

FIA EUROPEAN DRAG RACING CHAMPIONSHIP: 2014

Round Number: **FIA 5**
Event: **FIA European Finals**
Class: **Pro - Stock**
Location: **Santa Pod England**
Date: **4th – 7th September, 2014**

Entry List:

Jimmy Ålund SWE
Thomas Lindström SWE
Michael Malmgren SWE
Simon Gustafsson SWE
Magnus Petersson SWE

Coming in to the European finals at Santa Pod for the finale of the 2014 season, we have a championship table that could go in any of several directions.

The finals in 2013 were a formality for Jimmy Ålund. He left the Tierp event needing only to pass scrutineering and turn a wheel in qualification to secure the championship. Things are very different in 2014.

Driver	Number	Country	GB	FIN	GER	SWE	Total
Michael Malmgren	3	SWE	35	101	17	75	228
Magnus Petersson	5	SWE	40	60	15	100	215
Jimmy Ålund	1	SWE	47	83	13	67	210
Thomas Lindström	2	SWE	41	40	26	41	148
Jan Palmqvist	1711	SWE	35	33	14	33	115
Christian Sagelv	9	SWE	0	55	19	34	108
Simon Gustafsson	4209	SWE	0	39	14	35	88

Only 18 points separate the top three. None of the top three can afford to lose a race all weekend. Since that is not the way our sport goes, someone is going to be disappointed. The weather reports for the Santa Pod round are excellent. With the addition of a track that has been in tip top order all year, Pro Stock will be a tough class to win this weekend, and all the teams will be pulling out all the stops to do just that.

FIA points (for a five car field) are awarded on the following basis.

10 points for running in qualification
20 points for a first round exit
40 points for a semi-final exit
60 points for a runner up spot
80 points for an event win

Additionally points are awarded for qualifying positions:

1st = 8
2nd = 7
3rd = 6
4th = 4
5th = 4

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And finally, points are awarded for the top three qualifiers in each session.

3 to number one qualifier

2 to number two qualifier

1 to number three qualifier

So it is the case that the minimum points available for this event are 34 to a car that does not qualify in the top three in any session and is eliminated in round one. The maximum points haul is 110 for a car that qualifies number one in all sessions and wins the event.

Qualifying points are going to be important this weekend. Number one position all day on Friday and Saturday will net 20 points for that team which will close things up at the top assuming it is one of those three cars that achieve this. The temptation must be to go out from Q1 and attack the track as hard as possible, but we have seen many times that this strategy can back fire and leave a team in last place through tyre shake, wheel spin or the tiniest misjudgement of the clutch settings. There is no real safe option though. Failing to attack from Q1 may well mean that someone else takes valuable points away and extends their lead, or narrows your margin. The decisions the crews take in the hours before each qualification lap will be critical. Usually Pro Stock drivers and teams in the pairing lanes are relaxed and easy going. I expect tensions to be very high all weekend.

The championship leader is Michael Malmgren. Michael is in the best position to take the championship. Winning the event is the only sure way to do it, but it could still happen as runner up if Thomas or Simon make the final alongside him. Michael is a three time champion; he has been here before and will not be fazed. We can count on Michael and his team to be on their game all weekend.

Second place man Magnus Petersson is only in his second full season and is looking at the possibility of a championship. Magnus will also win the trophy if he wins the event or is alongside Thomas or Simon in the final.

Jimmy pretty much needs to win the event. There is a mathematical possibility that he could still win if he loses the final, but only if Michael or Magnus are not in the lane beside him. Jimmy will not be relying on anyone else to make the path clear for him, so we can rely on Jimmy to come out all guns blazing and driving for the win.

Thomas Lindström can make life very difficult for the top three. Thomas was running down into the 6.5's at Tierp but he can only improve his championship position by one place – and this is only a mathematical possibility. The likelihood is that Thomas will be PS4 in 2015, so he really has nothing to lose but quite a lot to prove, plus the bragging rights that go with winning the last event of the year.

These four are joined by Simon Gustafsson in the ex-Jonas Dantanus Race car. Simon is on his first Pro-Stock outing at Santa Pod, and has no chance to take the championship, but this is a quick car, and this means this team are able to provide an upset to any of the championship hopeful's bids for glory.

With only five cars, there are valuable bye runs in the opening round and into the final. Who gets these may play a very important role. Pro Stock is always very difficult to predict, and so I never do so. This year, the finals will have more twists and turns than a Stieg Larsson novel. We will almost certainly only know who our champion is as the last two cars cross the finish line. Here is to the closest, most thrilling Pro Stock finale I have had the pleasure of covering.

Ian Hart

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