

= 2008 AMP Energy 500 =

The 2008 AMP Energy 500 was the 30th stock car race of the 2008 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series and the fourth in the ten @-@ race , season @-@ ending Chase for the Sprint Cup . It was held on October 5 , 2008 at Talladega Superspeedway , in Talladega , Alabama before a crowd of 145 @,@ 000 . The 190 @-@ lap race was won by Tony Stewart of the Joe Gibbs Racing team after he started from 34th position ; Paul Menard finished second , David Ragan came in third .

Travis Kvapil , who had the pole position , held the lead until he was passed by Carl Edwards on lap nine . The race was first stopped 63 laps later when a multi @-@ car collision was triggered by Brian Vickers , and was restarted 17 minutes later , with Dale Earnhardt , Jr. leading the field . A second red @-@ flag period was triggered after Edwards ran into teammate Greg Biffle starting a chain @-@ reaction accident involving a further ten drivers . Stewart led the field for the remainder of the race , until Regan Smith passed him below the yellow line ( out of bounds line ) on the final lap . Stewart was therefore handed the victory , and Smith was demoted from second to 18th . The race had a total of ten cautions , and 64 lead changes among 28 different drivers , setting a new Sprint Cup Series record .

It was Stewart 's first victory of the season , his first at Talladega Superspeedway , and the 33rd of his career . The result advanced him to seventh in the Drivers ' Championship , 232 behind leader Jimmie Johnson who extended his lead to 72 points over Edwards . Toyota extended its lead in the Manufacturers ' Championship , twelve points ahead of Ford in second place . Chevrolet remained in third with a 41 @-@ point advantage over Dodge with six races left in the season . The race attracted 7 @.@ 44 million television viewers .

= = Report = =

= = = Background = = =

The 2008 AMP Energy 500 was the 30th of 36 scheduled stock car races of the 2008 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series , and the fourth in the ten @-@ race season @-@ ending Chase for the Sprint Cup . It was held on October 5 , 2008 at Talladega , Alabama at Talladega Superspeedway , one of six superspeedways to hold NASCAR races ; the others are : Daytona International Speedway , Auto Club Speedway , Indianapolis Motor Speedway , Pocono Raceway and Michigan International Speedway . The standard track at the speedway is a four @-@ turn superspeedway that is 2 @.@ 66 miles ( 4 @.@ 28 km ) long . The track 's turns are banked at thirty @-@ three degrees , while the front stretch , the location of the finish line , is banked at 16 @.@ 5 degrees . The back stretch has a two @-@ degree banking .

Before the race , Jimmie Johnson led the Drivers ' Championship with 5 @,@ 575 points , with Carl Edwards in second , and Greg Biffle in third . Jeff Burton and Kevin Harvick rounded out the top five , and Jeff Gordon , Clint Bowyer , Dale Earnhardt , Jr . , Matt Kenseth , Denny Hamlin , Tony Stewart and Kyle Busch rounded out the top twelve drivers competing in the 2008 Chase for the Sprint Cup . In the Manufacturers ' Championship , Toyota was leading with 172 points , seven points ahead of their nearest rival Ford in second . Chevrolet was third with 159 points , with Dodge a further 39 points behind in fourth . Gordon was the race 's defending champion .

Second @-@ place championship driver Edwards said he expected the top three points leaders to remain together during the race , " I 'll probably be glued to Jimmie , no matter where he 's at . If him and Greg and I can just stay together , and make sure we either all avoid or either all get in the same wrecks , then we 'll probably be all right . " Earnhardt said he aimed to achieve his sixth victory at Talladega Superspeedway ( where he had a large amount of fan support ) in an effort to move ahead in the championship standings . Gordon , who had not won so far during 2008 , felt that he could win the race , and employed a strategy where he would attempt to avoid being caught up in a multi @-@ car collision . Johnson felt the AMP Energy 500 would be " interesting " and " a turning point in the chase " .

