

# A NIGHT WITH

# STREET

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I recently received a rare invitation from Oklahoma City native — and *Street Outlaws* star — Chuck Seitsinger to attend the first night of the cable TV show's filming for the upcoming season. Well known for his "Death Trap" twin-turbo Mustang featured in the *Drag Racing Scene* summer issue, he placed us on his very short list of the entourage who can accompany each racer to the night's competition.

The other half of the "us" I mention was my son, Christopher. When Christopher entered college, he was already an eight-year veteran of the sport, driving junior and full-size dragsters and provided a storming case for his inclusion.

"I deserve to go to this filming, because when girls in college found out I was a racer, they would ask me if I was on *Street Outlaws*," Christopher says. "As someone who grew up in one of the most hardcore of racing families, I would roll my eyes at those comments. But here and now, I want to see what it's all about."

A long drive from Illinois to Oklahoma City provided some good quality time for the two of us. When we rolled into town early, we did what any good gearhead tourist would do; visit the Farmtruck and AZN shop, well known as being open to the public and filled with all kinds of T-shirts and *Street Outlaws* trinkets available for purchase.

With some time killed, we made our way out to Thunder Valley Dragway, where we were to meet up with

## We watch the highly-rated street racing show begin filming their 10th season

Seitsinger. He wanted to get a couple of test passes on the 'Stang before heading out to the secret filming location. The car made a pair of hard hits off of the starting line, with a little movement to the left. Back at the trailer, the data recorder was downloaded and viewed, and some adjustments were made, via the laptop on the roof of the Mustang.

Comparable to the life of the traditional drag racer, Seitsinger took some moments to visit with some local fans who had gathered almost immediately

when he pulled in the gate an hour before. He had a busy day between a sponsor's exhibit of the car during the day, rushing to make a couple of test hits, and then rapidly loading the car — because they were running behind — to get to the location of the night's filming.

"We will discuss a couple of more adjustments to the suspension on the way to the track," he called out to his team of friends. "Load her up; we gotta go!"

And go they did. If you think one of these *Street Outlaws* can handle big

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horsepower cars on the street, you should see them aggressively manipulate a 30-foot race trailer on an Oklahoma interstate during evening rush hour.

Out at race night, we were met by a sheriff's roadblock about a mile from the actual racing/filming location. We were vetted for entrance through multiple stages of identification, list confirmation, and signing our lives away on paperwork stating we granted the use of our likeness during filming, plus your average liability waivers. Surprisingly not on the waivers was a threat to not divulge anything about the outcome of the evening. It did come later in the form of an eye-to-eye understand-

ing from the crew that we were not to post cell phone images or on social media about anything taking place at the night's event. When you walk around with a \$2,000 camera, producers take notice and make their desires clear to you rather quickly.

So, if you thought you might get a glimpse of who raced who at the first filming of 2017 here in print, well... nope. From here on out, you will read about the sights, sounds, and "scene" of race night. The first airing of the show's fall season will air around the same time as this issue, so make sure to tune in to season 10, episode 1 and you might see our mugs in the background.

As the street racers arrived and cars were first rolled out of their trailers, the production crews were immediately wiring them inside and out with small Go-Pro-style cameras. It is evident there is a synergy between the racers, their crew, and the filming staff working together like a ballet for the ultimate goal: to race hard and let the filming crew capture it. It is a job within itself, and an observer has to be mindful of where they are standing to not get in the way of all of the activity.

This is the point in the evening where the questions I was pondering for the entire 11-hour drive to "the OKC" were answered. This racing is all real; there was no scripting, no director pointing in



At the start of the night, the racers and film crews take their places for the initial drivers' meeting. The entire filming process is passive, letting the racers do their thing while the video crews record it... There is no 'scripting' of preplanned words or actions.





The night started with little or no remnants of rubber on the street surface from the previous season. You can see it didn't take long for the pimp juice and fresh rubber to have their positive effect in each lane.

various directions, barking "now Shawn, you say this" and "Fireball, you say that and wave your arms around." The night was made up of real match racing and related drama, where the personalities did their thing, and the film crew was in what I call a "passive" mode. They worked diligently to be at the right place at the right time as racers talked to one another, negotiated, BS'ed each other, and prepared to race.

