly hot inside a car with the windows up, and the cozy wings move a lot of air quickly after a run. And remember that it's usually in the mid-90's at Columbus, and the pits are blacktop with no shade. That's why Jerry Christenson brings his "Y-BLOCK" tent (and brewski).

John Feistritzer has raced his Paxton-Supercharged 312 "Hoosier Hurricane" '57 Ford to Nostalgia Class wins at the '90, '96 & '01 Ford EXPO meets, and has some serious tips for the low 12-second Bracket racers. Some have been covered in detail in previous Y-Block Magazine issues, and some are fresh brain food. John gives serious attention to providing plenty of cool lubrication for his motor: A 1" deeper oil pan all around (not just the sump) with a scraper and screen using only 5 quarts of straight SAE 30 wt oil per Paxton's recommendations (his engine oil lubes and cools the blower). The modifications do the same job as a windage tray and were worth .1 of a second in the quarter mile; Shimmed the oil pump pressure relief spring approximately .18" for 60 psi at 2000 rpm and up from the gear type pump; Installed Chrysler main bearings w/oil holes properly aligned with the block oil passages (Issue #20); Increased the tapped hole depth for longer main cap bolts (Issue #11 and letters in Issue #14); Uses ARP rod bolts; And adapted a sbc Fluidamper (Issue #8). Whoa Jerry – I'll get to yours later. What I liked was his variation on an electric water pump drive and electric radiator fan. He used a Ford heater motor, adapted V-belt sheaves, and picked out a thin V-

belt from NAPA. But the trick thing about his setup is that he controls it with a 135 Reznor gas heater thermostat switch he mounted in his thermostat housing. He doesn't have to worry about turning the fan and pump on when the engine needs cooling, or turning it off when the engine cools in the pits. One of our shop's racers cranked up his car and left the pump and fan off to warm it up faster – then got involved with his kids and walked away. Cooked it! By the time we heard the (bearing) noise it was too late. A very expensive lesson! John also stresses to read John Mummert's article on Y-Block Assembly Errors (Issue #33). Then read it again and again before you start assembling your engine.

Remember that the slower car is always ahead until it's passed. And once you go fast, you never go back. Show 'em your taillights at Columbus. Make it to the Y-BLOCK NATIONALS & SHOOTOUT!

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