

Life With Heart Attack: The Green Light

All right, here we go, getting ready to start a funny car qualifier coming up momentarily and Paul Lee back on track. Great to see him back in the car after he had some issues health wise, but now he is told you are good to go, but really just starting to make his way. When a heart attack sidelined him, the doctors told him you'll never drive again.

"I was on my life cycle in my gym at home. And after I got off the cycle, I started feeling chest pains. And it felt like an elephant sitting on my chest within about a minute to minute and a half, and I said, Oh call 911. I'm having a heart attack."

"I started losing body function. My vision was going away and my heart had stopped. I didn't know that. And the ambulance was here at my house in four minutes. Within 25 minutes, I was in the operating room, getting three stents put in."

"And I found out later that I had hereditary heart disease. And my LED artery, which is the main artery in your heart, was 100% blocked. I had a defibrillator put in just in case I had another heart attack."

"So just lucky and a lot of ways to be able to survive a Widowmaker heart attack, which is the worst heart attack you can have. NHRA drag racing is racing nitro funny cars at the top level of the sport."

"They go from zero to 325 miles an hour and less than four seconds. We go to 1000 foot with 11,000 horsepower race cars. first time I came to the track, I was twelve years old. I loved it so much."

"I remember that day like it was yesterday, and I said, That's what I want to do some day, 30 years later, here I am still doing it. And although on the starting line, it looks like me racing another person, which is true when we get to the starting line."

"But the preparation of the car. All these guys are important part of the team. It's truly a team sport, just like football. Every one of those guys has to do their job for me to be able to go out there and race the other guy in the other lane and beat that guy."

"My first cardiologist said, well, you know, you're lucky to be alive. Forget about racing cars This is a 11,000 horsepower a violent vehicle that has, you know, it affects your body. The doctor told me that, you know, you're at high risk for another heart attack. So I announced my retirement."

Paul Lee had a massive heart attack, but I'm very, very glad to announce that he is OK and came through that OK. Sure, he may not drive a race car again, but we know Paul Lee. He's watching us today. Surely wish the best for you. Continued health.

"You know, maybe it was a little sad or, you know, I don't want to say I was depressed, I mean, I think that's too strong a word."

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"I don't think I ever was depressed. I'm happy that I'm alive, but at the same time you know, my life just changed. You know, it's like, what do I do? I came back to work after I got out of hospital, I was back in my office and then started my rehab, which was exercise, you know, eating right."

"I have a lot of dead tissue in my heart from my heart attack because my heart was literally stopped for approximately 30 minutes. But what exercise does is help other parts of my heart get stronger to kind of make up for the dead tissue."

"The oil pumps are one of our motors is critical to keep it alive. Well, just like my heart is the same thing. It's my oil pump to keep blood through my body to keep me alive. So I try to take care of my heart."

"Now, obviously, it's extremely important for me to do that. I had a lot of heart palpitations for months and months after that, and every time that would happen, it would wake me up and I would panic and I was like, Wow, I'm going to have another heart attack."

"I'm doing everything I can do to live a long, healthy life, and so I don't try not to think about it too much anymore, I just go and just live my life. When we're back at the pit, so I get it dressed in my fire suit, in the lounge, and I'm at that point, I just like to be quiet and get my thoughts together."

"We go through the whole run in our head multiple times. So when we get up to the starting line, we're basically repeating a mental exercise. And the one thing I love about sitting in the car being in this cocoon is total relaxation."

"That's my happy place. When the crew chief pulls me up to the starting line and gives me the thumbs up. Now we're waiting for the Christmas tree to come on. Soon, as I see a yellow flash, I hit the gas as hard as I can."

"Let go of that break and I'm starting the ride of my life. After about a year and a half of the rehab, I started to feel normal again. It took a long time and my cardiologist said to me, you know, you might be able to race again."

"And I said, Really? And I said, Well, what do we have to do? So the first thing we had to check was if there was any interference with my defibrillator. These cars have two 44 amp Magneto's. That's the ignition system on one of these nitro funny cars."

"He said, I want to get you in a funny car, started up and we'll monitor your defibrillator from laptop and we'll see if there's any effects. Looking good, there's no significant electro mechanical interference. Right? Good. So that's good, that's one hurdle not every hurdle."

"I understand first things first. Yeah, yeah. One at a time. Step one was passed. Next step. Get you in a race car again hooked up with a heart monitor to see your heart rate and everything like that actually driving a car."

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"So we did that about a month later and we made three runs that day and on the last run. I ran my best time ever, I ran a 3:90 at 322 miles an hour."

Nice job, Paul.

"When you have a heart attack The NHRA requires a cardiologist signature to sign off on my license."

Now we're just looking at the heart muscle. Now with the color we're looking at the blood flow. After over a year of rehab and working on bettering his health, I can't tell what this means for Paul. This is nerve wracking. After all this time, I hope it works out for Paul Lee.

Now we're just looking at the heart, one of the valves within the heart, the mitral valve. And we got back and they had my heart right, and I said, you know, your heart's good. The race to the green flag from our point of view.

"So he agreed to sign off on my license, and now I was back to being a licensed driver that started the next journey of actually getting back racing again. It felt great in not only being back on the racetrack and realizing I can drive the car."

"No problem, but my heart felt good. And that was what I was concerned. I had a lot of anxiety, you know, just worried about my heart going to be able to take this. It was great to be back. I was like, so happy, I couldn't, you couldn't believe how happy I was."

"When you hit the gas pedal in one of these things, it's like slamming you back in your seat from the G forces. The ground shakes. Actually, it measures on a Richter scale at an NHRA Drag Race, even if you're in the stands, you feel it against your chest."

"Every time I hear a Nitro engine, I just close my eyes. It's music to my ears."

"The tire smoke, the drag strip has this certain smell that only a drag strip has, and the people that love the sport just love being at the track. There's just no other experience for auto racing than an NHRA Drag Race."

Paul Lee got back, got clearance and is back in the car now, playing with his Straight Line Strategies group, and he has got a Championship winning team behind him and that obviously is the goal to get out here and win the NHRA Championship.

"One of the things I've always realized, and especially after my heart attack, it's not the racing that's important. It's who I race with because this team is not just my team. This is my friends and my family. Because when I had my heart attack, the one thing that was going through my mind as I was going to the hospital was, I haven't had a chance to tell my friends and my family that I love them. And basically, we're all just one big, happy family. And that's what it's all about. It's a team sport and have a whole team behind me."

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“But when I get up at the starting line, it's me against the other guy.”

Ready to go guys, let's do it.

“And I love that. And I want to beat that other guy. I wouldn't trade it for anything. It's the greatest sport.”