

U.M.P. crowns it's 2011 Champions

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Unzicker & Harrison Enjoy Spotlight As Nearly \$400,000 Is Distributed During DIRTcar UMP Night of Champions Awards Banquet

SPRINGFIELD, IL Jan. 8, 2011 Ryan Unzicker of El Paso, Ill., and Mike Harrison of Highland, Ill., shared the spotlight during Saturday nights 28th annual DIRTcar Racing UMP Night of Champions Awards Banquet inside the Springfield Crowne Plaza Hotels ballroom.

Unzicker, 30, was honored for winning his first-ever DIRTcar UMP Late Model national championship in 2011. The rising star accomplished his stated goal, using a late-season surge to unseat Rusty Schlenk of Jackson, Mich., for the renowned short-track organizations highest full-fender honor.

The 37-year-old Harrison, meanwhile, moved closer to DIRTcar UMP Modified immortality, winning the open-wheel divisions national crown for the second straight season and third time in his career. He is just the third driver in 18 years to win back-to-back UMP Modified national titles and moved within one of matching the circuit-record four championships owned by Jimmy Owens of Newport, Tenn.

A DIRTcar UMP banquet record crowd of nearly 900 attendees from more than a dozen states and Canada watched as DIRT Racing officials distributed nearly \$400,000 to the champions and top performers who raced under the DIRTcar UMP banner in 2011.

Unzicker earned \$27,000 in points-fund checks for his breakout 2011 campaign, including \$20,000 for the national crown and a \$2,000 prize for capturing the Illinois State points title. He also pocketed \$5,000 for finishing fourth in the DIRTcar Summer Nationals points standings.

It was a great year, said Unzicker, who beat Schlenk by 49 points (2,551-2,502) to win a championship determined using drivers best 35 finishes/points nights. There were a lot of ups and not a lot of downs besides the Summer Nationals. Our goal was to win the national championship so pulling it off is very satisfying.

A winner of a career-high 17 DIRTcar UMP-sanctioned features in 2011, Unzicker grabbed the national points lead early in the season and held it until being overtaken by Schlenk in late August. He proved his mettle, however, by rallying over the last month of points racing, winning four straight features to regain the top spot in the standings and then salting the title away by finishing no worse than seventh in his final six starts.

I never doubted us when we were behind, said Unzicker, who saw his once 300-plus-point lead become a 37-point deficit before his impressive comeback. We led it the whole time and only lost it for two weeks. We had confidence and momentum, everyone was behind us, and we knew we could do it.

Unzicker, who makes his living as the safety director at his familys RJR Transportation company, said the primary focus in 2012 for his family-owned team will be on chasing the DIRTcar Summer Nationals championship. He hopes to begin his season next month with a trip to Volusia Speedway Park in Barberville, Fla., for the UNOH DIRTcar Nationals Presented by Summit Racing Equipment, which features six consecutive nights of Late Model racing from Feb. 20-25.

Harrison picked up \$22,575 in points-fund checks at the banquet for his 2011 UMP Modified success,

including a \$20,000 national-title stipend and \$2,000 for capturing the championship of the inaugural Summit Racing Equipment UMP Modified Nationals. His earnings were accented by \$500 for finishing fourth in the Southern Illinois State points and \$75 for placing 15 th in the Midwest States standings.

A UMP Modified regular since 1996 who works fulltime for Rinderer Farms in Trenton, Ill., Harrison won 24 features in 2011, including eight in Summit Racing Equipment UMP Modified Nationals competition. He captured the national title by 17 points (1,924-1,907) edge over Michael Long of Quincy, Ill.

Winning the third national championship is the biggest highlight for me, said Harrison, whose first national crown came in 2004. Being the first Summit Modified Nationals champion was special too. We had a great season.

But its not just all about me. Its about my whole crew. Theyre the ones that put me in the position that Im in. I really just get in the car and drive it.

