

Experience levels, budgets merge for Challenger contenders

For its second season, the Southeast Limited Late Model Series renamed its main class the Pro division and added a subdivision called Challenger. Although the main eligibility point for Challenger action is that a driver cannot have won a Late Model Stock Car feature anywhere, it targeted two groups of racers: those with little to no experience in full-sized cars, and those wishing to cut down on their tire expenses and run shorter races.

The Challenger championship battle features one driver from each group: 16-year-old Justin Crider and 31-year-old Melvin Langley. They finished 1-2 in their 40-lap event at Coastal Plains Raceway. Langley almost had Crider passed for the lead at CPR, only to have a caution negate the pass; Langley didn't have third gear for the last restart or enough time to reel Crider back in.

Crider's second Challenger win followed Langley's first victory two

weeks ago at Ace Speedway. Crider needs to finish within a couple of spots of Langley in the season finale Nov. 19-20 at Myrtle Beach, S.C., to wrap up the title, but that's certainly no guarantee.

"We've had a good season and been pretty lucky," said Crider from Statesville, N.C. "I think this year the Challenger series was a good fit for me. I've been able to get more seat time with not as much pressure."

Langley, from Nashville, N.C., had been in some kind of Late Model action for four years. Most of that came in the Limited class at Southern National Raceway Park until it closed in 2009. He intended to race with the featured Pro class this year, until a conversation with former SNRP Limited dominator John Whaley.

"We decided it'd fit our budget better to do the Challenger," Langley said. "We run on used tires, about \$150 per set. If you're running Pro, it's one set of new tires, maybe \$150 each, and



Two-time winner Justin Crider (7) has a slight edge over Melvin Langley in the Challenger class points. (See LMD's Facebook page for a Langley photo.)

probably some to test with on Fridays."

This is the second year for his HarCor chassis, which has a crate engine and support mainly from his father Allen's business Langley Auto Sales. Crider, sponsored by Smith Automotive, JD's Class, Multi Electric and JM Motorsports, came into possession of his Marlowe piece in a different manner.

"The car we have was raffled off in the Dwight Huffman Memorial last year at Hickory," he said. "We were

there to watch, and we didn't ever expect to get a car out of it. We only bought one ticket, for \$20 I think. There were people there that bought five or six tickets."

Both drivers, who talk often as their haulers have been pitted next to each other at most events, plan to try their luck in the Pro class next year. Langley actually thought about it later this season, but instead he tried to become the first two-time Challenger winner. **LMD**