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MICHAEL VARACINS NAMED RECIPIENT OF MARK DONOHUE AWARD AT SCCA RUNOFFS

Michael Varacins, of Burlington, Wis., was selected as the 39th annual recipient of the prestigious Road Racing Drivers Club (RRDC) Mark Donohue Award at the SCCA National Championship Runoffs this past weekend at Road America in Elkhart Lake, Wis.



Varacins, 34, raced his Speed Sport Engineering AM-5 Formula Vee to an impressive 25-second victory over his 40 other competitors from the pole position to earn his first SCCA national championship in nine appearances at what is considered the "Olympics of amateur sports-car racing." He finished second in the category in the previous three years at the Runoffs.

His margin of victory was the largest in the Formula Vee class since RRDC member Dave Wietzenhof won his event by 63.8 seconds in 1972.

Varacins' win also capped a dream season that concluded with the coveted SCCA Super Sweep, which rewards a driver winning the Runoffs, his Divisional point title, a key qualifying event and the nationwide point title all in the same class.

A member of the Central Division of the SCCA, Varacins was selected by a large contingent of current RRDC members attending and/or competing at the Runoffs, who watched the action in all 25 classes. Varacins was chosen not only because of his outstanding performance in dominating his race, but because of his determination, sportsmanship, competitiveness and humility, the traits which best exemplify the spirit of the multi-talented champion and road-racing legend for whom the award is named.

"I'm not completely sure why we were so dominant," said Varacins, who is a mechanical engineer at Perfect Circle Projectiles in Lake Forest, Ill., a stone's throw from Burlington. "Every time we had finished second at the Runoffs we kept working harder to make sure that we could finally win this thing. I think that the combination of all the preparation that we did plus the fact that once I got out in front there was a big pack battling behind me for second place, helped me win it.

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"When (RRDC member and Runoffs Touring class winner) Don Knowles called me to tell me I had won the award, I was shocked," said Varacins. "I have always kept track of who was winning the award. And when I was told I had won it I looked back at the previous recipients. I am incredibly honored to be included in that list. I am ecstatic.

"When Mark was racing it was before my time, but I was certainly aware of all his accomplishments and what he meant to our sport. Words cannot describe how I feel right now."

Varacins' father Alan, 64, has been his chief mechanic throughout his career and was on hand for his son's first national championship. "He works as hard as I do," said Varacins, who raced a Formula Vee in each of his Runoffs appearances, except 1997, when he raced a Formula Continental. "He works as hard at it as I do. He spends a lot of time on the car preparation and I've never been to a race without him. He gives up a lot in his life to spend time working on the car to help me win. There's nothing that I do without him."



Every year, the RRDC Mark Donohue Award trophy is an engraved glass top mounted on a special, racing-experienced wheel, provided through the efforts of an RRDC member. This year's wheel was raced on the Patron Highcroft Racing Acura driven by David Brabham and Scott Sharp to victory from the pole in the 2008 American Le Mans Series race in Lime Rock, Conn. It was the first overall win for the team and the first for Acura in the ALMS.

RRDC President Bobby Rahal, a Runoffs champion long before he won the Indianapolis 500, emphasized the Mark Donohue Award is "about personal spirit and performance behind the wheel. Those qualities are more important for this award than winning the race. This year Michael Varacins excelled at both."

Varacins will officially be presented the award at the SCCA Convention in Las Vegas, Feb. 19-21.

The Road Racing Drivers Club was formed in 1952 with a goal to serve the future of road racing by mentoring new drivers on both amateur and professional levels. The Club now has more than 150 active members. President Bobby Rahal is the 1986 Indy 500 winner and is co-owner, with

David Letterman, of the 2004 Indianapolis 500 winning team. Six-time SCCA National Champion John Fergus is the Club's Vice President/Treasurer, and four-time SCCA National Champion Don Knowles is the Secretary. In addition to RRDC members lending their expertise to up-and-coming drivers, the Club presents three annual awards: the Phil Hill Award for rendering outstanding service to road racing; the Mark Donohue Award for personal spirit and performance at the SCCA National Championship Runoffs; and the Bob Akin Award for "speed with style" – passion, sportsmanship and contribution to motorsports.