No driver collected more points-fund money at the awards banquet than Shannon Babb of Moweaqua, Ill., whose third career DIRTcar Summer Nationals title was worth \$25,000 the single-biggest check handed out during the affair. He earned a total of \$28,000, including \$3,000 for finishing fourth in the national standings.

Babb, 38, rediscovered his vintage Summer Nationals form in 2011, winning nine times including a sizzling six races in a row en route to his first title since he captured back-to-back championships in 2006-06.

I was really proud of what we brought into 2011 because I stayed home all winter and prepared everything, said Babb, a fulltime professional driver. It feels good to win, but you cant let the grass grow. There are guys out there just like me doing the same thing Im doing trying to beat me.

Babb plans to pursue his fourth Summer Nationals championship in 2012. The month-long series has become his favorite time of the year.

Thirty days (of racing) is grueling, but its a blast, said Babb. It brings out a lot of people that take vacations and showcases what we have built (as a team).

The nights third-largest national championship check was presented to Dustin Griffin of Quincy, Ill., who pocketed \$10,000 for capturing his first-ever DIRTcar UMP Pro Late Model title. The 25-year-old driver also collected \$250 for finishing second in the Northern States points and \$140 for placing sixth in the Southern States standings.

Jeremy Hines of Seymour, Ind., was feted for winning his second career DIRTcar UMP Sportsman national championship. He received \$3,200, including \$200 for capturing the Southern States points title.

Mark Anderson of Canton, Ill., accepted accolades for his first-ever DIRTcar UMP Limited Modified national crown. His championship season earned him a \$1,000 check.

Nate Zimmer of Mattoon, Ill., also became a first-time national champion, winning in the Stock Car division. He earned \$3,240, including a pair of \$120 checks for finishing third in the Northern and Southern States points standings.

Dennis Bringedahl of Twin Lakes, Mich. (Factory Stocks) and Jeremy Callahan of Mt. Vernon, Ill. (Sport Compacts) were honored as the national champions of UMP DIRTcars entry-level classes, which debuted in 2007.

Both drivers earned \$1,000 for their national titles; Callahan added a \$200 check for winning the Sport Compact Western States points crown.

State champions recognized during the banquet included:

* Late Models (\$2,000 each): Unzicker (Illinois), Eric Spangler (Michigan), Randy Korte (Midwest), Garrett Alberson (Western), Trevor Glasier (Northwestern), Jon Henry (Eastern) and Terry English (Southern).

* **UMP Modifieds (\$2,000 each):** Denny Crane (Missouri), **Doug Adkins (Ohio)**, Clayton Miller (Kentucky/Tennessee), Michael Bolyard (Midwest), Todd Sherman (Eastern), Troy Foulger (Northwest), Jeff Mathews (Deep South), Clint DeMoss (Indiana), Jacob Poel (Michigan), Ray Bollinger (Northern Illinois) and Tim Hancock (Southern Illinois).

* Pro Late Models (\$500 each): Nick Bauman (Northern) and Credence Mott (Southern).

* Sportsman (\$200 each): Hines (Southern), Dan Flessner (Illinois), Joey Ladoucuer (Northeastern), Jake Simmons (Northern) and Jeff Herzog (Western).

* Stock Car (\$200 each): Mike Hodges (Southern), John Farris (Northern), Aaron Fields (Eastern) and Dan Dykman (Northeastern).

* Sport Compact (\$200 each): Callahan (Western), Evan Gaultney (Southern), Paul Namey (Eastern) and Kenny Butterfield (Northern).

Other DIRTcar UMP-sanctioned series titlists recognized during Saturdays festivities were Brandon Sheppard of New Berlin, Ill. (Northern All-Stars Late Model Series), Bryan Barber of Greensburg, Ky. (American Modified Series) and Nick Lyons of Centralia, Ill. (Pro Crate Racing Association).

