

Jack Beckman Gives Back Thursday April 10, 2008

NORTH HILLS, Calif. (April 10, 2008) – There are very few race-car drivers who contribute their valuable time to give back to their sport and to others as much as cancer survivor Jack Beckman does. The driver of the Valvoline/Mail Terminal Services Dodge Charger R/T Funny Car for Don Schumacher Racing doesn't spend his time between and during NHRA national events helping prepare his car for competition. He has a talented group of crew members and a crew chief to handle that. Instead, The 41-year-old California native donates his time to visit schools and hospitals and takes part in charity events and fund-raisers.

The 2003 NHRA Super Comp champion and driving instructor at Frank Hawley's Drag Racing School became especially motivated to help less fortunate people after being diagnosed with lymphoma, a form of cancer, that year. After enduring six months of chemotherapy treatments Beckman's outlook on life was changed forever. He began to get involved with charitable organizations and when he joined the Don Schumacher Racing team in 2006 it broadened his opportunities to reach out to others who have endured personal hardships.

This past week as well as this week of the NHRA Nationals in Las Vegas is a prime example of the effort that Beckman puts into his off-track activities. On his weekend off following the previous event in Houston, the former Air Force sergeant video-taped a speech at his California home for the Relay For Life cancer fund-raiser, a nationwide organization. This speech will be played during an event later in the year that he is unable to attend because of his racing schedule.

This Thursday he'll visit the patients at the military hospital at Nellis Air Force Base, outside of Las Vegas, something he does each time he competes in this area. That evening he, and a number of other NHRA racers, will sign autographs for hundreds of drag-racing fans at the Palms Resort Casino.

On Friday evening, in the DSR pit area at The Strip at Las Vegas, he will take part in an auction and an autograph session to help raise money for and NHRA fan and friend of DSR who is fighting cancer. Then he will participate in another autograph session open to fans at the Orleans Hotel & Casino on Saturday evening.

Beckman, who with wife Jenna introduced son Jason Russell to the world just over a year ago, will be interviewed on-stage in the Club Nitro VIP area at The Strip during the event.

Following the Las Vegas event, he will make an appearance and speech for the Racers Who Care organization at the Santa Monica Boys and Girls Club on April 17. His inspirational talks are always welcome and heartwarming.

"I don't think I'm a philanthropic person by nature," admitted Beckman. "I was always kind of a self-absorbed Southern California hot rodder. Obviously, having cancer was quite an awakening, but even still I didn't particularly go out and find ways to donate my time and money. A lot of them kind of come to me. I know a lot of people and I'm outgoing and I network a lot and many people were aware of my situation and they

called me and asked me to help. And I found myself saying yes to almost every offer and it just developed from there.

"When I went to Las Vegas a few years ago I got together with a good friend of mine named Pam Robinson, who was in the Air Force for 12 years and does a lot of volunteer work there. We went over to the military hospital at Nellis Air Force Base and I visited with some of the troops and veterans there.

"I think the common denominator you'll find among people who give time to charity is that there is a passion for it, whether they lost somebody close to them or went through something themselves. They usually have a heartfelt draw to whatever charity they are donating their time to. I have a deep compassion for veterans and sick people so I started visiting the hospital at Nellis and now it's something I try to do every time I'm in Las Vegas. And it's blossomed into other charitable opportunities.

"During my cancer my wife, Jenna, who was still my fiancée, did three marathons and raised over \$20,000 for the Leukemia Lymphoma Society. She did that because I had cancer and it was an eye opener to her.

"Don Schumacher Racing has been awesome about opening up its hospitality area and letting families and children spend time with us. We have even taken several of these people in our tow vehicle with us and let them be honorary crew members for a run.

"The downside is that several of those people have passed away and it's very difficult because you realize that not every one of them is going to live. So it's pretty tough. But you just have to keep plugging along and realize that you're doing something good for people. And we've received feedback from the families of the ones who have passed away telling us that it really made a difference during the short amount of time that they were able to spend with us. It's something that warms your heart a little bit."

Beckman shares a different message with each group, depending on the ages and/or situation.

"For the Racers Who Care organization I give speeches at YMCAs, Shriner's Hospitals and schools," explained Beckman. "At the schools you're talking to fourth graders and tenth graders. Because they're at different points in their lives they relate to things differently. A fourth grader wants to try on your helmet and gloves and a tenth grader is starting to develop some career-oriented goals, so they have a better understanding of cause and effect and consequences.

"As part of DSR I was invited to give a speech to the Army Youth, Education and Services program (Y.E.S.) at the NHRA national events and it went well and now I am part of the program for multiple races this year. That involves talking to young adults who are facing career and educational choices and maybe give them some direction.

"But when you're dealing with someone who comes out to the races with a 7-year-old who has congenital heart disease we try to show them a wonderful day and tell them how much we love them and hopefully that gives them some strength to deal with what they are going through. We're not talking to that kid about career choices but rather about being strong and hanging in there."

In providing inspirational messages and encouragement, Beckman also takes away

feelings which have a huge impact on his own outlook on life.

"There are times that I go out and give a speech and it's a small group of people and they're being polite, but you're not sure that they are getting anything out of what you're saying. But, what's so awesome about it is that a lot of the time you'll receive an e-mail afterward from one of the people there or a family member saying that they really enjoyed it and they got something out of it. It's really easy to feed off the positive energy when you're talking to a crowd and you can tell that they are getting into it and it really gives you motivation to talk longer and be more enthusiastic. Sometimes you have a group that doesn't seem like they're excited or into what you're talking about, but there are always people within that type of group who are really affected by what you say.

"It's heartbreaking getting e-mails from families of people who have passed away," added Beckman. "I tear up just reading the e-mails. That's something that affects you. It's so unfair that people die young, but some of these people are going to die regardless. The way I've got to look at it and to keep going on is that you want to be part of what made their short stay here wonderful. You want to give them something that makes them enjoy the days that they've got. It charges me up to get positive feedback from these people and more often than not it is from a family member. It's not always the younger people who you're getting the message through to.

"I don't think there is much of a positive you can take away from having cancer. If you gave me the choice today to rewind my life and not have cancer, I would say yes. The positive thing has been that I am now more aware. And though I am not a naturally philanthropic person it's made me more that way. It's made me realize that the kindness that you show to people makes a big difference. But charity doesn't have to be just talking to people. It might be pulling over for that person whose car has broken down or holding the door open for somebody. It might be saying 'please' or 'thank you' when you speak to somebody. I think the whole idea is that it's a little bit on your part that might make a big difference in somebody else's day, week or life, so why not make that effort."

Beckman's sponsor, Mail Terminal Services, also makes a major contribution to help the troops overseas. MTS continues its "Mail from Home" program in 2008, which proved wildly successful in 2007. Fans at each NHRA national event have the opportunity to sign special cards at the DSR hospitality area and at the U.S. Army Racing Zone in the midway area, which MTS will then ship, free of charge, to the troops in war zones overseas. Over 90,000 cards were shipped in 2007. "What MTS does to help the troops is an inspiration," said Beckman. "They do such a great job, and I am incredibly proud to be associated with them."

Beckman is second in the NHRA POWERade Drag Racing Series point standings, just 11 points behind first place. This weekend's event at The Strip at Las Vegas Motor Speedway is the fifth of 24 for the season. Beckman won at The Strip in only his fourth-ever national event in Funny Car, in the 2006 fall event. He holds the national top-speed record of 333.66 mph.

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