

Starting Line

**TIPS &
TRICKS**

WIN MORE ROUNDS!

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Starting Line Tips and Tricks

What is the MOST IMPORTANT thing when you head up to the starting line?

- Comfort?
- Consistency?
- Your girlfriend or boyfriend cheering for you?

Those are pretty important. But not the most important. The **most important** thing you can have when you approach the starting line is a routine or a plan.

That's right. A plan.

#1 Starting Line Tip: Have a Plan!

A **plan** for how the staggered tree will look when it starts.

A **plan** for how the race will look at the finish line.

A **plan** for how your car is going to react when you hit the brakes to keep from breaking out.

A **plan** for what it is going to feel like when your street tires don't get the traction you were expecting because the car in front of you put down some transmission fluid.

You need a plan. Here are some things I think about before I get to the line:

1. What is the difference between my opponent's dial-in (or index) and mine?
2. What does that difference in time mean on the tree?
3. What MPH will the opponent be doing at the finish line and how does that compare to mine?
4. Did I put fuel in my car?
5. Is the battery charged?
6. Did I check my tire pressures?
7. Are my CO2/NOS tank(s) full and "on"?

Here is what NOT to think about:

1. How many times has this opponent beaten me this season?

2. What kind of lights has he/she cut all day?
3. What kind of food you'll get after this round, nachos? Or a hot dog?

Don't psych yourself out – you'll lose!

Rehearse how the run will go down before you get to the burnout. That practice will help you make quick decisions in those last few moments of the run. NHRA Top Fuel pilot J.R. Todd once told me that he mentally pictures the burnout, the run and everything he needs to prepare for each round, while sitting in the car in the staging lanes. The planning and going through your routine eliminates the need to think through it at the starting line and during the burnout and makes you available to focus on the tree.

Once you have your plan and you have rehearsed the most important components of your run **CLEAR YOUR MIND**. That's right – let it all go. None of it matters. You are going up to the tree – if you let yourself be distracted by everything else going on you will miss your opportunity to focus on the tree!

WORTH MENTIONING

Multiple NHRA National Event Winner Erica Enders-Stevens shared with me that being too regimented at the starting line is risky. You make yourself vulnerable to games that your opponent may play at the starting line. Have your plan but be flexible enough to cope with how the run evolves as you move toward the beginning of the run.

#2 Starting Line Tip: Focus INSIDE the Bulb!

If your local track uses [incandescent bulbs](#) – you can actually see the filament start to warm up as the light comes on. Stare so deeply into the bulb that you can see it start to glow. Don't try to "time" it using syncopation or some kind of rhythm. REACT to the bulb and stare into it.

If your track uses [LED bulbs](#) – you can still stare INTO the bulb – but there will not be any warming of a filament – it will be instantly on.

Either way – you want to be consistent from run to run, week to week, track to track so you need to have a system you can count on. Staring into the bulb will bring you a new level of consistency.

WORTH MENTIONING

I talked to NHRA World Champion Greg Anderson at the 2014 Southern Nationals in Atlanta Georgia and he said that he **doesn't believe in focusing inside the bulb**. And I agree! His goal every time he goes up to the tree is to be **completely clear headed** (in his "happy place") so that he is fully available to "react" to the tree. Clear mind and an emphasis on reacting. And that makes perfect sense if you are reacting to a Pro Tree. HOWEVER, if you are a

sportsman racer and have two large distractions (one being the staggered tree and the other being the fact that there is a 0.500 second delay between each bulb) you MUST focus inside the bulb to disregard those distractions.

So if you compete on a Pro Tree – focus on clearing your mind and reacting quickly and consistently to the lights.

If you complete on a Full or Sportsman Tree – focus inside the bulb so that you are not prone to distractions from the other driver or the other bulbs.

#3 Starting Line Tip: Know Your Ride!

Can you close your eyes and picture where all your switches are? Maybe your hot rod only has a turn key because you also drive it to work every day. That is fine. But if your car has a switch box on the roll cage – you need to know what every switch does. Every. Switch. Without looking.

If you don't know – go sit in your car right now. Right. Now. You have permission. You need to know how your car works. So if you get to the line and see your car is running hotter than it should be – you need to be able to turn on your water pump/fan without looking for where the switch is.

Your race vehicle needs to be an extension of you.

#4 Starting Line Tip: Breathe

After you light the prestage bulb – take a deep breath. A VERY deep breath. You might be thinking, “Hey, what if I am the second person into the beams?” Even if you are not the first to stage – breathe. Center yourself and be present and prepared.

If you have rehearsed, planned, focused, studied and breathed – you are ready to win some rounds. Rounds are won by the driver who makes the fewest mistakes or the last mistake. So make fewer mistakes and you have the best odds of winning.

When I spoke with NHRA World Champion Matt Hagan between rounds at an NHRA race, he told me that one thing he does (that he very rarely shares with people) is that he recites positive thoughts to himself. Thoughts like,

- I'm gonna nail this tree
- I'm going to keep it in the groove

I personally hold Matt in high regard and if positive mental attitude is a key component to success like he has **earned** – it is worth the rest of us emulating.

Let us know how it goes! [@DragTracker](#)