There were two changes of driver before the race . Red Bull Racing Team announced regular driver A.J. Allmendinger would be replaced by Mike Skinner who would drive at Talladega , and by former Scuderia Toro Rosso , Formula One driver Scott Speed who would drive in the seven remaining races of the season . Red Bull Racing vice president and general manager Jay Frye said this change would allow the Red Bull Racing Team to continue its development for the future . Kenny Wallace took over from Michael McDowell in the No. 00 Michael Waltrip Racing car at Talladega , because the team decided to regroup after he failed to qualify the previous race weekend at Kansas Speedway . Richard Childress Racing fielded a fourth car driven by Nationwide Series driver Mike Wallace .

== Practice and qualifying ==

Two practice sessions were held before the Sunday race , both on Friday . The first practice session ran for 75 minutes , the second lasted 45 minutes . Burton was fastest in the first practice session with a time of 48 @. @ 887 seconds ; Elliott Sadler was second , and Brian Vickers third . Robby Gordon was fourth , and Harvick placed fifth . Kasey Kahne , Biffle , Jamie McMurray , Skinner and Ryan Newman rounded out the session 's top ten drivers . Earnhardt 's engine failed , and his team installed a new one . David Ragan did the same between the two practice sessions . Later that day , Vickers paced the final practice session ( where thirty @-@ seven drivers competed ) with a time of 49 @. @ 694 seconds , ahead of Kahne and Bobby Labonte . Casey Mears was fourth @-@ fastest , ahead of Harvick , Scott Riggs and David Gilliland . Earnhardt , a Chase for the Sprint Cup driver , was eighth , with Skinner and Stewart rounding out the top ten ahead of qualifying . Earnhardt 's right @-@ rear tire exploded while leading a pack of cars at the exit of turn two , nine minutes after the session started , beginning a chain @-@ reaction accident involving cars driven by Gilliland , Stewart , David Reutimann , Hamlin , Clint Bowyer and Kahne , resulting in the session being stopped for 30 minutes . No drivers were injured , but Earnhardt and Gilliland were checked at the infield medical center and later released . Earnhardt , Bowyer , Kahne , Gilliland and Reutimann switched to back @-@ up cars .

Although forty @-@ five cars were entered in the qualifier , according to NASCAR 's qualifying procedure , only forty @-@ three could race . Each driver ran two laps , with the starting order determined by the competitor 's fastest times . Travis Kvapil clinched the first pole position of his career with a time of 51 @. @ 109 seconds . He was joined on the grid 's front row by Mears in his best qualifying performance of the season . Aric Almirola qualified third , his Dale Earnhardt , Inc. teammate Regan Smith was fourth , and Paul Menard started fifth . Mike Wallace , Joe Nemechek , Tony Raines , Vickers and Martin Truex , Jr. rounded out the top ten qualifiers . Of the other drivers in the Chase , Edwards was twelfth , Burton 17th and Johnson 20th . The two drivers that failed to qualify were Sam Hornish , Jr. and Patrick Carpentier . After the qualifier Kvapil said , " Definitely qualifying doesn 't really mean much as far as your chances to win the race after 500 miles , but we got a good pit selection and we 'll have less chance to get caught up in a wreck early on in the race . It doesn 't take long to get shuffled to the back and I 'm sure I 'll be shuffled in and out throughout the field . But the first few laps we 'll be up front and hopefully keeping it clean . " He also stated the pole was " special " , and this was the first time Ford had occupied that position at Talladega Superspeedway since 1997 .

== Race ==

Live television coverage of the race , began at 1 : 00 p.m. EST in the United States on ABC . At the start of the race , weather conditions were sunny . Fred Cook of Alabama Raceway Ministries began pre @-@ race ceremonies with an invocation . Brad Arnold , the lead singer of rock band 3 Doors Down performed the national anthem , and Pepsi employees Antonio Clements , John Foster , Richard Stuckey , Daniel Harris , Demetrius Blackmon , Reginald Thomas , Kenneth Goodwin , and Raymond Castleberry , who serve in the National Guard commanded the drivers to start their engines . During the pace laps , Earnhardt and Ragan moved to the rear of the field because they

had changed their engines ; Johnson did the same because his team made adjustments to his engine outside of the impound .