The production crew is a massive group. There were three "mobile" crews, each with multiple cameras, lighting, remote microphone recording, and other staff running around with laptops to log what was going on during each minute of filming.

Before any race action took place, there was a very active conversation be-

tween racers "Daddy Dave" Comstock, Seitsinger, and Shawn Ellington. It was interesting to watch these guys interact as if no one was around. There may have been an entourage of filming crew recording the banter, but in such a way that they were not affecting the jabber.

Static crew manned the cameras at trackside, which was its own flurry of activity. What appears on television as a simple out-of-the-way road is filled with high-tech portable lighting, multiple boom cameras, zip line cameras, and even drones to catch the street action. The schedule of events for the evening played out just as seen on TV.

First up was the drivers' meeting, where all of the competitors met on the starting line. Discussion took place concerning the evening match-ups, and the

pit flurry began as each team prepared.

On "action night," the community law enforcement protected the area from onlookers, just ask the two young gentlemen who tried to sneak into the filming area by taking a long walk through an adjacent field. They were quickly met by officials who escorted the bewildered young bucks to those carrying badges.

With callouts made, the evening took shape as the cars and their stars got ready to race. The cars arrived mechanically prepared for competition, but in proper heads-up street car fashion, the laptop that sets up the ignition, fuel mapping, and boost control became the main tool of the evening.

"We have pet names for our cars, Dad, but these guys should name their laptops since they spend more time tapping on the keyboard instead of spinning wrenches," Christopher told me. "I would love to see all of the inner workings of those computer controls to see how they get down this street."

As my son and I walked around from trailer to trailer, I recommended we not speak to anyone until we got a feel of the intensity of race night. Are these guys of the "don't bother me, I'm a star" attitude, or will they happily talk your leg off during a slow moment of their night? The perception I immediately got is some are genuine racers, but others are legends in their own minds.

To observe the "stars" of the show was to take in the huge personalities you pretty much derive from your Monday night viewing of the show. Jerry Johnston, known as "Monza", is a tall overseer of his surroundings; he made deliberate tinkering adjustments to his car, while sizing everyone up around him at the same time. Don't look at the Cama-



What do two gearhead clowns do when you get in town early? You stop by the Farmtruck and AZN shop and do some cheesy selfies with the famed "call out box."

ro (or him) for too long; he is likely to give you the serious "stink eye" and blow a puff of cigarette smoke in your face.

Ryan "Fireball" Martin is every bit the super-analyst he appears to be on the show. If he is not overseeing adjustments to the car, he has his face deep into his laptop on the roof of the Camaro, poring over charts and data. Last but not least, Shawn "Murder Nova" Ellington is one of the more personable individuals of the group. He is constantly interacting with everyone at a rabbit's pace, seemingly interested in what others have to say, while also mastering his own race duties.

It was pushing 11 p.m., and no racing had yet taken place. It did give us time to absorb the race area and the flurry of

preparation there. The "street" itself was nothing more than a typical industrial complex side street of concrete. With only a few remnants of rubber from the previous season, there was no secret preparation to make the racing surface more than a daily-driven surface.

One of the interesting aspects was the "pimp juice" used for burnouts and traction compound applied to the racing surface. (see sidebar). Any "Sticky" street surface was nonexistent at the start of the night, but quickly became a part of the first few hundred feet with each burnout and launch. This is why the show exhibits the challenge between racers at the start of the night on the raw concrete as part of the high drama.

Upon close observation, the cars were as high tech as any car competing in NMCA or Lights Out style events. It was interesting to see some of the subtle technical differences making up the *Street Outlaws* fleet, like the lack of standard radiators in some cars. Weight transfer is king when it comes to these cars, and water cooling boxes are diligently filled time after time with water and copious amounts of ice. All of that extra weight from a radiator is relocated from the front end and plumbed, in many cases, to the passenger compart-



The pits are the same road as the racing surface. The business subdivision outside the 'undisclosed' town features a road where no buildings have been constructed yet. The area is remote and safe from any streetside obstructions.



As Joe 'Dominator' Woods and James 'Reaper' Goad walk the road and discuss strategy, the camera crews maintain their distance and let them do their thing.

