

# FASTEST STREET CAR

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## SATO TAKES FIRST JET-HOT OPEN COMP WIN OF THE 2016 SEASON

**N**MCA West Open Comp is an amalgam of cars encompassing everything from daily-driven street cars to full-blown racecars that don't necessarily fit in other classes. This diversity, combined with a pro tree, makes for exciting racing—both to watch and participate in.

The 5th Annual Nitto Tire NMCA WEST Spring Nationals brought 17 cars to the class with engine sizes ranging from 281 cubic-inches to 565 cubic-inches. Leading the class after qualifying was John Guinn from Riverside, California, in his 2002 Camaro with a .007-second reaction time. Justin Spencer was right behind him with an identical .007 light, but due to the first come, first served rule, had to settle for the second spot on the ladder. Dennis Sato took the third spot with a .008, and Ron DeHoop took the clean-up spot with a .010. Rounding out the top five qualifiers in a field of big names was Brent Calvert in his 2014 Mustang with an .011 reaction time.

As Sunday rolled around, the qualifying sheet was filled with heavy hitters, foreshadowing a tough day for everyone in the lanes. For one driver, today was different.

Dennis Sato was "on." In his first-round match against Rick Champcin, Sato was on the brakes hard as Champcin was way off his index. The next round found Sato in a tight battle with John Marquardt, and Marquardt broke out trying to make up the holeshot Sato had on him. Round three saw the ladder bye go to Sato, and he ran a solo 9.340 on his 9.35 index, with a stellar .007 light.

In the semis, Sato found himself opposite Greg Dreher. Not to be taken lightly, as he had cut a perfect light in the previous round, Sato chopped down the tree on Dreher with a .003 and cruised to the final when Dreher's hood came up and he aborted the run. In the final round, Sato faced Ron Mihld in what might have been the most exciting Open Comp race of the weekend. Sato continued to be strong on the tree, .012-to-.023 and the pair charged hard down the track, nose to fender at the stripe, with Sato taking the win light in an exciting double-breakout.

"Everything was going my way that day and I didn't mess up, for once," laughed Sato. "Normally, I'll be going rounds and I'll do something stupid, but this one

felt really good. It was just my day I suppose." Unfortunately, several weeks after the race, Sato underwent neck surgery, which will keep him out of the car for the rest of the season. "It's tough starting the season off with a win, putting me on top of the points, and having to give that all up this season. But it's not like this can't happen again, I'll be back," said the resolute Sato. **FSC**



Ron Mihld wheeled his classic 351-powered Mustang through some heavy hitters, including Mike Nordahl and the number-one qualifier, John Guinn, en route to the final round.



A little modern flavor in the class, John Guinn's 2002 Camaro took the top-qualifier honors on Saturday. Surprisingly, it was a slower-than-normal light that ended Guinn's weekend in the third round.



Greg Dreher had a great weekend, finishing in the semis in Open Comp, and taking the win in Mustang Madness, not to mention a perfect reaction time in the third round coupled with a 10.098 on a 10.09 index - .008 from a perfect pass.



Defending champion Justin Spencer has the smallest engine in the class, but it is one of the few that runs in the single-digits. Spencer broke out in the third round, trying to compete with Dreher's .008 package.