The race started at 2 : 23 p.m. Kvapil maintained his pole position advantage on the first lap , as the field ran three and four abreast during the lap . Mike Wallace led the cars on the outside lane and challenged Kvapil for the lead on lap four , but was unable to get ahead . Edwards and Vickers drove on the outside lane to move to the front on lap nine , and the two exchanged the lead on the backstretch , before Edwards pulled clear of Vickers . Kvapil fell to seventh place by the same lap . Vickers regained the first position on the next lap , after Edwards drove down the track . On the 14th lap , Almirola and his teammate Menard gave each other assistance , and Almirola passed Vickers on the backstretch to take over the lead . Ragan , with assistance from Kvapil , passed Almirola for first place by taking the outside lane three laps later . After falling down the field earlier in the race , Gordon had moved back up to seventh by lap 18 . Earnhardt moved into the lead eight laps later , but Kvapil reclaimed the position on lap 30 , after receiving assistance from Gordon . Earnhardt retook the lead two laps later , and Johnson had moved to fourth after dropping down the field earlier in the race . Mike Wallace claimed the lead on lap 33 . The first caution was triggered on the next lap when debris was spotted on the track . Most of the leaders , including Mike Wallace , made pit stops for tires and car adjustments .

Gordon led on the lap @-@ 38 restart , followed by Truex and Burton . One lap later , Burton , with assistance from Johnson , passed Gordon for the lead . Kenseth claimed first position on lap 40 after driving on the outside lane . Vickers followed Johnson on the inside line to reclaim the lead on the following lap , before Sadler passed Vickers around the outside for the lead on the 44th lap . On lap 45 , Mears led after passing Sadler , and debris was located on the backstretch , triggering a second caution . All drivers , including Mears , elected to make pit stops . Sadler reclaimed first position and led the field back up to speed at the lap @-@ 49 restart , ahead of Mears and Kyle Busch . Hamlin and Kyle Busch led the cars driving on the outside lane , with Busch claiming the lead on lap 51 , pulling away from the rest of the field . Kurt Busch , with help from Vickers , got ahead of Kyle Busch to move into first place .

Jamie McMurray took the lead by the 53rd lap , when a third caution was deployed after Reutimann 's right @-@ rear tire blew on the backstretch , causing Gordon to take evasive action by turning right and heavily damaged the nose of his car when he collided with the outside wall . Reutimann 's tire broke Johnson 's front splitter brace . All drivers , including McMurray , chose to make pit stops . Vickers elected to stay on the track and led the field at the restart on lap 58 , ahead of Kvapil and Skinner . Two laps later , Hamlin used the draft to take over the lead , with Labonte moving into second . Kahne used the outside lane to claim first position , before Reed Sorenson also drove on the outside lane to claim first place on the next lap . The pack drove three abreast on lap 63 , as Truex moved into first place on the 64th lap . McMurray reclaimed the first position when he got ahead of Truex at the start @-@ finish line on lap 65 , and Kahne dropped to 26th position by the same lap . Truex retook the lead from McMurray at the start of the following lap , and Harvick moved into first on lap 67 .

Earnhardt moved back into the lead on lap 68 , when Vickers ' right @-@ front tire blew in the tri @-@ oval on the same lap , starting a multi @-@ car accident involving Gilliland , Truex , Kahne , Skinner , McMurray , Terry Labonte , Raines and Almirola . A fourth caution was triggered initially because of the accident before a red @-@ flag was shown shortly afterward to stop the race to allow officials to clear the track of debris . The race resumed seventeen minutes later as the field elected to make pit stops . Earnhardt led on the lap @-@ 72 restart , followed by Menard , Burton , Harvick and Montoya . By lap 74 , Montoya had the lead before Hamlin passed him at the start @-@ finish line to lead the lap . Johnson moved to the front of the field two laps later , before losing the lead to teammate Earnhardt on lap 78 as the pack ran three abreast at the start @-@ finish line .

