

Tradition-Rich Darlington Poses Next Test for Clint Bowyer and BB&T Racing

Clint Bowyer and the BB&T Racing team will compete this Saturday night at South Carolina's Darlington Raceway, one of the most difficult tracks on the circuit for drivers to master. It will be Bowyer's fourth visit to the 1.366-mile icon, known for hosing the historic Southern 500 race during dozens of past Labor Day weekends.

After the track had its race on Labor Day weekend taken away by NASCAR to give to California Speedway and now Atlanta Motor Speedway, the Southern 500 has been in hibernation. However, track officials have revived the tradition and brought it to spring in South Carolina.

There is so much history and tradition behind the Southern 500; I am glad they've brought it back," Bowyer said. "It's such a cool race track. It's a driver's track. It's a very difficult place to win a race, but when you do it's got to be a rewarding feeling. I heard that the winner of this race will have the trophy named after them, so that's even more incentive to win the race this weekend."

While Darlington is not Bowyer's best track, he has a solid record of running in the top 15. Bowyer's average running position of 17.8 ranks him 14th-best of the 48 drivers who have competed at the track "Too Tough to Tame" over the last four years. Of the 1,099 laps that Bowyer has completed at the 1.366-mile oval, 509 of them have come while running inside the top 15.

The first pole position of Bowyer's career came at Darlington in the spring of 2007.

"Darlington tests your skills each and every lap," Bowyer explained. "By far, it's one of the tracks that I enjoy the least, but you can't help getting caught up in the history of it all. I won my first pole there and that was really special. Again, it's not easy to get around there and I'll always be proud of that accomplishment."

Ten races into the 2009 season, Bowyer has planted himself into eighth place in the driver rankings. The race is close. Bowyer is 102 points from the top five and 229 points from Jeff Gordon, who is the top-ranked driver.

Bowyer has been on the track instead of in the garage for repairs due to an accident or engine failure at the end of every race dating to Phoenix in November 2006. When Bowyer crossed the finish line in Richmond, he extended his modern-era record of 83 consecutive races without a DNF (did not finish). Bowyer is now just one race shy of tying 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.

Live coverage of the Southern 500 will take the green flag Saturday, May 9, beginning at 7 p.m. ET. The race will be televised live on FOX and broadcast worldwide on the Motor Racing Network and Sirius XM Satellite Radio. Qualifying will be televised live on SPEED Friday, May, 8 at 5 p.m. ET. MRN and Sirius XM Satellite Radio will provide live qualifying updates.