

Y-BLOCK SHOOTOUT TIPS PART 6, and LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

by
Bob Martin

If you followed my TIP series in previous installments from those familiar with Bracket Racing, you got plenty to chew on. Hopefully those of you who wanted to do more at the dragstrip than just show off your rides, took the opportunity to make a few passes down the track and even mix it up with the regulars. While it can be intimidating, it's a mix of ego and fun that makes one want to keep on racing and at the Ford EXPO in Columbus, it's the FUN and camaraderie of our "Y's Guys" gathering that makes it so. Last year saw a number of new faces – with a surprising turnout of 4-speed cars and a taken opportunity for a real Y-BLOCK SHOOTOUT! It gets better every year. More cars and trucks / makes and models, and increasing prize purses contributed by fellow Y-Blockers. With that said, this article will discuss tips not previously mentioned (or recently encountered), and talk about what it takes to prepare a Y-Block (and pass tech) to run 11.99 and quicker – and deep into the 10's – and now into the 9's – on the way to 8's. History in the making from 40+ year old iron.

SHOOTOUT TIPS: We've talked about consistency (with everything) and record keeping, which makes selecting your dial-in easier. Then about your reaction time – what affects your reaction time, and how to adjust it. Then it was up to you to understand how to take the finish line without breaking out, or giving it up to your opponent and let him "take it from you" for the win. Well, in 2001, Harry Hutte had an experience in his 312 '60 Merc in the NSCA World Finals worth mentioning again, from a different standpoint. Sorry Harry. It happened in a "revenge" match with a 10-second Buick that beat him by .030 earlier in the year. When Harry saw that he had drawn his opponent (again) in the first round, he acted cool, laughing and carrying on with me, in full view of his competitor – who was pitted next to him. I told him he "owed him one", and Jim was dead serious – because he had a golden opportunity to win the championship if he could take Harry out in the first round. Harry showed everyone that he could run under his 15.25 index during qualifying, and most of the heavy hitters run "soft". That is, they pick an index they can run under and rely on catching you and then pacing you all the way to the finish, and rely on you not being able to run your number for an "easy" win. Well, Harry took the 5.50-second handicap start and never looked back. Jim Netherland left wheels up in pursuit on a 10.75 index, and gave chase. Both men cut equal reactions, so it was all going to happen at the finish line – and it did! Jim got no further than Harry's back bumper when Harry crossed the finish line, and Jim said his stomach flopped. But the win light came up in Jim's lane because Harry had run .07 under his index – and Jim got his stomach back when he got his time slip. But it was the reason Harry lost that's worth mentioning. OK, so the Buick was coming up his tail pipe – but Harry couldn't see him – couldn't judge him and work his brakes and take the finish line without breaking out (index racing also uses the break-out rule). Harry had too many decals on his windows, and couldn't pick the Buick out. **TIP 829: Don't over-do the decal thing!** Especially on your rear and side windows. Be strategic with them so you have a chance to see anyone coming up from behind. And remember – you might be racing at night under the lights! Some racers paint the front of their car black just to make it more difficult to be spotted coming up on their opponent. And most track lights are not very illuminating at speed.

Consider your or your opponent's Bracket Racing "style". Some either don't quite get consistent enough to suit themselves or like to be a "sandbag", so they dial soft, catch their opponent and pace them to the traps. Others run flat out and let their opponent make the mistake. Then you have those who throw in a few tricks, like getting good at letting off at the first cone – to mentally upset you at the finish line. They all can be beat, but it's usually by the flat-out racer – the racer who is confident enough that he can cut a good light, run his number and beat you to the finish line without breaking out. All it takes is a good car to work with, skill and understanding, and experience. The quicker and quicker Brackets see more and more flat-out racers, with matches won by mere thousandths of a second. But the slow Brackets, where the "first timers" or "non regulars" play, give you the best chance to learn and win. If the bug bites, and you start winning rounds, trophies, or a few bucks, you'll probably start mixing it up in the higher dollar Brackets, where you will continue your learning experience. Last year, I told you that your first time down the track, and your first round of actual handicapped competition, will probably be adrenaline-fueled "white knucklers", and you won't recall much about them. But there's another situation you need to plan for before it happens and you get caught in a brain fog. The time you pull to the line and you find out that your opponent has the same, or nearly the same, dial-in as you do. Now, reaction is your primary concern. If you leave first, and can hold the lead, your chances of winning are great. If you leave last, and your opponent holds the lead, don't panic, think it through, never give up and never let off. If your opponent lets off before the finish line, you can cover him or her in an instant and he'll be the one beating flat spots on his forehead – for killing you on the tree, but giving you the win at the finish line. Been there, done that! **Tip 830: Know your opponent's dial-in before you stage!** You don't want to see you are in a heads-up run just before the tree starts down. Great way to come apart mentally and either red light or get treed. **Tip 831: Never panic, think it through, and never give up!** Easier said than done, but you have to stay consistent with the style you used to determine your dial-in, which most probably didn't include an adrenaline rush. I saw a driver in 10-second car break out, unloading it off the trailer, worked on it and got it running – but after his Bracket was already in eliminations. Without any time trials to base his dial-in, he hurried to the lanes before they closed, chose a dial-in 8-seconds slower than his opponent, left first and moseyed down the track and stopped inches from the finish and waited for him. The instant before the other car got there, he blipped it through the lights and won! His opponent didn't figure out what was going on and had let off thinking he was broke. Think about it!