Johnson moved back into the lead on lap 80 , after receiving assistance from Earnhardt , before losing it to Stewart around the inside two laps later after Stewart was helped by Mike Wallace . On the 81st lap , Mike Wallace 's right @-@ rear tire blew causing a fifth caution to be displayed ; Wallace regained control of his car but his tire struck Michael Waltrip 's car forcing him to pit for repairs . Most of the field , including Stewart , elected to make pit stops for tires and fuel . Kyle

Busch gained the lead after the pit stops , and led the field back up to speed at the lap @-@ 86 restart , followed by Earnhardt . On lap 89 , Labonte led the outside lane after he was helped by Earnhardt . Hamlin , Earnhardt and Kenseth traded the first position over the next seven laps . Hamlin 's right @-@ front tire exploded in turn two on lap 98 and crashed heavily into the turn two outside wall , triggering a sixth caution . The leaders , including Kyle Busch , who took the lead before the caution , made pit stops for tires and fuel .

Hamlin was extracted from his car , and placed on a stretcher and transported to a local hospital for further evaluation . Riggs led the field back up to speed at the restart on lap 104 , ahead of Menard . On the following lap , Riggs lost the draft allowing Menard to move into the lead . The field went three abreast , as Menard lost the lead to Stewart on the 107th lap , but Menard reclaimed the position one lap later . Stewart retook the lead on lap 112 after he received assistance from Montoya . Burton challenged Stewart for the lead on lap 115 as both drivers ran side @-@ by @-@ side at the start @-@ finish line , before Burton moved in front of Stewart two laps later . Harvick moved back into the lead on lap 120 , after running on the inside lane . Harvick , Ragan and Stewart formed a single line , as the rest of the field ran in double @-@ file .

A seventh caution was triggered on lap 138 when Gordon had smoke and fluid coming out of his car , ending his race . Most of the field , including Harvick , elected to pit under caution . Edwards spun after he left pit road but avoided damage to his car . During the pit stop period , the record for the most leaders in a Sprint Cup Series race was broken when Nemechek led one lap ( the 27th race leader ) before pitting . Kyle Busch led on the lap @-@ 144 restart , followed by Ragan , Kvapil , Stewart and Johnson . Four laps later , Johnson dropped from fifth to the rear of the field , as part of a strategy to run at the rear until the race ended . Kyle Busch lost the draft on lap 151 , allowing Earnhardt to retake first place . Burton , with assistance from Richard Childress Racing teammates Bowyer , Harvick and Mike Wallace , moved back into the lead on lap 156 . Ragan took over the lead on lap 160 , after he was helped by Earnhardt .

Waltrip took over the lead on lap 163 , and an eighth caution was necessitated when Biffle made contact with Ragan , who hit Harvick , who spun heading into turn three but avoided hitting the barriers or other cars . Some drivers , including Waltrip , chose to pit for fresh tires and fuel during the caution . Montoya elected not to pit , and led the field at the restart on lap 169 . The top six drivers quickly began to pull away from the rest of the field , as Stewart ran fourth and Harvick 16th by lap 172 . Stewart and Montoya ran alongside each other at the line on lap 173 , before Stewart moved in front for the lead one lap later . On the same lap , a second multi @-@ car accident occurred necessitating a ninth caution when Edwards made contact with teammate Biffle going into turn three , and collected , Earnhardt , Harvick , Kyle Busch , Nemechek , Sorenson , Kenseth , Kvapil , Watrip , Dave Blaney and Montoya . The second red @-@ flag of the race was shown shortly afterward to allow officials to clear debris from the track . The race was restarted twelve minutes later , as some drivers made pit stops .

Stewart led the field back up to speed at the lap @-@ 178 restart , ahead of Nemechek and Sadler . Stewart and Nemechek pulled away from the rest of the field , but Nemechek lost the draft on the next lap and fell behind Sadler . The field formed into a single file , and remained this way until a tenth and final caution of the race was deployed because McMurray had his right @-@ rear tire go down on lap 185 . The race restarted on lap 188 , for a green @-@ white @-@ checker finish ( extending the race to 190 laps ) with Stewart leading Smith . The field again formed a single line , with most drivers remaining in that formation for the rest of the race . On the final lap , Smith passed Stewart on the frontstretch below the yellow line , and crossed the start @-@ finish line ahead of Stewart . NASCAR determined that Smith was out of track bounds , handing Stewart the victory with Smith provisionally in second . The race had a total of ten cautions and 64 lead changes by 28 drivers . Stewart led four different times for a total of 24 laps , more than any other competitor .

