

Classic win caps off dream season for Sitterly

By Keith Champine

(Oswego, N.Y.) – Otto Sitterly passed Doug Didero late in Sunday’s 200-lap Budweiser International Classic at Oswego Speedway and drove to his first victory in the nation’s most prestigious supermodified race. The Canajoharie, N.Y., driver earned \$15,000 plus extra thousands in lap money and contingency awards for his outstanding efforts.

Sitterly qualified and started second in the 34-car field of non-winged supers. Didero was the pole sitter, setting a new track record of 16.212 in Saturday evening time trials. Otto hounded Didero for the first three-quarters of the race, ultimately making an inside pass for the lead on lap 160, which led to a loud cheer from the crowd of thousands seated around The Big O’s five-eighths-mile oval.

“I followed Doug for the majority of the race and I didn’t know the pace we were keeping until one of Didero’s guys popped out a sign very early that said 17.6 and I went yikes, that’s pretty fast,” Otto told Chris Porter of SuperRacingNews.com Sunday evening after the win. “I knew he was the guy to beat, and part of me thought that I didn’t want him to break (Jimmy) Champine’s 200 (laps led) record, so I wanted to get at least one lap on him. I wanted to lead at least one lap and stop him from doing that if I could.”

Champine’s record was safe. The Nicotra Racing 7 team clearly hit the best setup of anyone with their blue Hawk Jr chassis. Otto proved it when he got out front, turning a fast lap of 17.082 just two circuits after his pass on the North Carolina racer.

“His crew guy was signaling him and I kept putting pressure on him. His crew guy would close the gap and he’d try harder and I think his tires went away on him. He slipped really bad out of (Turn) 2 once and I was so close that I slipped the same amount. If that didn’t happen I may have been able to make the pass then. Probably about 50 laps later he left the door open out of 4 and I took it.”

The Classic win just two weeks after winning his third Oswego track championship puts Sitterly in an elite group of the drivers at Oswego. He joins Champine, Didero, Greg Furlong, Bentley Warren, Eddie Bellinger, Doug Heveron and Nolan Swift as the only racers to win the track title and Classic 200 in the same season.

The win also marks the highlight of a 20-plus-year career that began on the dirt tracks of upstate New York.

“Not many people may understand where I come from, but the road it took for me to get here is pretty unbelievable. I started out with my girlfriend at the time, who’s my wife now, and she was my pit crew when I had my first car. And there were just two of us. It’s been 20 years of sleepless nights and a lot of work and most of the money I’ve ever made to be able to do things like this right here,” Otto said, speaking of a career which truly began at the grassroots levels of the sport.

Sitterly's Nicotra Racing teammates were two of the best open-wheel racers in country, but each fell victim to unfortunate circumstance in the 200-lap grind. USAC star Bobby Santos III joined the team as the driver of the Hawk Jr No. 6, and was running inside the top 10 when a front-straightaway accident with Joe Gosek on lap 171 took the Massachusetts native out of contention.

Indy 500 veteran Davey Hamilton, behind the wheel of Nicotra's newest mount, a 2008 Xtreme Chassis No. 79, was attempting to make an inside pass on Didero for second on lap 199 when he and the North Carolina racer came together in Turn 1. Hamilton's No. 79 made contact with Oswego's inside hubrail, ending his day just one lap short of the finish.



Otto wins his first Bud Classic
Johnson photos



Sitterly is all smiles – Mike “Pinner”