

Shell Leads Wire-To-Wire For Kingsport Late Model Win

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Zeke Shell scored his first Late Model Stock feature win of the season at Kingsport Speedway Friday night.

Photo by RPM Photos

Zeke Shell broke the Late Model Stock win streak of Kres VanDyke Friday night by scoring the feature victory at Kingsport Speedway in Kingsport, TN.

VanDyke, who had visited victory lane the first two Late Model Stock races to begin the season, set fast-time in qualifying at 15.331 seconds. VanDyke rolled the dice on the front straightaway in victory lane which landed on six, thus meaning the top six from time trials would be inverted.

Shell, of Johnson City, and 16-year-old rookie Justin Fontaine brought the 18-car field to green from the front row. The veteran Shell quickly moved into the lead over Ronnie McCarty and Paul Nogradi, Jr., with Lee Tissot and Chad Finchum battling for fourth in the running order. The race ran clean-and-green the opening 15 laps, before Luke Fox spun between turns three and four to bring out the event's first caution.

Back under green, Shell led McCarty while Nogradi and Tissot raced side-by-side for the third spot before the North Carolina campaigner Tissot took the spot. Up in the high groove, Nogradi wound up losing track position to VanDyke, Finchum and Ryan Stiltner to slide back to seventh place.

Just past the halfway point on lap 31, Shell held a six car length advantage over McCarty and Tissot when the yellow flag waved for Fox spinning between turns three and four.

Shell and McCarty were alongside one another on the front row for the restart, and once back under green McCarty was up on the wheel battling Shell for the lead. They raced side-by-side for four laps before Shell moved back out into the lead. But what would be the final caution waved on lap 36, when Fontaine spun in turn three.

On this restart, Shell shot back out ahead of McCarty, while behind them Tissot and Finchum were battling door-to-door around the .375-mile banked concrete oval. Over the final 20 laps, the racing action was intense behind Shell between McCarty, Tissot, Finchum, VanDyke, Stiltner and Nogradi as they battled back and forth swapping positions.

But out front the race clearly belonged to the 26-year-old Shell, as he captured his first NASCAR Whelen All-American Series Late Model Stock victory of the season over a hard-charging VanDyke, Tissot, Finchum and McCarty.

Completing the top 10 finishers were Stiltner, Nogradi, Zack Walton, Fontaine and Phil Harris.

“Man, following our deal last week in wrecking while battling with Lee (Tissot) for position and having to work on the car back at the shop this week, to bounce back strong tonight and get an impressive win, this is totally awesome,” said a smiling Shell in the pits following the victory lane ceremonies. “We had a really good car tonight and I believe we showed that during the race, but I admit the luck of the invert really helped by putting us starting from the pole position. Hey, the deal with the invert is it can hurt you or help you. I’ve been quickest in qualifying before and with the invert I’ve had to start from the third row. It’s just one of those deals you hope will work out well for you.

“We opened the season with a solid second-place finish, then last week the DNF (Did Not Finish) was pretty disappointing because I know we had at least a top-three finishing car. I just want to thank everybody who helps me live out my dream of racing, my father (Pat Shell), and Danny Rollins for all his advice and unreal racing knowledge on setting the car (chassis) up, along with BRM, Joey Buckles, Scott Clark, and my fiancée Amber Abram. Nights like tonight, when after a week of working on your equipment and you get to the track and things go your way, this is what it’s all about. You get the win, then you’ve got bragging rights as being the winner until the next race.”

Following an invert of the top six from qualifying, Sam Hurd and Mark Christian brought the Street Stock field to the start from row one. Christian appeared to have missed a shift at the waving of the green flag, while Hurd didn’t seem to come up to speed, which in turn sent cars behind the front row duo going three wide down the front straightaway into the first turn.

Royce Peters of Kingsport capitalized on the chaotic start to quickly grab the lead over Rob Austin and Chris Tunnell. On lap 5, both Nick Cole and John Harrell got around Tunnell to move into third and fourth respectively in the running order, dropping Tunnell back to fifth. Five circuits later on lap 10, Cole moved under Austin for second and with the door open, Harrell also waltzed right by into the third spot and relegated Austin back to fourth in the running order.

With the leader Peters, along with Cole, Harrell and Austin beginning to overtake Hurd to place him a lap down on lap 19, the front trio got by unscathed. However, Hurd got together with Austin

exiting the fourth turn and both wound up making heavy contact with the front straightaway concrete wall to end their nights on the hook of the wrecker being towed back into the pits.

Anticipating the restart, Peters jumped back out ahead of Cole, Harrell and Tunnell. But somehow Cole, Harrell and Tunnell tangled on the front straightaway near the flag stand, with each spinning wildly to once again bring out the caution. On the next attempt at green, Peters once again smashed the loud pedal to accelerate ahead of Cole. Even though Cole was on his rear bumper, Peters never missed a beat en route to capturing his first-ever victory at Kingsport Speedway over Cole, Tunnell, Christian and Harrell.

Lloyd Baker jumped out into the lead at the start of the Pure 4 feature over David Trent and Dylan Bates. But quickly on the move were two-time defending divisional champion John Ketron and Kenny Absher. Ketron, from Kingsport, with already one win to his credit this season, worked his way around both Bates and Trent and then disposed of Baker between turns one and two on lap 5 to move into the lead. A good run for Baker ended on lap 7 when smoke erupted from under his hood and he coasted to a stop high between turns one and two to bring out the caution.

Ketron and Absher restarted alongside each other and battled for a couple of laps before Ketron moved ahead, while behind them Bates, Trent, Jason Ketron, Keith Helton, Tim Abelseth, Billy Byington and Jon Pittman were jockeying for real estate. But out front it was all John Ketron as he captured his second Pure 4 victory in the first three races to begin the season over Absher, Jason Ketron, Bates and Pittman. Helton crossed the finish line in third, but failed post-race inspection when his car came up light at the scales, thus moving Jason Ketron into the third spot.

Billy Duty grabbed the lead at start of the 25-lap Mod 4 feature over Rocky Yates and Kirby Gobble. Gobble, from Abingdon, VA, and a former track champion at Kingsport Speedway, moved around Yates for second on lap 3 and just two circuits later passed Duty for the lead. While both Duty and Yates would challenge Gobble on a couple of restarts during the event, each time Gobble managed to power back ahead. Gobble recorded the victory over Yates, Duty, Duke Bare and Chris Amburgey.

James Deese of Elizabethton was involved in an exciting three-car battle for the win coming off the fourth turn to the checkered flag last week, finishing in third. Determined to come back this week and finally earn that elusive first-ever trip to victory lane, Deese got around Michael Jeter just two laps from the finish and went on to capture the Rookie Pure 4 feature win over Jeter, Brandon Crumbley, Rusty Clendenin and Tim Jennings.

Kingsport Speedway returns to action on Friday, May 9. For more info, visit newkingsportspeedway.com.