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History made at 28TH Xtream Rock Island Grand Prix

ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS — History was once again made in the streets of the city during the 28th running of the Xstream Rock Island Grand Prix, the world's largest karting street race. The event has a rich history of foreign competitors. This year, Scott "Skitchy" Barnes of Bermuda won his seventh and eighth Rock trophy and Erik Gasparovich of Latvia became the 20th foreign winner at Rock Island and first from his country. History was also made when Andrew Bujdoso of Ohio won his third consecutive King of the Streets shifter title, tying Alan Rudolph for the three-peat but becoming the only racer to be crowned King 3 consecutive times at Rock Island.

Gasparovich teamed up with fellow Latvian Roman Pandans, who now lives in Wisconsin. Gasparovich won the Vintage Open heat race by 14 seconds over his teammate and then won the final by 16.2 seconds also over Pandans. Gasparovich finished sixth in the 100cc Open race and also in the 100cc King of The Rock race won by Chase Jones of Indiana by just .139 of a second over MPG Motorports teammate Race Liberante. Jones would go on to also win the Briggs & Stratton 206 King of The Rock race over a field of 27 in what turned out to be a crowning day for Jones.

This year's event featured 207 entries – up slightly over last year at a time when some other races haven't seen declining entries. However, 100cc, Vintage and shifter entries were off slightly. Race organizers said that will be a target for next year.

As part of an effort to boost participation in 2-cycle classes at Rock Island, Grand Prix sponsor Courtney Simpson of Factory Kart East and Simpson-Bjerke Racing, offered the winner of this year's 100cc King of the Rock race a paid entry to the SKUSA SuperNats this fall if the class is expanded – otherwise to the event in 2024. Impressed by the racing between Jones and Liberante, he later expanded his offer to include paid entries for both drivers.

Erik Gasparovich, now 58, brought a storied racing profile to Rock Island, according to his teammate. Gasparovich has been racing karts since 1979 and in 1981 became the junior champion of the Soviet Union. He is a multiple Latvian, Baltic States and former USSR national champion and is well respected in the karting community of the Baltic States as a coach and mentor, his teammate said. He is an organizer of a street race in his home city of Jelgava, Latvia and has three sons racing including Kristaps who won the Rotax Grand Finals last year in Portugal.

Barnes gained his two additional Rock titles, edging Magik Kart teammate Bujdoso in the Open Shifter race and then leading all 15 laps in the Open Shifter Masters division for his eighth win at Rock Island. James McMahon, a native of Ireland now living in Minnesota, earned a top 10 finish in the Briggs 206 Masters race.

The three wins by foreign drivers brought the total to 22. Previous winners include: **Canada** -- Matt Champagne 2003, Cory Cacciavilani 2012, 2013; Scott Hargrove; 2015; Remo Ruscitti 2016 (2); **Bermuda** -- Jason North 2000, 2001; Scott Barnes 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022 (3); **Poland** – Voytek Burdzy 2007; **France** -- Nelson Philippe 2002; **England** – Martin Pierce 2006; **Philippines** – Michele Bumgarner 2008, 2009. Other foreign competitors who have not won at Rock Island have come from England, Canada, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica and Argentina.

In winning his third consecutive King of The Streets title, Bujdoso repeated a historic milestone not done since Alan Rudolph won the title in Quincy 1999 and then in Rock Island in 2000 and 2001. Rudolph would later also wear the crown in 2006 and 2007. Bujdoso recorded a fast lap of 32.610 while posting a win by 16.25 seconds over Joe Ruch, despite track changes which significantly narrowed some portions. Ryan Bjerke was third. In his post-race interview, Bujdoso challenged racers to step up and “run a big-boy race” and try to defeat him. Ryan Bjerke also won the Rok/Honda shifter race.

New guidelines from motorsports insurance underwriters to make racing safer for both racers and spectators brought changes in the design of the track and limited some areas for spectator access. It also brought significant increases in insurance costs to the race. But while other races across the country were shut down, Rock Island was among a handful of temporary or street circuit karting events given support to continue. Several racers noted that the changes which resulted in a narrower track designed by race director Terry Riggins, also made the racing smoother and safer by eliminating some rough areas of the streets.