Bobby Pierce, 15, of Oakwood, Ill., received a \$1,000 check for winning 2011 DIRTcar UMP Late Model Rookie of the Year honors. The son of former DIRTcar UMP Late Model great Bob Pierce won five features and finished 10 th in the national standings.

A number of special awards determined by a vote of the DIRTcar UMP membership were handed out:

* Brandon Thirlby (Late Models) and Brian Lynn (Modifieds) received Sportsman of the Year trophies.

* Brian Redmon, who turns the wrenches on Ryan Unzickers Late Models, and Terry Frazier, who serves as Harrison's UMP Modified crew chief, were presented the Mechanic of the year awards. Frazier won the UMP Modified honor for the second consecutive year.

* **Portsmouth (Ohio) Raceway Park was announced as the DIRTcar UMP Track of the Year.**

* Betty Crook of Mount Pleasant (Mich.) Speedway was presented the DIRTcar UMP Promoter of the Year award.

Randy Mooneyham received the seventh annual Bob Memmer Achievement Award, which honors the

memory of UMP DIRTcar Racings late founder. A veteran Missouri promoter who operates Monett Speedway in his home state and directs the MARS DIRTcar Series, he was surprised to win the award not to mention shocked to be joined for pictures by eight members of his family, who traveled to the banquet unbeknownst to Mooneyham and sat at a table tucked away in a corner of the ballroom until the award was announced.

The 2011 DIRTcar UMP Chassis Builder of the Year awards went to Rocket Chassis of Shinnston, W.Va., in the Late Models and Bob Pierce Race Cars of Oakwood, Ill., in the Modifieds. Rocket cars won 110 DIRTcar UMP-sanctioned features and Pierce machines reached Victory Lane 155 times in Modified competition.

Rhyne Racing Engines was recognized as the 2011 DIRTcar UMP Late Model Engine Builder of the Year as well as the National Champion Engine Builder. The Gary, Ind.-based shop collected 52 feature wins and powered Unzicker to the national title.

Mullins Racing Engines in Mt. Olive, Ill., claimed the 2011 DIRTcar UMP Modified Engine Builder of the Year with 81 feature wins, while Dargie Racing Engines in Richmond, Ind., was honored as the 2011 UMP Modified National Champion Engine Builder for providing powerplants to Harrison.

MasterSbilt Race Cars (Late Models) and Larry Shaw Race Cars (Modifieds) were recognized as national champion chassis builders.

The banquet began for the fourth consecutive year with an awards ceremony for the top drivers in the Kid Modz division, a four-cylinder version of a UMP DIRTcar Modified that car builder Bob Pierce launched to bring youngsters into the sport. Teenager Logan Mitchell of Palmyra, Ill., was celebrated as the divisions 2011 champion.

Appreciation plaques were presented on Saturday to promoters or representatives from the nearly two-dozen DIRTcar UMP-sanctioned tracks who were in attendance. Promoters met earlier in the afternoon with DIRTcar UMP officials to discuss the organizations plans for the 2012 season.

The 2012 DIRTcar UMP season begins on Feb. 2 with the first of three consecutive nights of UMP Modified racing at Bubba Raceway Park in Ocala, Fla. Twelve more evenings of UMP Modified action will take place in Florida during the month Feb. 9-11 at East Bay Raceway Park in Gibsonton; Feb. 14-21 at Volusia Speedway Park in Barberville (UNOH DIRTcar Nationals Presented by Summit); and Feb. 23-25 at North Florida Speedway in Lake City.

The DIRTcar UMP Late Model division will also jump-start the 2012 season in Florida, running as part of the UNOH DIRTcar Nationals Presented by Summit at Volusia Speedway Park. Six nights of full-fender action includes four under the DIRTcar UMP banner (Feb. 20, 21, 22 and 24) and two World of Outlaws Late Model Series programs (Feb. 23 and 25).

For more information on DIRTcar Racing, visit www.dirtcar.com.