

Making It Happen

By Michael Beard, Photos by Robert Grice



It's Friday, and Myron Piatek is about settled in at the IHRA Mardi Gras Nitro Jam at State Capitol Raceway, in Baton Rouge, La. Although he has a lengthy routine to go through to get set up at each event, he makes time to call on a good friend.

"Hey Mike, it's Myron. I just had an idea for a story, you know, in case I win. The Daytona 500 is this weekend, and I'm from Daytona, so..."

"You realize you haven't run the race yet, right?" replied Mike. "And the Daytona thing is kind of a stretch."

Of course, the banter is as much a part of the routine as warming the car up, adjusting the valves, pouring over copious notes, repainting the white Hoosier lettering on the tires, hanging the Holeshoot Wheels and Amsoil banners on the back door of the trailer, and setting out the wire rack containing information from those sponsors and numerous others.

That being said, the storyline ideas don't spring from any sense of audacity, but rather

from wishes just like any racer, coupled with a penchant for studious over-planning. It's not wishful thinking in Piatek's case, however. With enough Ironman trophies and championships to fill a 3500 Ram, ranging from Divisional titles to a World Championship, Piatek's career is a case study in preparation leading to success. Despite the deadly combination of preparation, skill, and focus, however, Piatek doesn't rule out a little superstition to go with his routine.

"I remember after spending the night in the holding lot, I had walked across the street to the McDonald's, and I found a quarter in the parking lot. Hey, I made money on this trip! Every time I had to flip for lanes, I used that quarter, and I won lane choice," he said with a chuckle.

Piatek pushed his Eastern Performance Engines-powered J/CM '75 Dart Sport to the no. 22 slot with a solid -.959 under 11.291. The 39-car field was (out) paced by the Southland Dodge '09 Challenger of Jeff Teuton, who obliterated the D/FIA index with a -1.705 under 10.495.

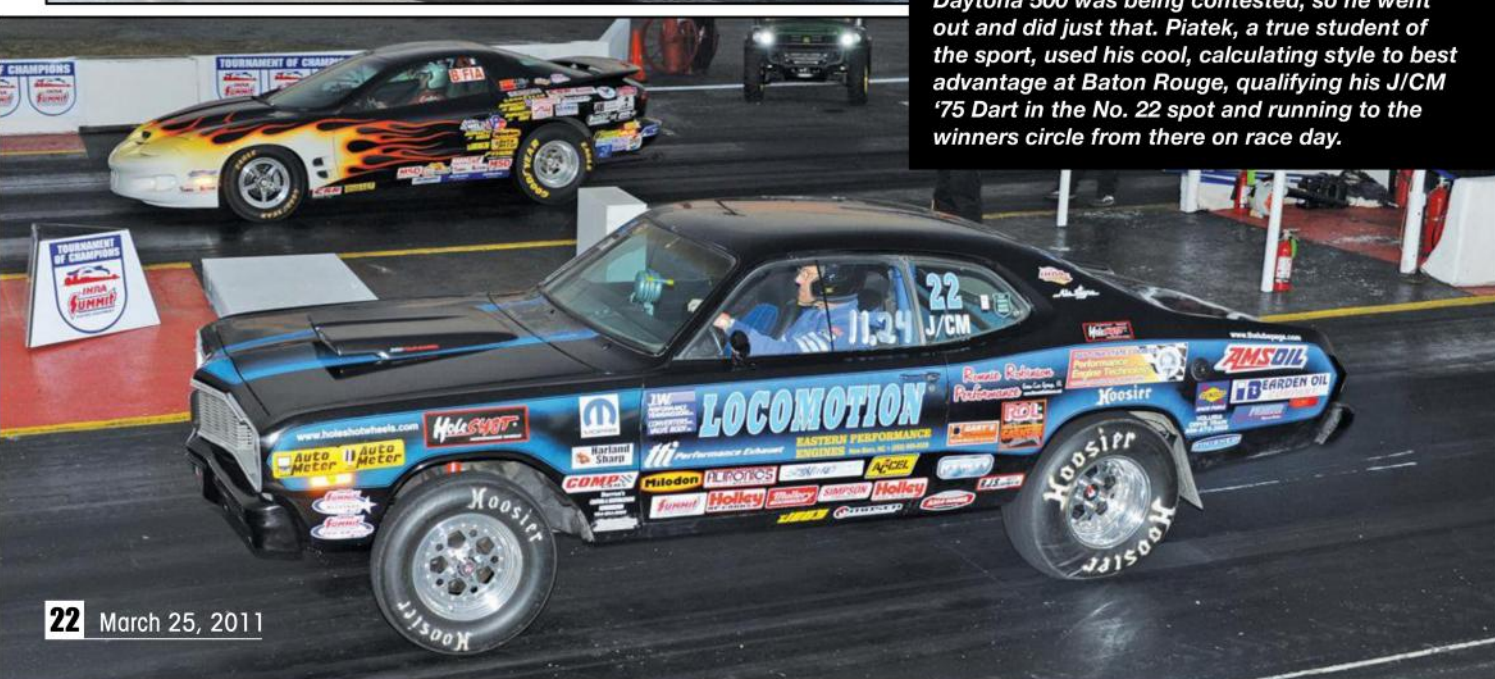
"It was fun with the whole Mardi Gras theme, and Cajun hospitality," said Piatek. "It's also the first time I got to see Teuton's car up close. I wanted to race him for Pinks...in a bracket race, not heads-up!" he quickly added.

