

## Oscar & Felix

By Dan Johnson

**Oswego Speedway, September 30, 2009** - Without a lot of fanfare, Oscar and Felix are putting together a resume that has them in the same conversations with the names of Shampine, Swift, Warren, Bellinger, Furlong, Muldoon, Heveron, Gioia, and Coniam. Oswego Speedway's version of the 70's sitcom "The Odd Couple" are the team of Otto Sitterly and John Nicotra. Sitterly is the Felix, as he's the organized, hard working, always "on" guy, while Nicotra is the Oscar, as John is the guy that makes it all come together, while having the "cat that ate the canary" smile behind those ever present sunglasses.

Classic Weekend 53 is in the books, and the lead driver in the Nicotra stable of supermodifieds picked up his first ever career International Classic win. Sitterly drove a masterful race, as he combined the right mix of unnerving patience, a good car, excellent track position, a dose of Lady Luck, undying dedication in the garage, and smarts to wheel the #7 to Victory Lane for the 2009 Classic.

It all started for the team on Saturday, when Otto wheeled the blue #7 to a time of 16.443 in qualifying, good enough for second fast, and starting outside pole for the 200. He tied his effort in 2006, where he started second as well. This front row run gave him the opportunity to stay up front early, and not burn up his equipment getting to the lead pack.

Pre-race talk buzzed about who would win, would it be the blue cars (Nicotra team cars), or the black cars (Didero, Graham, McKnight). As race time approached, it was generally thought that Doug Didero was the odds on favorite, and maybe even had a thought about trying to lead all 200 laps, equaling the effort of Jim Shampine in 1980.

The race went green, and as scripted, Didero shot to the front. He held a pretty quick race pace for a 200 lap grind, as the 3 circled the speedway in the 17.5 or 6 area. With his game plan intact, Sitterly began his afternoon of staring at the back end of the 3 car, as he followed the tire tracks of the Xtreme car. Laps wound along, Didero still leading, Sitterly still following, with others looking to catch the 3 and 7 cars.

While others had their thoughts about challenging, this race was going to be settled between Doug Didero and Otto Sitterly. Pardon the pun, but this was a Classic set up. Here we had the defending track champ against the defending Classic champ. It was the top 2 qualifiers for the race. We had the Hawk against the Xtreme. It was black vs. blue. There was no way this race wasn't going to be decided between the 3 & 7 cars.

As fans began to wonder if the Shampine record was in question, just after the lap 100 mark, Didero's #3 began to push up a bit in the corners. It appeared the tires were beginning to go away. Sitterly remained patient, riding just behind, watching the whole thing from the best seat in the house. It was evident the handling on the Xtreme #3 was going away, just before the Greg Furlong-Lou Levea caution flag. The #3 was going up the track just enough to leave the door open on the inside, which has been the preferred line this year.

Lap 160, Sitterly saw his chance. He only wanted to do this once, and this was his chance. As they raced between turns 3&4, he pulled his Hawk Chassis left, and drove to the inside of Didero and won the drag race to turn one with the lead. From there, Sitterly hit another gear and poured it on. His first lap in the lead was timed four tenths of a second faster than the last lap he ran behind Didero.

From the pass for the lead on, there was no other car in the area code of the 7 in the last quarter of the race. The rout was on. The only one that was going to take the race from Otto was Lady Luck. He was in the midst of driving the best race of his life, the car was handling like a dream, the only thing getting in the way of him and sure victory, would be if Lady Luck decided to turn her head on him. That didn't happen, and the only question was the margin of victory. Caution flags kept cars close, but this race was Otto's. Lap 207, to a thunderous approval from the grandstands and pit area, Otto Sitterly crossed under the double checkered flags 3.18 seconds ahead of Didero.

It was a dream come true for the Canajoharie driver. All the hard work, the hours in the garage, the missed dinners and blood sweat and tears were all worth it, as Otto Sitterly could now be called "Classic Champion". Add the classic title to his three track championship, and he is putting a serious case in for one of the top drivers to suit up ever at Oswego Speedway.

Car owner John Nicotra is one of the biggest supporters of the speedway. When Pat and Steve took control of the track, John wanted to support them, and the best way he could was to help with the car count. He put together a deal with Otto and his family, where John would own them, while Otto would maintain, drive, and do whatever was needed to help make them one of the top flight teams at the track.

It's been a combination that has worked for everyone involved. The two have clicked since coming together, and have turned into a force on the track. Off the track, John and Otto have just as much, if not more, fun that anyone else, as they are the poster boys for the work hard-play hard slogan.

We'll get into other storylines of Classic Weekend '09 next week, but this week was time to salute the Champions. To Oscar and Felix, aka John Nicotra and Otto Sitterly, congratulations on winning the 53<sup>rd</sup> Budweiser International Classic.

See you at the races.