

Follow A Dream/Permatex TA/FC team overcomes adversity to start 2017 season with strong effort

MARSTONS MILLS, MA (March 15, 2017) - Given the way the 2017 season began, the Follow A Dream/Permatex Top Alcohol Funny Car team has already gone through a season's worth of adversity - and it's full steam ahead from here.

Early last week en route to Gainesville Raceway in north central Florida, the team's transporter broke down, forcing it to be towed about 50 miles to the track so that repairs could be made.

"The racetrack was great to let us get in after hours," team owner Jay Blake said. "We appreciated that very much." Then, driver Phil Burkart was flying from New York to Florida when the airplane he was on experienced engine failure and had to make an emergency landing in Tennessee.

After Burkart made it to the drag strip, the race pack installed during the offseason on the team's 2015 Chevrolet Camaro inexplicably broke, forcing team crew chief/tuner Anthony Terenzio to run the car without one of the most important things needed in drag racing: computer data.

"That was pure torture for Anthony," Blake said. "Still, Anthony did a great job. He did it by feel, going in blind, really, and doing it the old fashioned way.

"Anthony, Phil and everybody worked great together. We did it the old school way."

All in all, though, the team became much stronger because of all that adversity. It did well in two days of testing at Gainesville, and then qualified fourth and reached the semifinals in the Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series regional event there.

"There were a lot of good things, way more good things than bad, so it was really a good weekend," Blake said.

Now, the team picks up where it left off last weekend, still at Gainesville, in this weekend's NHRA Gatornationals national event.

"It's like in life, you have all kinds of adversity but you've got to keep going," Blake said. "The number and caliber of cars and the quality of racing will be a little bigger at the Gators, but they're both just as important as the other. You want to win it - it's the Gators - but you don't do anything different."

The Follow A Dream/Permatex TA/FC team has had good luck over the years at the Gatornationals, one of the biggest national events on the NHRA circuit, including winning it in 2006 with Dave Ray behind the wheel.

"The national events, there's TV coverage and more prestige in winning them," Blake said. "You want to win the big ones and win them more than once. But you always want to win."

Adding to last weekend's success, Blake and the team also hosted 10-year-old Dwayne Lewis, who like Blake is also visually impaired.

"His parents brought him to the racetrack and they spent the day with us," Blake said. "Phil showed him the whole car and was absolutely awesome with him. He was just great. It was fun to have him there with us on Saturday."

After this weekend's national event at Gainesville, the next race for the Follow A Dream/Permatex TA/FC team will be April 19-23 in the Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series Division 1 race at Virginia Motorsports Park in North Dinwiddie, Virginia.

The Follow A Dream team lost in the final round there last year and is looking to avenge that with a win this year.

"The reality of it is we have the people, we definitely have the driver and tuner and we've got all the pieces to be a contender at all these races," Blake said. "There's no doubt about that at all. Phil, Anthony and the Follow A Dream team, we're positioned to be a top player."