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Who will make history, grab headlines at Xtream Rock Island Grand Prix powered by Mediacom

ROCK ISLAND — Who will grab the headlines at the 24th annual Xtream Rock Island Grand Prix powered by Mediacom?

In 2015 Tony Neilson, from nearby Delmar, Iowa, won 6 races at “The Rock.” In 2016, Cal Stewart from Concord, NC, who works in the shop for Hendrick Motorsports, took home five victories. Last year each driver added three more coveted Rocks to their collection.

But there are always other drivers to watch. For instance, last year Texan Austin Wilkins also won twice, claiming the King of the Streets and 125cc Open Shifter 2 races. All 3 and many more are back to try to claim a championship this year.

"To be able to win at a race where big names never won at is just awesome to think about," Wilkins said, pointing to IndyCar standouts Graham Rahal and Connor Daly, who each failed to win during visits to Rock Island.

"It's a dream what happened to me in 2015. But today is a dream, too, coming out of here winning three races," Neilson told The Dispatch-Rock Island Argus newspaper after last year's races. "Holy cow. Winning once here is special when you're racing against the guys I'm racing with."

"This just shows how strong the talent level of karting is in this event and in this town. People should recognize that because nothing is easy out there."

Will one of these racers dominate? Or will some up-and-coming karter be the next to capture the headlines? It's entirely possible as entries continue to climb back from recession period lows. Last year entries cracked the 300 level (311) for the first time since the economic downturn hit karting in 2007. The largest number of entries at Rock Island was 411 in 2005. General admission to the races is free with a \$10 daily charge for pit passes.

"We've already seen the number of drivers steadily growing back to our pre-2008 levels over the last few years, but I'm sure the naming rights partnership with Mediacom, now in its third year, and the exposure it has provided has helped too," said Roger Ruthhart, president of the Grand Prix organization.

This year's Grand Prix offers 17 feature races Sunday, Sept. 2. Practice and heat races fill the racing schedule on Saturday, Sept. 1. Sunday's schedule also features a 2 cycle vs. 4 cycle Speed Challenge at 9:30 a.m. where karts not legal in the day's race classes will attempt to break the track's lap speed record.

Margay's twin x30 was built for and appeared on the TV show Speed is the New Black on the Velocity channel. Besides the twin 175cc 2-cycle kart, the event will also feature Schurr Power Engineering's 420cc open Honda 4 stroke. Both will be trying to unofficially beat the track's fast lap speed record 31.084 set in 2016 by Texan Austin Wilkins in his shifter kart.

There will continue to be other attractions offered during the race day and into the evening. This year's Sunday Car Show is expanding to include 50 cars from the Quad City Camaro Club, QC Cruisers, QC Gearheads and QC Mustang Club on 18th Street near WHBF TV, as well as a variety of food vendors.

The world's largest karting street race already has a home in the racing history books but each year it adds to its storied tradition. This year for the first time the Rock Island race is the final event in the Triple Crown of Karting with competitors previously gathering points for finishes at the Grand Prix of Quincy, the Battle of the Brickyard in Indianapolis and the Thor Industries Elkhart Grand Prix in Indiana. Series winners will be honored at Rock Island's Sunday Awards Ceremony with trophies and North American street racing bragging rights.

Once again this year Sunday racing will kick off with the Travis DeVriendt Memorial Race for Briggs & Stratton 206 Heavy competitors. The biggest race of the day each year helps to draw attention to suicide awareness after the untimely death of former the former Rock Island champion and Quad-Citizen.

Last year's race drew more than 40 entries forcing race organizers to commit to putting last chance qualifying races back in the schedule for any race with more than 40 entries this year.

Ruthhart said. “Racers love it because it’s an out-of-the-box engine with no way to modify it, so it really levels the playing field competitively.

“And now, Margay has gone one step farther with the Ignite package. For \$4,000, you get everything you need to race — engine, chassis, tires — and that’s bringing a lot of new people into the sport.” As a result the Grand Prix is offering a full package of Ignite classes for Senior, Junior and Masters.

It will also feature the 19th running of the King of the Streets shifter kart race, showcase a wide range of vintage karts as well as a number of 2-cycle and 4-cycle powered race classes. For more about the Xtream Rock Island Grand Prix powered by Mediacom please visit rockislandgrandprix.com.

Sponsors for this year’s event include: Mediacom, Jumer’s Casino & Hotel, Hoosier Tires, LeCont Tires, AT&T, Gett Industries, Briggs & Stratton Racing, Modern Woodman Financial/ Joe Schurr agent, CBS TV4 / Fox 18 and CW, Schurr Power Racing Engines, Sunbelt Rentals, AMT Ambulance, Johannes Bus Service, The Dispatch-Rock Island Argus-QC Online.com, Modern Woodman Bank, Holiday Inn Rock Island, eKartingnews.com, Margay Racing, Courtesy Car City, Gas & Electric Credit Union, Rogan Scale, J&J Camper Sales, 61 Kartway, Triple E Sales, Curry’s Transportation, Miller Trucking and Excavating, Meier Trucking, Brenny’s Motorcycle Center and the local radio stations Q106, Fox Sports QC, WOC and WLLR.

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2018 race weekend schedule

FRIDAY, AUGUST 31

2-10 p.m.: Competitor sign-in open at Holiday Inn, Rock Island.

2-5 p.m.: Pre-race tech/scrutineering open at the off-site staging area, Jumer’s Casino & Hotel.

5 p.m.: Streets close in The District of Rock Island.

6-11 p.m.: Pits open.

6-9 p.m.: Pre-race tech/scrutineering, fuel testing open on the pre-grid.

8 p.m.: Outdoor music on the East Plaza Stage sponsored by the Rock Island Brewing Company. Admission charged.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 1

7 a.m.: Pits open.

7-9 a.m.: Driver sign-in open at Holiday Inn, Rock Island.

7 a.m.: Pre-race tech/scrutineering for overnight arrivals only.

7:15 a.m.: Mandatory Driver’s Meeting in front of the Argus building.

8 a.m.-1 p.m.: Two practice rounds. Five-minute sessions. Crossing breaks every four rounds.

10 a.m.: Grand Prix Marketplace vendors open.

1-5 p.m.: Heat races.

5 p.m.: Track closes at conclusion of racing.

8 p.m.: Outdoor music on the East Plaza Stage sponsored by the Daiquiri Factory & Rock Island Brewing Company. All ages show. Admission charged.

SUNDAY, SEPT. 2

8 a.m.: Final practice round begins.

10 a.m.: Grand Prix Marketplace vendors open.

10:45 a.m.: Opening Ceremonies.

11 a.m.: Kid's Autograph Session. Start/Finish line.

11:15 a.m.: Racing begins.

5 p.m.: Racing ends.

7 p.m.: Xtream Mediacom Awards Ceremony, Holiday Inn, Rock Island.

8 p.m.: Outdoor music on the East Plaza Stage sponsored by the Rock Island Brewing Company. Ages 18 +. Admission charged.

MONDAY, SEPT. 4

9:30 a.m.: Annual Rock Island Labor Day Parade. 18th Avenue and 24th Street.

Note: *All times tentative and subject to change.*