

**RACE RECAP:****Auto Club Speedway****Stater Bros. 300****Saturday, February 20, 2010****Paul Menard – No. 98 Richmond/Menards Ford Fusion****BLOWN TIRE RUINS WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN A TOP-10 DAY FOR PAUL MENARD AND NO. 98 RICHMOND/MENARDS FORD FUSION TEAM AT THE AUTO CLUB SPEEDWAY*****Despite Lap 143 Trouble, Menard Secures 19<sup>th</sup>-Place Finish***

The NASCAR Nationwide Series traveled west to the Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif. for the second race of the 2010 season. Coming off a top-10 run at Daytona, Paul Menard and the No. 98 Richmond/Menards Ford Fusion team were optimistic heading into Saturday's Stater Bros. 300. After posting fast speeds during Friday's practice sessions and qualifying a respectable 17<sup>th</sup> for the 150-lap event, it seemed as though the team would be a force to be reckoned with. From the drop of the green flag Menard reported that his Ford was "loose in the turns", in spite of the handling issues he kept the No. 98 inside the top 15 for 78 laps. Through a series of scheduled pit stops the Menards crew tweaked the handling of the No. 98 and by mid-way through the race Menard was running inside the top 10. On lap 143, just seven laps shy of the finish, the right front tire blew on the Menards Ford and Menard was forced to pit for fender repairs. Valuable time and track position were lost in the pits and Menard would ultimately finish the race in 19<sup>th</sup> place.

Pole winner, Joey Logano led the 43-car field to the green flag and the drivers settled in for 150 laps of racing. Over the first run of the race, Menard reported that his Ford was handling "tight in the center and loose off". Despite the handling woes, Menard was able to maintain 16<sup>th</sup> place until the yellow flag waved on lap 33 for debris. During this caution period, crew chief Matt Puccia called Menard to pit road so that the No. 98 team could work to remedy the handling issues that Menard reported. After the Richmond/Menards Ford received four tires with air pressure adjustments, fuel and track bar adjustment, Menard exited pit road and took the green flag on lap 38 in 15<sup>th</sup> position.

By lap 50 Menard reported that the balance was "good", however his Ford was still "loose" and by lap 73 the condition had gotten worse and Menard had fallen to 17<sup>th</sup> place. The field began making green flag pit stops on lap 80 and Menard took this opportunity to bring his Ford to pit road for more adjustments. After the No. 98 was serviced with four tires, fuel and a slight air pressure adjustment, Menard was scored in 15<sup>th</sup> place when the field cycled through on lap 86.

The adjustments seemed to be what Menard needed as he was running inside the top 10 just after the halfway mark. As team Menards looked to be headed towards another top-10 finish, trouble in the form of a blown right front tire would find the No. 98 gang on lap 143 – just seven laps short of the finish. Severe fender damage was incurred as result and a lengthy pit stop was needed to repair the damages.

The race restarted for the green-white-checker finish on lap 150 and Menard was scored in 20<sup>th</sup> position. He was able to make up one spot before the checkers waved on lap 152 to bring home a solid 19<sup>th</sup>-place finish.

"We had a really good Ford Fusion out there today," said Menard. "Our car was just a little free in the turns, but after that last adjustment it was handling much better and we were running inside the top 10. Unfortunately, we may have adjusted too much and tire blew. But, even with a damaged race car, we still managed a top-20 finish, so not really an awful day."

Kyle Busch held off Greg Biffle to win the Stater Bros. 300. Brad Keselowski was third followed by Carl Edwards and Joey Logano completed the top five.

Menard and the No. 98 Richmond/Menards Ford Fusion team race next at Las Vegas Motor Speedway in Las Vegas, Nev. The Sam's Town 300 is scheduled for Saturday, February 27 at 4:40 p.m. (EST). ESPN and PRN radio affiliates will broadcast the race live.

**UPCOMING RACE:****Sam's Town 300 – Las Vegas Motor Speedway****Saturday, February 27, 2010****4:30 p.m. (EST) ESPN television and PRN radio**

**MENARD'S FONTANA STATS:**

**Start:** 17<sup>th</sup>

**Finish:** 19<sup>th</sup>

**Laps:** 152/152

**Points:** 106

**Status:** Running

**Fastest Laps:** 0

**Laps in top 15:** 78

**2010 CUMULATIVE STATS:**

**Races:** 2 of 35

**Points:** 256

**Rank:** 10<sup>th</sup> (-79)

**Top fives:** 0

**Top 10s:** 1

**Starts:** 2

**Poles:** 0