Life in the Fast Lane / Y-Blocks 11.99 and Quicker: In previous installments, I reported tips from past SHOOTOUT competitors from 21-second rollbacks – to 17-second “Streeters” like myself, all the way down to the 11.83 F-Code “Hoosier Hurricane” of John Feistritz. While the meat of the above average (normally aspirated) Y’s Guys run in the 14-second +/- range, there were enough of the sub-13 second cars out there that made the tips from John much appreciated. But we’ve got a bunch of sub-12-second Y-Blockers, and a couple 11 second (now 9-second) machines on record, and I would like to elaborate on a few tips from those in this group. More importantly, I want to point out the safety requirements that have to be adhered to for even being ALLOWED to run on a sanctioned Drag Strip. If you use slicks or run in the 14’s, it is very worthwhile to pick up an NHRA or IHRA Rule Book. Read and follow the regulations before you get caught up in the “need for speed” and get tripped up in Tech Inspection and not allowed to run one day. Remember, someone, or a bunch of someone’s paid the price once upon a time to make those rules to be written in the first place. They get more and more involved from 13.99 down, picking up additional restrictions and demands for about every second quicker that you run – and that’s just for Bracket Racers! The Class racers, even in “Stock”, seem to get more involved with every ½-second quicker. The same is true in the National Street Car Association (NSCA) and the National Muscle Car Association (NMCA).

Jerry Chistenson, from Minnesota was the first 10-second Y’s Guy that I’ve personally met and had the pleasure of putting the image of his blown “SR-57 Blackbird” in the cross hairs of my camera. His recommendation for sub 12-second timeslips is simply put. “Make lots of horsepower and/or cut out the weight”. He states that adding nitrous is the least expensive way to go fast, but supercharging is his thrill. In both cases, he echoes the Safety Rules, especially when using nitrous, from a “been there, done that” point of reference (11.30’s in his ’85 Ford). While he respects the stick tranny for Nostalgia, he recommends a C-4 with a high stall speed converter and a tranny brake. “As you get faster, a leaf spring rear suspension becomes very hard to manage”, he wrote, and ladder bars and coil over shocks become the better way to go. Stock wheel wells limit the tire size, and getting higher horsepower to the ground requires narrowed rear ends for wide slicks. “Plan ahead”. See what others have done before you and budget yourself accordingly. Jerry built his tube frame around his B&W supercharged 312, complete with his own intake, headers, timing cover, and C-4 adapter, and covered it with a custom fiberglass T-Bird body. When I first met Jerry in Columbus at the ’98 Shootout, his “Blackbird” was in its original 2-seater double-caged configuration. But when he made his first trip to Bakersfield in October of ’99, the NHRA Tech was not impressed, and only certified his frame for 11.99 passes. He uncorked an 11.06 at 122 mph, loaded it up on the trailer and waited for them to find him and smiled at them as he pulled it out of the pits on his way back home. With a copy of the rule book in hand, he revised the frame and had it re-certified to 9.99 (I’ve seen his 9.96 @ 133 mph time slip). In 2001, Jerry recorded a 10.53 at 123 mph (on the way to his 9.96), and subsequent Shootouts have seen Ern Phillips record 10.80’s @ 123 mph in his Texas-based ’56 T-Bird on nitrous, and fellow Texan Ted Eaton go to 9.81 at 133 mph in his carbureted ’23 T Ford Altered.

While purses and track rules on electronics seem to vary track-to-track, safety regulations follow strict guidelines, and as mentioned above the faster you go, the tougher they get. The following rules are a mix of general and specific, because of the way they overlap for various sanctions and classes. If in doubt, and highly recommended, buy, read, and follow the rulebooks!

Regardless of where you race, be expected to show a valid drivers license, have good sidewalls and plenty tread on your tires, and have TOTAL maximum of 10” of rubber fuel line. You are expected to have a minimum of one diameter of thread engagement in your lug nut and be prepared to be checked if they are not open ended. An overflow catch can is mandatory and the required 16-oz minimum is not enough – believe it! If you use slicks, driveshaft loops are mandatory – do your pole vaulting at the track and field events. Long pants – no shorts or tank tops. Have two return springs on your accelerator linkage. At 13.99, you are required to have a SNELL 85 Helmet. Some tracks require them regardless. Rear mounted batteries require specific enclosures, master cutoff switches and trunk requirements. 12.5 mandates a driveshaft loop regardless if you run slicks or not. Scatter shields for sticks and Tranny shields/blankets for automatics.

At 11.99, you start to get a lot more attention in Tech. Fire extinguishers are required within reach of the driver. Neutral safety switch HAVE to work. Valve stems must be metal and screw into the wheels. Roll bars are recommended or required (and 100# of roll bar will cost you one tenth of a second ET). 11.49 requires aftermarket axles and fail-safe retainers, as well as 5-point safety belts that require data stickers and must be replaced every two years. At 10.99 all of the above are mandatory. Roll cages are required if you run in excess of 130 mph, or have altered floors or firewalls. Now your flywheel shield, clutch and pressure plates require specific safety identification and you have to run an aftermarket harmonic balancer. When you THINK you can run 9.99, you have to apply for a Competition License to do so and make five pre-determined passes witnessed and signed by track officials. Tube frames must be certified to be able to run those numbers, based on the size of the tubing, placement and number of braces, the type and size of the welds, etc. The chassis must display fasteners, dated tag, the inspection certificate must be presented in Tech, and the chassis must be re-inspected every year, etc, etc.... The parachutes and neck collars become mandatory. Pants, gloves and arm restraints come into play, helmets must meet more stringent spec brake and fire systems get tricky, and the list goes on. In a nutshell, if its FAST you want to play, you gotta pay – and I haven’t even talked about the COST of Y-Block Horsepower! You’re going to have to talk to the POWER people for that information!

Bob Martin, 2127 Oakwood Drive, Milford, OH 45150, (513) 576-6759, e-mail: bmartin@ogara-hess.com