“We appreciate that some people were disappointed that they could not sit in their favorite spots,” said Roger Ruthhart, president of the Grand Prix. “But unlike most races, this is a free event and the six-tenths of a mile track provides over a mile of spots on both sides from which people can watch. The decision to follow the new guidelines so our race could continue was ours; new rules that lead to the changes were outside of our control. We anticipate that this will continue and allow us to hold the races in the future.”

History continued to take a beating as Tony Neilson of Iowa, grabbed Rock trophies with wins in Margay Ignite Masters and Margay Ignite Senior 2, bringing his total race wins at Rock Island to 25 and closing the gap with long-time record holder Gary Lawson of Ohio who has 28. Race Liberante also added two Rocks to his collection with wins in the Travis DeVriendt Memorial Briggs & Stratton 206 Senior race and adding another win in 100cc Senior.

Another local driver, Michael Dittmer of Iowa, followed Neilson by adding to his Rock Island win record at 12. He won the Briggs 206 Heavy race on the last lap by just 92 thousandths of second over another local pilot, Drake Ostrom of Illinois. Dittmer also won Briggs 206 Medium 1. Ostrom again finished second after Neilson made contact with the barrier.

Jeff Dolian of Texas won the Briggs 206 Masters after taking the lead back from Dittmer on the final lap and edging him at the finish line by just 0.146 of a second. After an accident that brought out a red flag during Saturday heat races, Riley Scott of Quincy, Illinois, was back in form for Sunday’s final winning the Margay Ignite Senior race over Neilson and Barnes. Mick Gabriel of Illinois won the Briggs 206 Medium race after a tough battle with Ostrom and Justin Wishard of Illinois.

In the two other Vintage classes, besides Vintage Open won by Gasparovich, Dave Doogan won the Vintage Yamaha class over Kris Porter and Travis Porter of Illinois and Steve Welte of Wisconsin won the Vintage Mac class over Richar Vandermaiden and Randy Duncalf, both of Illinois.

A new Briggs & Stratton 206 Novice class added this year drew just 9 entries and was won by Hunter Bolton, son of former Rock Island winner Todd Bolton. Yamaha Senior was by Charlie Mohr by 6.7 seconds over Ohio's Blake Korth.

This year's award for Track Team of the Year, based on the average results of a number of racers from the same track, was won by Sugar River Raceway in Broadhead, Wis.

Complete results of this year's races can be found at:

<https://beta.speedhive.com/events/2377108>

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Rock Island is located in an area known as the Quad-Cities, equally split between Illinois and Iowa, with a metropolitan population of 400,000. It is home to the Rock Island Arsenal military base and corporate headquarters for John Deere in Moline, Ill. It is served by the Quad-City International Airport and is at the intersection of Interstate highways 80, 74, 88 and 280.

The race has featured competitive teams from 39 states as well as 17 foreign teams and 22 foreign winners.

Sponsors for the event include: National Karting Alliance, Mediacom, Briggs & Stratton Racing, Bally's Quad-Cities Casino & Hotel, Hoosier Kartsport, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Modern Woodmen Financial/ Joe Schurr agent, Miller/Coors and Euclid Distributing, Group O, Factory Kart East/Simpson-Bjerke Racing, Baker Street Creations, Moon Print Shop, Illinois Casualty Co., Eagle Construction, Shaw Electric, Halligan McCabe DeVries Funeral Home, Hiland Toyota, Lincoln Electric, RLV Tuned Exhaust, CBS TV4 / Fox 18 and CW, the local iHeart Radio stations: Big 106.5, Fox Sports QC, WOC and WLLR, Q Sports Net, Schurr Power Racing Engines and Tyler Schurr Racing, Sunbelt Rentals, Johannes Bus Service, Holiday Inn Rock Island, eKartingNews.com, Courtesy Car City, Gas & Electric Credit Union, Rogan Scale, Triple E Sales, Duncalf Racing, Fastenal, 4 Cities Cornhole Club, Hughes Tire, RIGP Corner Workers, 61 Kartway, city of Rock Island.

For more information on the race, please visit racerockisland.info or Facebook or Instagram pages.