

Bowyer, Cheerios/Hamburger Helper Team Finish 26th at Phoenix

Race: Subway Fresh Fit 500

Date: April 18, 2009

Location: Phoenix International Raceway

Start Position: 24th

Finish Position: 26th

Points Position: Sixth (lost two positions)

AVONDALE, Arizona – Clint Bowyer had two strong finishes at Phoenix International Raceway in 2008, but the constant hunt for improvement had the No. 33 Cheerios/Hamburger Helper team headed west with what crew chief Shane Wilson called a developmental setup. With limited time to fine-tune their experiment, the No. 33 team struggled to get their Chevrolet Impala SS handling to their driver's liking. The end result was a disappointing 26th-place finish but all was not lost for the Richard Childress Racing team.

With the NASCAR-imposed ban on testing for the 2009 season, teams have struggled to find ways to develop new setups. With two practice sessions prior to Friday evening's qualifying session, the Wilson-led crew made several changes in an attempt to improve the handling of their Chevrolet. Bowyer recorded the 24th-best lap in time trials, touring the one-mile desert oval in 27.149 seconds at an average speed of 132.602 mph.

From the drop of the green flag Saturday evening, Bowyer struggled with a loose-handling Impala SS. Despite his struggles, the two-time NASCAR Sprint Cup Series winner managed to hold his position inside the top 25 for the majority of the event. For the second race in a row, extended green-flag runs resulted in Bowyer losing valuable track position and, ultimately, left him one lap down to the race leaders when the checkered flag waved on the 312-lap event.

Bowyer's RCR teammates Jeff Burton, Casey Mears and Kevin Harvick finished 15th, 20th and 30th, respectively.

While the finish was not what Bowyer and his Cheerios/Hamburger Helper crew were hoping for, when the Emporia, Kansas, native crossed the finish line, he tied the current modern-era record of 81 races without a DNF (did not finish), held by Harvick. Bowyer now sets his sights on the all-time record held by Herman Beam, who did not run his races consecutively but did make 84 starts from 1961-1963 without recording a DNF.

Mark Martin scored his 36th NSCS win, marking the third consecutive week that a Chevy Impala SS has pulled into Victory Lane. Martin was followed to the finish line by Tony Stewart in second, Kurt Busch was third, Jimmie Johnson finished fourth and Greg Biffle rounded out the top five. The win extended Chevrolet's lead in the Manufacturers' Cup Standings by 15 points.

Next weekend, the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series drivers and teams head to Alabama's Talladega Superspeedway for the April 26 Aaron's 499. The second restrictor plate event of the 2009 season will be televised live on FOX Sun., April 26 beginning at 1 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time. The Motor Racing Network and Sirius XM Satellite Radio will also provide live lap-by-lap coverage. Qualifying for the ninth of 36 points-paying races will be televised on SPEED Sat., April 25 beginning at 11 a.m. EDT.