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Dierks Bentley shines in his first Stagecoach headlining spot

It was no secret that headlining an evening of the annual three-day Stagecoach Country Music Festival in Indio has been on country music star Dierks Bentley's bucket list. He's grown with the festival throughout the years, first appearing during an early afternoon set on the Mane Stage in 2008, eventually working his way up to playing second to Lady Antebellum in 2013 and Miranda Lambert in 2015.

This year, however, it was Bentley's turn to shine and he took full advantage Friday night. Since he's currently out on the road with fellow Mane Stage performers Cole Swindell and California-native Jon Pardi, he brought them both out during his set for some fun moments. Pardi returned to the stage clad in his signature cowboy hat and joined Bentley for a cover of George Strait's "Fireman." Bentley even donned a Strait-style light-colored cowboy hat for the occasion, something he said he wouldn't make a habit of and did especially for Stagecoach since he's never been cowboy-hat-wearing-country. Bentley is his own brand, not falling within the subgenres of baseball cap country or bro country or pop country.

Swindell, who falls under the baseball cap category and made his Stagecoach Festival debut Friday with an impressive turn, came out to sing his current radio hit, "Flatliner," which features Bentley on vocals. Earlier in the set, Bentley brought out Elle King, another artist that performed earlier in the day in front of a large crowd over at the Palomino Stage. King's seemingly effortless talent, sharp sense of humor and willingness to admit "I'm already drunk" during her 3 p.m. run won over the Stagecoach crowd. As Bentley introduced King, he called her the "coolest, the baddest and the bestest" before the duo launched into their Grammy-nominated hit, "Different for Girls."

The rest of the setlist leaned heavily on some of his biggest country-party anthems like "Am I the Only One," "5-1-5-0," "Somewhere on a Beach," "What Was I Thinkin'" and "Sideways." After cranking out "Every Mile a Memory," Bentley told the crowd that he knew what it was like to be at a festival until 10:15 p.m. (his start time) after drinking and being in the sun all day long.

"I wish I didn't have to work tonight," he said taking another sip from his red Solo cup. "I'd be passed out by now if I'd been out there watching all these great bands."

He was certainly one of the most grateful artists to have ever grace the Mane Stage. On several occasions he made mention of his love for Stagecoach in between songs and even incorporated bits of his enthusiasm into the lyrical content.

"This is an unbelievable experience," he said soaking it all in. Later he added that after playing the fest four times, he and the band were extremely grateful for the fans that have allowed him to return.

"We love you guys," he continued. "That's all I'm gonna say about it ... for now."

With perfect timing, the winds picked up as Bentley started with his new sultry single “Black,” his more crooning vocals echoing across the sprawling festival grounds. His popular cut “Riser” was another pretty moment out in this desert, his voice projecting all the way to the fans in the back of the venue who raised their arms up high, singing and swaying along.

Though he teased that the band was “out of songs,” Bentley wasn’t going to leave the venue without playing his hit “Drunk on a Plane.” Even as fans began to file out to try and beat the traffic, many stopped to take in the encore, some opting to belt out their own drunken and off-key versions even after the show was over and they continued to the parking lot.