

HELBERG TOPS KING OF THE WINGS SPRINTS @ IRWINDALE

– By Tim Kennedy

Irwindale, CA., Nov 21, 2015 – The second annual appearance of Davey Hamilton's Lucas Oil RacingTV King of the Wing winged sprint car series presented by Kingdom Racing competed Saturday at the half-mile banked Irwindale Speedway. The series produced the fastest speeds ever recorded at IS and breathtaking passing in all four races run. The 40-lap feature had 21 starters from a field of 28 after engine failures sidelined four cars during practice and qualifying. The victory trophy and a \$3,000 check went to Jo Jo Helberg, from Santa Rosa, for the second consecutive year. The 25-year old winged sprint car veteran drove his own 2012 Beast chassis with his own front end modifications. MAVTV taped the event for telecast during February. The King of the Wing series ran for a separate Western point fund within the KOTW national circuit point series. It competes in the Southeast, Midwest and Northwest. The 2015 Western tour raced at Madera Speedway Friday night and Davey Hamilton, Jr. won a 40-lap feature. Following the Irwindale race the three-race series concluded Sunday at Kern County Raceway Park in Bakersfield. The Irwindale KOTW event on a warm evening attracted 3,970 spectators who cheered amazing speed passes during three eight-lap heat races and the 40-lap main event.

With 28 sprint cars in the pits, mid-afternoon practice sessions at 2:00 and 3:00 resulted in terminal engine problems for four cars. All-time one-lap track record holder Helberg had fast time in the mid-14 second bracket during both sessions on an unseasonably hot day with a high of 87. It was still 82 degrees when sprint cars qualified at 5:05 pm. Sixth qualifier Helberg ran a 14.027 (128.324 mph) and eighth qualifier Bobby Santos III, from Franklin, Mass., clocked the only 13-second lap at 13.998 (128.590 mph) for fast time honors. Last year Helberg set the all-time fastest lap of 13.791 (130.520 mph).

FEATURE: The first three rows in the 11-row field were fully inverted. David Byrne, the outside row one starter from Wisconsin, led the first two laps. Pole starter Ron Larson made an inside pass in turn four and led laps 3-8. Byrne faded to sixth by lap 6 with an engine vibration and he dropped out with a broken rocker. Third starter Decaire was sixth on lap 9 when he had an oil leak and blew the oil filter O-ring. He stopped just past the starting line next to the track, causing the only yellow flag.

On the lap 9 green flag, Indianan Aaron Pierce shot into the lead and third place Santos also passed Larson in an exciting three-way battle for the lead. Pierce led four laps. Drivers reached an estimated 140-150 mph on the straights and the front and top wings planted the Hoosier tires to the pavement in the turns. On lap 13 pressing Santos used a power move and passed Pierce in the inside groove entering turn three for his first lead. Pierce then took command and led laps 14-18. Santos made another inside power pass to lead lap 19. The top three battle now included Helberg. He shot past both leaders on the inside entering the third turn to lead lap 20. Pierce simultaneously dropped Santos to third place.

Helberg quickly opened half a straightaway advantage over the runner-up by lap 24. On lap 29 Pierce dropped out of second place with engine overheating. Seventh starter Sierra Jackson, the third place finisher at Irwindale last year, joined the top three by passing Larson before lap 30. The 22-year old Idaho driver has been called “the world's fastest female winged sprint car driver”. She took second position on lap 30 from fastest qualifier Santos and held it five laps as they lapped slower cars high and low each lap. She was slowed in traffic on lap 35 and dropped to third place.

Helberg lapped cars rapidly and won by 11.302 seconds over Santos. Jackson was 11.584 seconds in back of the winner. Larson (-15.421 seconds) and Sacramento driver Dylan Hutchison in his dad Glenn's No. 8 Beast with a Rex Hutchison cast iron 360 cu. in. Chevy, followed. Hutchison was 16.527 seconds off the lead and the last driver on the lead lap. Richie

Larson, brother of the fourth place driver, super-modified veteran Jim Birges, from Fresno, Ryan Burdett, Bryan Warf and Matt Mansell rounded out the top ten and all completed 39 laps. The 13-minute race averaged 88.779 mph despite the one brief caution flag. Helberg ran the fastest lap of the race at 15.382 (117.020 mph). Eighteen of 21 starters finished with six drivers down one lap, four down two laps and one down three laps. Two others, including Davey Hamilton's father Ken, 74, and Jimmy Hamilton were down five and six laps respectively. The final checkered flag flew at 9:52 pm. Many fans went to the pits to talk to drivers and check the cars.

The top three finishers stopped at the finish line for post-race interviews. Appreciative fans applauded drivers for their sensational racing. Helberg used his own modified 2012 Beast. Santos drove a 2002 Beast owned by Floridian Richard Fieler and based out of Brownsburg, Indiana. Jackson drove the same car she raced all last season—a 2013 Diablo chassis, built by Florida resident and former USAC driver Dave Steele.

Hutchison is the 21-year old grandson of noted Sacramento sprint car engine builder Rex Hutchison, 86, who still comes to his garage daily. Hutchison made his sprint car debut at Irwindale but has raced stock cars at the track in NASCAR K & N West and in the first Pacific Challenge Series late model event during April 2015. Another first time sprint car driver at Irwindale was Idaho's Justin Segura, a 16-year old high school junior. He used a mid-1990s Tognotti chassis and under-powered 360 cu. in. cast iron block Chevy against the predominantly 410 field.

Robert Stout, a 23-year old Palm Springs resident, is the son of MAVTV on-air racing announcer Ken Stout. The sprint car rookie who raced sports cars in IMSA World Challenge Series events, drove a Davey Hamilton-owned Beast in his 12th KOTW race. He finished 11th with 39 laps. Davey Hamilton, Jr., 19, from Boise, Idaho, drove the No. 45 Rick Gerhardt-owned 2014 Diablo chassis to victory Friday night in the KOTW 40-lap feature in Madera. At Irwindale he was tenth quickest qualifier, finished fifth in the first heat, but did not start the feature because of an ignition box failure.

Other drivers sidelined before the main event were Mike Stutsman, Kevin Feeney, T. J. Thorn, A. J. Russell, J. Segura and Kyle Vanderpool. Jim Birges had a right rear mechanical failure and hit the third turn crash-wall during the first practice session. His Ted Finkenbinder Racing team spent the afternoon and early evening rebuilding the front of his No. 3f car in time to race in the third heat and feature, where he finished seventh.

Three eight-lap heat races used fully inverted starting lineups. Winners in all three heats started from sixth position. Troy Decaire, from Florida, led all the way in heat one and beat Santos by 2.920 seconds in a 2:01.006 (119.002 mph) event. Heat two had three leaders before Helberg led the final four laps in a 2:01.822 (118.205 mph) event. The third heat also had three leaders including winner Ron Larson, from British Columbia. He led laps 3-8 and won by 1.447 seconds in a race restarted after Kevin Feeney, from Michigan, blew his engine and stopped next to the third turn wall. His car oiled the backstretch and necessitated a red flag and 19-minute track clean-up.

Again this year the KOTW circuit brought a field of diverse drivers from ten states and Canada (British Columbia). California is home for eight drivers, Idaho six, Oregon, Michigan and Utah two each. Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, Washington and Wisconsin were represented by one driver each. British Columbia, Canada is home for three competitors. There were four push trucks present for the KOTW event and they quickly started all sprint cars to expedite the program.