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NATIONAL HOT LIST



P.J. GROENKE (RICHMOND HILL, ON)

Pirelli World Challenge

Six years of dedicated effort finally paid off for P.J. Groenke as he has been crowned the TCB class champion in the Pirelli World Challenge series.

"I've been in the PWC TCB since the inception in 2012," noted the Richmond Hill, ON resident. "I ran one race weekend there and I've been in this class ever since. [In the final race of the year] I thought, no one is taking this away from me."

Following a season-long battle with TechSport Racing teammate Canaan O'Connell and 19-year-old rookie Jake Pipal, Groenke won the final two rounds of the year at Mazda Raceway at Laguna Seca to claim the title, edging Pipal by two points in the year-end tally.

"I put it to the floor on that standing start, got by Canaan, [and

once] I did, I was gone and there was no way that he, or anyone else, was going to catch me," said Groenke.

Over the course of the 12-race TCB schedule, Groenke managed to put his No. 25 Verax.ca/Tundra/Prestone/Cabano's Food Chevrolet Sonic into the winner's circle on three occasions and ended the campaign with ten podium appearances while never finishing out of the top five. *With files from PWC*

BRADY CREAMER (MIRAMICHI, NB)

Atlantic Stock Car Championships

In just a limited number of starts in the 2017 season, Brady Creamer reminded those in the Maritimes why he will be one to watch in 2018. The Miramichi driver competed in two Atlantic Stock Car Championships events at the CENTRE For Speed outside of Shediac, NB to close off his year. The Sportsman 100 event, which was his first in a car acquired from the Reid stables, saw Creamer hot out of the trailer. Creamer started on the front row and led the first 54 laps of the race before a scramble on a restart saw the No. 10 shuffled out of the top spot. Creamer would battle up front for the remaining 46 laps and come home a strong third in an event he has yet to win at.

The Limited Late Model 125 would be the next race for Creamer the next week. Creamer wasted little time getting to the front, taking the lead on Lap 14 from Marcel LeBlanc. While the car was now on Hoosier 1070 Slicks compared to the Hoosier 890 tires the Sportsman division runs, the car and driver did not miss a beat. Creamer would lead the final 111 laps to victory but was challenged often by former track and Atlantic Stock Car Champion Laurie Cormier.

Can Creamer continue his hot streak into 2018? Only time will tell. With a quick car added to the team late in the year and a driver that knows his way around the short tracks of Atlantic Canada, the combination may be one to watch next year. *Story by Tim Terry*



(Top) PWC TCB champion PJ Groenke. (Above) Atlantic Stock Car Championships race winner Brady Creamer. Photos courtesy Steve Embling (top) and Speedway660 (above)



BRAD STEVENSON (COURTICE, ON)

Ontario Modifieds Racing Series

Combine some top-shelf racing equipment with a driver who possesses the perfect mix of skill and aggression when he climbs behind the controls and the mixture will usually find a way to make it to victory lane. The S&S Racing pairing of car owner Brian Strawn and his chosen wheelman of Brad Stevenson scored a pair of main event wins along with several top five and top ten finishes on the way to the 2017 Ontario Modifieds Racing Series championship.

The 36-year-old, second-generation speedster from Courtice, ON – whose father Craig also runs with the open-wheel racing tour – scored his first career OMRS feature win Saturday, May 27 at Peterborough Speedway and backed up that performance less than a couple of months later with another triumph at the same venue. Stevenson, who has been teamed with Brian Strawn and his son Chad since the pair started racing in the Thunder Car division at Kawartha Speedway, said it was a great season for the No. 77 team.

“Brian and his crew give me a great car,” said Stevenson. “I’m the guy who is lucky enough to drive one of the best machines in the field. If we’re able to win, I’m confident that we have the equipment to get the job done. Earning the series championship was the culmination of a year of hard work.” Story by Jim Clarke

LUKE WHITTEKER (IROQUOIS, ON)

Brockville Speedway 358 Modifieds

A season championship is every racer’s goal. Luke Whitteker had come close in the past, but during Brockville Ontario Speedway’s 2017 campaign, everything fell into place. The 24-year-old from Iroquois, ON connected with veteran Sportsman Modified car owner Ralph Murphy and the 358 Modified combination produced immediate results that included a pair of regular season wins and ten top



(Clockwise from above) NHRA Hot Rod Heritage Series Funny Car champion Ryan Hodgson, Brockville Speedway 358 Modifieds champion Luke Whitteker and Ontario Modifieds Racing Series champion Brad Stevenson.

Photos by Bruce Biegler / DragRaceCanada.com and Jim Clarke

five finishes in 14 starts. It turns out that the team’s track title was a tasty slice of cake without any icing. The frosting was added at the season-ending DIRTcar Northeast Fall Nationals event in the form of a 100-lap ‘A’ main win that contributed a healthy CDN \$4,000 payday to the coffers of the first-year alliance and gave the No. 38 ‘Special’ crew a place in history as the first home track regulars to win the prestigious Small Block Modified headliner, which was also a 358 Modified DIRTcar Series race.

“It was nice to have a good season at Brockville; a track where I had struggled over the years,” said Whitteker. “As a team, we were committed to make the car the best it could be every week. There weren’t any goals as far as finishes were concerned, but our crew was in the shop every day of the week to make sure we were prepared for every race.”

Whitteker’s winning season also included victories in three of the four Ogilvie’s Quad Crown events and a checkered flag in the first-ever Tri-Track Challenge show. Story by Jim Clarke

RYAN HODGSON (EDMONTON, AB)

NHRA Hot Rod Heritage Series

Edmonton, AB drag racer Ryan Hodgson made history at the NHRA’s Hot Rod Reunion in late October, in Bakersfield, CA. By reaching the semi-finals of the NHRA Hot Rod Heritage Series Funny Car class at Auto Club Famoso Raceway – his closest rival failed to qualify – Hodgson became the first Canadian to with the overall World Championship in the popular Nostalgia division.

Hodgson guided the Hodgson & Papirnick ‘Pacemaker’ team’s 1969 Camaro to a pair of wins and three final round appearances, en route to the title. If some of the names sound familiar, Ryan is the son of legendary car owner Ron Hodgson, who has been involved in drag racing since 1967. In the past, the ‘Pacemaker’ Funny Car was piloted by the late Gordie Bonin and Gordon Jenner.

The team recently brought the ‘Pacemaker’ name back, which added to the satisfaction of winning the championship in the illustrious Hot Rod Heritage Nostalgia Funny Car class. In addition to carrying sponsorship from Ron Hodgson Chevrolet Buick GMC, Wakefield Canada also supported the team via its Castrol brand. Oceanus and NAPA were also prominent sponsors.

“It was pretty interesting. I’ve been watching Jason Rupert for quite a few years – he actually helped me out five years ago when we were getting started in the alcohol funny car,” said Hodgson. “Here I am, years later, racing against him for the championship. I had him in my sights from the start of the season because he was the best. We probably raced about ten times this season and it was about ‘fifty-fifty’ for the wins.” Story by Greg MacPherson **IT**