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SRT Motorsports - Sprint Cup Allmendinger Open Interview - Pocono

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A.J. Allmendinger (No. 22 Shell/Pennzoil Dodge Charger R/T)

YOU WERE THE FASTEST IN TODAY'S MORNING SESSION HERE AT POCONO. HOW DOES THIS NEW REPAVE LOOK TO YOU AND HOW DID THINGS GO FOR YOUR THIS MORNING? "There's definitely a lot of grip on the racetrack. You can see it by the lap times. You know, the biggest thing is there's a huge balance difference between going out there on brand new tires and having full fuel in the car and then running eight or 10 laps and going back out there after the tires cool down. The tires just pick up a lot of speed, so I think that's where you keep seeing the fast laps keep popping up. Guys go out there, they run a couple of laps and then go make a change, let the tires cool back down and go back out there and the times just keep picking up. And then once you go back out there on new tires, you lose a lot of time. What we're trying to focus on is figuring out what we're going to do with the balance of the race car when we put new tires on. That's going to be the tricky part of it because it's a lot different feel. It's pretty amazing. The tires feel really hard when you put 'em on and real slick. Then, you take 'em off and let 'em cool back down and they feel amazing. Obviously, in a race, you don't get that luxury most of the time. I think it's between that and figuring out how long the tires last; if we're going to do two tires, no tires, strategy like that. I think we're just going through that with changes and trying to learn the car. But the track's in great shape. The biggest thing is just trying to get it to widen out. You know, when you are out there running by yourself, basically, everybody is going to run nearly the same lines so there's really only one groove on the racetrack. I think it's kind of like Phoenix. You're not going to really know if there's going to be a second groove until the ARCA cars get out there and kind of widen it out and until we really have to restart double-file."

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED SINCE YOU WERE HERE FOR THE TIRE TEST? HOW HAS THE TRACK CHANGED? "The track was actually really similar when we came back and started yesterday. When we were here at the tire test, there was only five or six of us right around there, seven of us maybe, and it was really cold. Not a lot of rubber was getting put down on the racetrack. With 40 cars out there, there's a lot of rubber getting put down on the racetrack. I think more than anything you're just learning how the racetrack changes and what your car does with that rubber on the track. The track keeps picking up but I think right now this is the fastest you'll see the track all weekend. There's a lot of cloud cover. For the race, it looks like it's going to be a little bit warmer. The track always slows down on race days. I think it's really just trying to figure out what balance your car needs with all the rubber that gets laid down."

HAVE YOU HAD ANY RUNS LONG ENOUGH TO GET ANY IDEA WHAT THE TIRES ARE GOING TO DO FOR A FULL FUEL RUN? "We've done a couple 10-, 12-lap runs. We haven't had a full extent of a full run. Like I said, it's kind of tough because the tire never really, at least in those 10 laps, comes in the way if you let it cool back down and go back out there. You know, I feel like it's going to be a fine line between getting your car free enough that it keeps turning but not too free where it chatters the right-rear and that's where all the speed comes from. I think the lap times are going to be really close. All the cars are going to be really close as always, so the biggest thing is being one-groove right now. If you can just get good drive off and make sure your car keeps turning where maybe you get a little air up to your fender up off the corner, you can get under a guy. That's really what we're trying to focus on. It's a combination between that and just going through changes on your racecar that you don't get to do on a normal weekend. You've got a day and half to try to learn. Todd Gordon (crew chief) and I, we're still learning that. We're tuning for Pocono, trying to pick up speed and figure out where your car is going. We're also trying stuff just to see what it does and get a feel for what I need. I feel like over the last few weeks we've had good runs, we've had bad runs. We're just trying to narrow that box on what we need."

WOULD RUNNING SCUFF TIRES MIGHT BE AN OPTION? "Yeah, but I mean, you're not really going to have a ton of scuffs. In practice, with five sets, you pretty much use those tires up completely. You'll have your qualifiers and that's probably about it. I really think it comes down to what your car does on new tires. Then, maybe how it's wearing the tires and if you want to do two tires, no tires, etc."

THIS IS THE FIRST OF TWO RACES ON TRACKS THAT HAVE BEEN REPAVED. THEN YOU HAVE A ROAD COURSE AND BACK TO DAYTONA. THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR UNPREDICTABLE SCENARIOS TO DEVELOP. IS THIS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GUYS LIKE YOU TO MAKE SOMETHING HAPPEN AND CHARGE TO THE FRONT? "Yeah, I mean, every weekend we have those opportunities. But yeah, it'll be a little bit different. I think it always comes down and you see the same suspects come to the front. Our car has been really good. It was really good at the tire test. It's been really good here and more than anything, we've just got to get back to having consistent runs. We've had a lot of failures this year. We've had, I think, five failures during a race this year, stuff like that and with the format the way it is, yeah, you can go out there win a couple races, get inside the top 20 and you've got a chance at the Chase, but I'm not even going to look at that right now. I just look week-to-week trying to run better. If you run better, you put yourself in that position. Then you have a chance to win races and in the end, the points kind of take care of themselves. I look at a place like this and we've had a fast race car. Michigan is an unknown, haven't seen it yet. Brad (Keselowski, teammate) was there doing the test but it'll be different when we go back. I feel like the road course program at Penske is really good, so I look forward to Sonoma. More than anything, it's just week by week. I don't even look at the points right now. I know that we've got to keep running better and if we can start running better, you start finishing in the top 10. If you do that, you just keep putting yourself in position to win races. The points, they fix themselves. It's just a week-to-week thing right now."

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT THE RESTARTS TO BE LIKE HERE GOING INTO TURN 1? "I think that's a question of how much it widens out. At Phoenix last year, we all thought the same thing when it got repaved, that starting on the outside was going to be brutal; you're just going to be hung out to dry and by the end of the race, you could kind of argue that being on the outside of every row was actually a little bit better because you get a run off the corner. It's kind of hard to tell right now with the way the tires feel when you go out there on brand new tires. It feels like you get in one and it's going to be a little hairy. A lot of cars are going to be moving around because the cars just feel like they're on top of the racetrack. When you put on new tires, it feels a little bit hard. I think that's really where the challenge is going to come from. The track will eventually widen out because we'll have to start the race double-file, restart the race double-file. You have an ARCA race that'll have to start double-file so the track itself will widen out. It's just not going to do it until people start racing because everybody is going to be in that same line (in practice)."

DO YOU THINK THE CARS WILL FAN OUT WIDE WHEN THEY HIT THE FRONTSTRETCH? IS THERE ENOUGH GRIP OR ROOM TO DO THAT NOW? "There's so much grip off the corner right now that everybody is in the throttle so early, so I think if you get somebody that gets checked-up, gets loose, gets up against the wall and everybody has to check up, then everybody's going to fan out. It used to be, over the last couple of years, you had the inside that everybody kind of dove down to because the outside, everybody was up on that patch. Well, the last couple of years that patch didn't have as much grip, so it almost kind of evened out and you kind of almost have like two lanes that would kind of merge back together and there'd be a speed difference. That's where the four-wide would come from. But you're not going to see it like that. You're only going to see it if somebody gets checked-up and everybody kind of fans out to get around each other."

IF YOU'RE RUNNING SUB 52-SECOND LAPS, HOW FAST DO YOU FIGURE YOU'RE GOING INTO TURN 1? "I think it's 211. The speed is easy down the straightaway. The problem is that you've got to turn at the end of it."

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