



Gordon Grabs Win -- and Points Lead -- From Johnson at Talladega

Jeff Gordon led one time for one lap in Sunday's UAW-Ford 500 at Talladega Superspeedway, but it was the right lap to lead -- the last one. Gordon passed teammate Jimmie Johnson on the final lap to capture his 80th career victory and move into the points lead, nine ahead of Johnson.

Gordon, driving a specially painted No. 24 DuPont/Pepsi Chevrolet, started 34th in the 188-lap race. With this marking the debut of the "Car of Tomorrow" at a restrictor-plate track, the four-time NASCAR Cup Series champion wanted to play it safe to avoid the "big one" -- multi-car accidents that commonly occur during restrictor-plate races due to the tightly bunched packs. For much of the race, Gordon ran in a smaller pack of cars -- around 30th place -- while the larger lead pack contained 20 - 25 cars.

"The good news is we're not in that mess," Gordon radioed the crew on lap 136, referring to the lead draft of cars racing three and four wide. "The bad news is we're going to have to get into it."

But Gordon almost didn't have the chance. During a caution flag pit stop on lap 138, an air hose from the No. 24 pit stall became trapped under the rear fender as Gordon exited the pit. The air gun was pulled away from the pit stall, and Gordon was assessed a stop-and-go penalty for the rules violation (equipment leaving the pit stall).

The penalty was served as the field returned to green flag conditions on lap 140, but Gordon lost the draft and was running 30 seconds behind when the "big one" occurred in the lead draft -- an 11-car wreck on lap 146.

During the ensuing caution, Gordon asked how many laps remained in the event.

"There will be 38 to go when you get the green flag," crew chief Steve Letarte replied.

"Time to go," Gordon responded.

Gordon restarted 17th. By lap 166, he was up to ninth. But when the day's final caution waved on lap 175, he was just outside the top 10 in 11th.

When the race resumed under green conditions on lap 180, Gordon began his charge. On lap 181, he crossed the start/finish line in seventh. Two laps later, he was running second behind leader Johnson.

"I was running behind the No. 48 (driven by Johnson) with some good pushes and momentum, but the No. 12 (driven by Ryan Newman) and the No. 2 (driven by Kurt Busch) were just locking me down," Gordon explained after the race. "They were on my quarter and on my outside. If I wanted to make a move before that last lap, I couldn't because they were in the spot I needed."

"But on the last lap, they got three-wide, the momentum shifted and I was able to get clear of the No. 12. I got a push from Dave Blaney (running behind Gordon) and I just went with it. And then I heard my spotter say that Tony Stewart had a run on the outside."

"That happened at the same time I made that move on Jimmie, and Jimmie couldn't block me enough and I got to the outside of him. I looked in my mirror and there's Tony."

"Tony had a lot of momentum, but he had no choice when I pulled up in front of him. He either was going to hit the wall or hit the cars on the inside if he tried to pass me. Or push me."

"He pushed me. And that push is what allowed me to get by Jimmie."

Gordon will now look to extend his points lead this Saturday night in the Bank of America 500 at Lowe's Motor Speedway. ABC and PRN Radio will broadcast the race live beginning at 7 p.m. EDT.

UAW-Ford 500 results (unofficial)

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|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Jeff Gordon | 6. Casey Mears |
| 2. Jimmie Johnson | 7. Kurt Busch |
| 3. Dave Blaney | 8. Tony Stewart |
| 4. Denny Hamlin | 9. Tony Raines |
| 5. Ryan Newman | 10. Reed Sorenson |

Point standings (unofficial)

1. Jeff Gordon

2. Jimmie Johnson (-9)
3. Clint Bowyer (-63)
4. Tony Stewart (-154)
5. Kevin Harvick (-202)
6. Carl Edwards (-205)
7. Kurt Busch (-215)
8. Kyle Busch (-260)
9. Denny Hamlin (-262)
10. Martin Truex, Jr. (-300)
11. Matt Kenseth (-318)
12. Jeff Busrtton (-336)