= = = Post @-@ race comments = = =

Stewart , who earned \$ 270 @,@ 136 for the victory , appeared in victory lane to celebrate his first win of the season , and his first at Talladega Superspeedway , in front of a crowd of 145 @,@ 000 .

He was delighted to take the victory : " It 's one thing to get back to Victory Lane , but to do it at Talladega wow . " " I 've wanted to win here for so long . This hasn 't been one of my favorite places on the fan side . People haven 't always liked me here . But this was for those guys up in the stands today . " Second @-@ place finisher Menard was pleased with his result , saying he had a good car throughout the duration of the race : " Car had speed in it all day . Didn 't make any chassis adjustments , just did a little bit of air pressure after the first run to free it up . It was just all track position really . " In the post @-@ race press conference , third @-@ place finisher Ragan said that he felt that he had a car which could have secured the victory under the right circumstances , but believed it was a good day for his team : " We always seem to be pretty fast here on the superspeedway track , so that just goes to show you how much effort our Roush Fenway team is putting into this program . "

NASCAR officials reviewed video evidence of Smith 's pass of Stewart on the final lap with Smith and Dale Earnhardt , Inc. president Max Siegel in attendance , and declared the manoeuvre illegal ; Smith was issued a pass @-@ through penalty which dropped him from second to 18th . Smith argued that he was forced down below the yellow line : " I was always told that the rule is if you get forced down there , then you are the winner of the race , and on the last lap , anything goes . That ? s what I was going with . I had a nose inside of him and I could have piled up the whole field . " Ninth @-@ place finisher Johnson said there were rumors that drivers were allowed to go below the yellow line on the last lap of the previous day 's Craftsman Truck Series race which were circulated on the day of the AMP Energy 500 : " I didn 't know what to really think about it , or understood it , or had seen it . It ? s ironic how it played out today . ?

NASCAR spokesperson Jim Hunter however insisted Smith was not forced below the yellow line , and stated drivers were warned beforehand in the pre @-@ race drivers ' meeting about gaining a position illegally . Earnhardt felt Smith deserved to win the race , saying there was a lack of clarity over what going below the yellow line meant . Smith stated he did not ask for clarification of the rule because of his low @-@ profile status . NASCAR president Mike Helton stated that race officials had correctly awarded the penalty to Smith , and clarified that no driver would be allowed to advance their position by going below the yellow line at any time during a race . Similarities were also made between Smith 's overtake , and Earnhardt 's pass of Kenseth below the yellow line at Talladega at the 2003 Aaron 's 499 .

Hamlin was kept in hospital overnight for further evaluation , but complained of a headache and favored his right foot after exiting his car . His crew chief Mike Ford revealed Hamlin 's right @-@ rear tire had been cut on the run before his crash which Hamlin later attributed to running over debris on track . Vickers described his right @-@ front tire failure saying : " It sounded like a bomb exploded . " Goodyear 's product manager Rick Heinrich said the tires used in the race were the same from the Aaron 's 499 , and conducted an analysis of the tire failures at their plant in Akron , Ohio . Edwards admitted he was at fault for causing the crash between himself and teammate Biffle on lap 174 , and apologized to the drivers caught up in the incident . Biffle revealed he was unable to steer his Ford away from the incident .

The result kept Johnson in the lead of the Drivers ' Championship , seventy @-@ two points ahead of Edwards . Biffle and Burton maintained third and fourth positions , while Bowyer moved up to fifth . Harvick moved up into sixth , with Stewart 's victory advancing him from eleventh to seventh place . Gordon , Kenseth , Earnhardt , Kyle Busch and Hamlin rounded out the top twelve . In the Manufacturers ' Championship , Toyota extended their lead over Ford to twelve points . Chevrolet remained in third with 165 , 41 points ahead of Dodge . The race attracted a television audience of 7 @. @ 44 million people . It took three hours , thirty @-@ six minutes and ten seconds to complete the event , and the margin of victory was 0 @. @ 052 seconds .

= = Results = =

= = = Qualifying = = =

=== Race ===

== Standings after the race ==