## PIMP JUICE: IT'S NOT JUST FOR BREAKFAST ANYMORE

The attempt to gain any bit of additional traction at no prep or street racing is paramount. Those who race on the barren streets or "no-prep" events rely heavily on "pimp juice" applied between the slicks and surface in the burnout area. After a handful of applications by means of mega-burnouts, this magical compound can almost pull you out of your sneakers like a national event starting line.



Just like the hidden secrets of cubic inches, secret nitrous kits, and any other gained advantage in outlaw racing, the magical compound differs by racer. The concoction of pimp juice is typically a blend of VP Lane Choice, methanol, Methyl Ethyl Ketone (MEK), VHT, acetone, and, yes, even cola fountain syrup is mentioned. Regardless, if one, two, or all of these chemicals are mixed into an old plastic jug, each racer thinks their magic pimp juice is best and the reason why they might have just beaten you. The magic potion may differ, but the saying stays the same: "If yo tires are slippin', then you ain't pimpin'." Even the lighting of the flammable compounds after application to the street surface broadens the theatrics.

In any case, if you think street racers are secretive about their engine combos, just ask them about their pimp juice. It's the stuff (urban) legends are made of.



Is Oklahoma City hardcore? While driving through a suburb before race night, we happened upon a test patch of pimp juice and 15-inch wide tire marks. No one was in sight, but the pimp juice would still yank you out of your sneakers.



We met up with Chuck Seitsinger out at Thunder Valley Dragway, where he made a couple of test hits in the afternoon before race night. Chassis adjustment tweaks were discussed, and some fine tuning done through the FAST XFI Engine Management System, using a laptop on the roof of the Mustang.

ment or trunk. The extensive use of weight bars is also a predominant part of this style of chassis tuning. I should have expected nothing less when it comes to putting this kind of power to this kind of pavement.

As each pair raced, the starting line procedure was noticeably drawn out compared to the TV presentation. Multiple burnouts and copious use of the pimp juice between the slicks and the street were combined with adjustments and control panel punching from within the cockpit. Eventually, Justin "Big Chief" Shearer lined the cars up and sent them down the street via flashlight.

Cameras rolled furiously as the pair screamed down the street. As someone who has watched racing from that vantage point for almost half a century, I had never seen the violence and instability these cars and racers battle on a normal basis. Everyone waited for the official call to come from the top of the track via the radio in Shearer's hand, then everyone cheered or jeered at the outcome (just as seen in the show).

I've been privy to the Chicago stockyards street racing activities a number of times before, and the mental games unfold on race night pretty much as expected. At a real dragstrip, the clocks and win light do not lie, and the racers are affixed on the computerized win light. Here on the street, it's all about gamesmanship—too many burnouts, quick staging, burn-downs, jumping the flashlight, and a list of arguable outcomes as long as some of the tattooed arms in attendance.

As opinionated as race night is among the competitors, there is a visible brotherhood between the teams. They may want to choke the crap out of each other in the fervor of racing, but at the end of a very late night, they are as close knit as any other group of hardcore racers. Yes, it was late. By the time 4 a.m. rolled around, a mere handful of races had taken place. Talking to one camera person, he explained racing kicks off slow on the very first night of annual filming, but gets rolling as the season moves forward.

Christopher and I climbed into my pickup following our experience. I asked my son if it was everything he thought it would be, and I think he summed it up perfectly.

"Many things were more realistic than I expected and these guys were sure as hell racing with some pretty legit cars!" **DRS**



Search "OKC Street Outlaws" at [DragRacingScene.com](http://DragRacingScene.com) for much more on our night with the Street Outlaws.



It's a constant effort to stay out of the way of the flurry of activity in the pit area. Camera crews film Ryan 'Fireball' Martin buckling up. At the same time, other crew members are checking the cameras fastened to the car while others log every bit of filming with laptops.



In an effort to move any possible weight towards the rear of the car, many Street Outlaws utilize a circulating water box in lieu of a radiator. Lots of ice is fed into the box before each pass.



On or off camera, the interaction is all the same such as James 'Doc' Love, Jerry 'Monza' Johnston, and Justin 'Big Chief' Shearer talking between the action.