With the first round of eliminations completed on Saturday, the second round was a whole new day.

"I don't like the first round of a new day, but I took the opportunity to check the internet to see what everyone had been doing," Piatek admitted. "I'm always very happy when I can rely on the race track. The consistency in the 60', from lane to lane and day to night was within .004 for me. The variable winds, with gusts up to 15 mph, made it tough, though. I was surprised I did as well as I did."



Daytona, Florida's Myron Piatek thought it would be cool to win on the same day as the Daytona 500 was being contested, so he went out and did just that. Piatek, a true student of the sport, used his cool, calculating style to best advantage at Baton Rouge, qualifying his J/CM '75 Dart in the No. 22 spot and running to the winners circle from there on race day.



STOCK ■ MARDI GRAS NITRO JAM



Piatek worked his way through Sam Pourciau, Scott Helms, David Latino, and Warren Birkett, Jr. to earn the semifinal bye run, where he carded an .020 light before lifting early. Jimmy Hidalgo, Jr. used an .047 bulb and a dead-on 10.596 to oust Sharon Bogues' .041-initiated 11.369 (11.35 dial-in) in the lone semifinal pair.

Despite a great .019 light in the finals, Piatek left himself vulnerable with an off-pace 11.281 (11.24), but Hidalgo gave up the stripe by .010 after an .051 light and a 10.589 (10.57).

"Hidalgo has an excellent reputation, and any of those races could have gone either way," said Piatek. "I was staring intently at the win light, and it didn't come on right away. When it did, I was ecstatic! I was a little worried after the first few races, but I'm in the Tournament of Champions now, and that's a relief."

"I'd like to say a special thanks to Ocala Tire Service and the Griggs family. I got new tires on the dually, and had an uneventful trip to Baton Rouge and back."

Piatek also thanked Daytona State College, Amsoil, Holeshoot Wheels, Hoosier, ROL Gas-kets, Ronnie Robinson Performance, Pioneer Automotive Products, TTI Exhaust, Auto Meter, Harland Sharp, JW Transmissions, Bearden Oil - Sunoco, Ishihara-Johnson Crank Scrapers, Milodon, Larry Whitley at Eastern Performance Engines, Volusia Drive Train, Gary's Driveline, Al's Signs, Staging Light Graphics, and Darren's Custom & Restoration.



No. 17 qualifier Jimmy Hidalgo, Jr. advanced to the final round of Stock at State Capitol, where he went up against Myron Piatek. Hidalgo's 10.589 on a 10.57 dial bettered Piatek's 11.281 on a 11.24, but a slower reaction time (.051 to .019) resulted in a runner-up finish.

The beautiful D/FIA 2009 Dodge Challenger of Jeff Teuton blew away the class index, and the competition, during qualifying with a -1.705 under 10.495. Teuton, of the iconic Houma, Louisiana-based racing family, garnered a quarterfinal finish during eliminations.



Bethany, Louisiana's Sharon Bogues was right in the thick of the Stock competition at Baton Rouge, driving her S/GTD '85 Camaro all the way to the semifinals from the No. 28 spot in the field. A dead-on run by Jimmy Hidalgo Jr. was all that prevented her moving on to the final round.

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