

Pruett Stepping Aside From NHRA Competition in 2024 to Focus on Starting a Family

BROWNSBURG, Ind. (Dec. 7, 2023) – After completing 27 consecutive years in NHRA competition, Leah Pruett is stepping aside from racing in 2024 to focus on starting a family with husband Tony Stewart.

Stewart will move into the Top Fuel seat on behalf of Pruett at Tony Stewart Racing (TSR), following his first full NHRA season in a Top Alcohol Dragster for McPhillips Racing.

“Drag racing has been an important part of my life for over three quarters of my life,” Pruett said. “27 years of racing in the NHRA has molded who I am and I am extremely grateful for the life it has given me. Through a long series of thought processes and a decision that did not happen overnight, I feel that stepping out of the seat right now is what’s best for myself and Tony to start a family.”

Pruett is a 12-time NHRA Top Fuel event winner. Her NHRA journey began in the series’ Junior Drag Racing League as an 8-year-old. Pruett earned two victories in 2023 and finished the season third in the Top Fuel championship standings, which is the highest she’s finished in her 14-year Top Fuel career.

“This has been one of the most difficult decisions to make because of what we have collectively created at TSR; a highly-successful program and enjoyable operation,” Pruett said. “I had the best finish of my entire career. To step away from that can be a challenging move, but I had already made up my mind long before we were deep in the championship hunt. I’m excited about how competitive this team is, developed through the leadership of Neal Strausbaugh and Mike Domagala, and to be able to have Tony compete in a very safe, vetted, and well-performing car with an established team makes my heart happy. Our final-round appearance at the World Finals brought me the closest I’ve ever been to fulfilling a life-long dream of winning a Top Fuel world championship. We were so close that we could taste it, but it wasn’t our time. Ultimately, it will be up to the Lord if we are blessed with what so many share as their greatest joy in life, a family of their own. While Tony and I prefer to keep our personal lives private, we’re honored to share in this announcement with our partners, team members, and fans. There are no guarantees or promises on when I will be back in the seat, but I have every intention of returning as soon as I can. Everything in my heart says that I will return to driving Top Fuel as soon as I feel ready, especially after being so close to winning it all this year. For now, I am thrilled that Tony is getting a well-performing, safe car with an excellent caliber of people, both personally and professionally.”

With thoughtful consideration, Pruett and crew chief Neal Strausbaugh selected Stewart as the replacement driver. Stewart is humbled

by the opportunity and looking forward to growing a family with Pruett.

Stewart, the adaptable racer has earned championships across NASCAR, INDYCAR and USAC, along with hundreds of victories on oval tracks, dirt tracks and road courses. He finished second in the NHRA Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series national championship standings in 2023 and also finished second in the North Central Region. Stewart earned two victories at national events, the NHRA Four-Wide Nationals and the Pep Boys Nationals, as well as two regional victories in Indianapolis, Indiana and Reading, Pennsylvania.

“I enjoyed my time in the Top Alcohol Dragster class,” said Stewart. “I absolutely loved racing with the McPhillips Racing family and as far as I’m concerned, they’re a part of my family now. It’s hard to leave those guys, but to have an opportunity like this, where you have your wife, who’s also the driver, and the crew chief feel you’re capable to come in and do the job is very flattering. I’m very honored to be able to fill in for her until she’s ready to come back.”

Pruett will continue to be involved in various aspects of the team in 2024, including assisting with technical projects.

Stewart will join the two-car TSR operation with existing Funny Car driver, Matt Hagan. Hagan earned the 2023 Funny Car Championship, which was the first championship for TSR and the fourth title for the Christiansburg, Virginia native.

Joining Stewart in his Top Fuel quest will be current Tony Stewart Racing partners, with the 2024 partner schedule to be announced at a later date.

“We’ve reached out to all of our partners and they’ve all been very supportive of Leah’s decision,” Stewart said. “It was important to let them all know what our plans are. For all of our partners, it goes way beyond a partnership. It’s personal friendships and personal relationships we have with these people. Their support means a lot to us on a personal level, not just a professional level. It means more to us on the personal level that our partners that are our friends have been behind this one hundred percent and being excited that we’re trying to grow our family. Having their support means the world to us.”

With 13 driving championships to his resume, Stewart is looking forward to the year he’ll have in his Top Fuel dragster and is cautiously optimistic on his expectations for the season.

“It’s hard to set expectations for the year when you don’t know what you don’t know. I didn’t know what realistic expectations should have been for 2023 in the Top Alcohol dragster. This will be a massive learning experience and



it will be very humbling. The Top Fuel class is arguably one of the toughest classes the NHRA has right now. There are so many quality teams and drivers in the series. It will be extremely difficult and challenging, but at the same time, I’ve thrived on that my whole life. I’ve always wanted to compete at the highest level with the highest level of teams and drivers. Because of our decision to expand our family, I get that opportunity. I’m really excited to race with these guys and girls. In the last couple years, I’ve really gotten to know the teams and a lot of the drivers I’ll be competing against. I don’t think any of us had the inclination this would be the path we’d take, but I’m excited to have the opportunity to support my wife and her

decision for our family.”

Prior to strapping in for the first race of the season, Pruett is confident that Stewart has proven to be the ideal candidate for the Top Fuel dragster.

Prior to kicking off the NHRA season, Top Fuel and Funny Car competitors will begin their 2024 season February 8-10 at Bradenton Motorsports Park in Bradenton, Florida for the PRO Superstar Shootout. Pruett is planning on competing in the event. The invitation-only race will feature four qualifying sessions, leading to eight-car fields in Top Fuel and Funny Car. FloRacing will livestream the event. Stewart will start the 2024 season at Gainesville Raceway for the NHRA Gatornationals.

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