

Speedway racer Greg Hancock wins AMA Athlete of the Year award, headlines lineup of champions honored at the AMA Racing Championship Banquet, presented by KTM North America

LAS VEGAS, Nev. -- A sell-out crowd of AMA Racing champions and their families, friends and fans joined the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas on Friday, Dec. 4., to celebrate the successful seasons of some of the country's most-talented motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) racers.

"All AMA Racers are born and bred with exceptional levels of dedication, talent and guts -- but only a few become champions," said AMA Director of Racing Joe Bromley. "At the Hard Rock this Friday night, many of our best were with us, and we turned the spotlight on them. Whether they are the very young or the not-so-very young, high-flying, bar-banging motocross racers or observed trials masters -- those magicians with two wheels and a motor -- they all got their due. It was our honor to recognize these incredible individuals for their successful seasons in 2009."

The AMA Racing Championship Banquet, presented by KTM North America, kicked off a two-day celebration honoring motorcycling's greats at Las Vegas' Hard Rock. On Saturday night, Dec. 5, the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame officially inducts its 2009 class.

Hundreds of top competitors, in disciplines ranging from land-speed racing to motocross to woods racing and everything in between, received their national championship trophies and No. 1 plates at the end-of-year gala banquet. A number of special awards also were presented to those who went above and beyond this season to make 2009 one of the most memorable in recent history.

The AMA Racing Athlete of the Year award was won by speedway racer Greg Hancock, from Costa Mesa, Calif. Hancock, the 2009 AMA Racing/USA Speedway National Champion, claimed an unprecedented eighth national speedway championship this year, surpassing the career total of the legendary AMA Hall of Famer Mike Bast.

Dave Joiner, promoter of Fast Fridays speedway events, which include AMA Racing/USA Speedway Nationals, accepted the award on Hancock's behalf.

"Greg really wanted to be here tonight -- he was scheduled to get in last night -- but because of some weather issues in Scotland, where he's testing right now, he wasn't able to get away in time to make it over here. As a multi-time national champion, a world champion, a youth champion, Greg has performed at the highest levels of the sport, and he is very deserving of this award. I know he is very thankful to the AMA for presenting it to him."

Chris Borich won the AMA Racing ATV Athlete of the Year. Pennsylvania's Borich had a remarkable season in the Can-Am Grand National Cross Country (GNCC) ATV series. Borich won 10 races in the 13-race series to give Suzuki its first GNCC title.

"The GNCC title has been a long time coming for me," Borich said. "We put a lot of time and effort into the program, and this year, everything just clicked. We got everything working good and put in the time training and felt real comfortable on the bike. To win the GNCC title and the AMA's ATV Athlete of the Year Award in the same year -- well, I just can't say enough."

Both of the Athletes of the Year also took home special automatic chronograph watches courtesy of Tissot, the innovative Swiss watch brand. The watches featured an automatic, self-winding function, a clear caseback and day and date display.

Eli Tomac, who won two championships at the Air Nautiques/AMA Amateur National Motocross Championships as well as the FIM World Junior Championship in Taupo, New Zealand, won the

2009 AMA Racing Sportsman of the Year award. The AMA Racing Sportsman of the Year is an individual who has elevated the sport of motorcycle racing through his or her unselfish demonstration of outstanding sportsmanship. Although this award is not always presented to a racer, the Tomac excelled on the track, on both U.S. soil and abroad.

Tomac said that his focus has turned to the next level of his career.

"Right now, I'm just getting ready for my professional career, which will kick off next spring," Tomac said. "I really appreciate winning this award and, first off, I would like to thank the AMA for helping me get to New Zealand, where I was able to win the Junior World Championship. That was a phenomenal event."

The AMA Racing Female Rider of the Year was Kacy Martinez, from Sunol, Calif. Martinez excelled in western woods racing, winning three national championships. This season, she earned No. 1 plates in the AMA West Hare Scrambles Championship, the World Off-Road Championship Series (WORCS) and at WORCS Week, a week-long, grand-championship-style event that combined woods racing, extreme enduro and grand-prix competition.

"This award means a lot to me," Martinez said. "I worked hard this year, and I'm just thankful for getting this award. I want to thank my mom and dad for getting me here, and my sister for coming to watch me tonight."

Paula Shank, from Petersburg, Va., was honored as the AMA Racing ATV Female Rider of the Year. Shank successfully defended her AMA Racing Extreme Dirt Track National Championship.

"It's been a lot of hard work, time and money," Shank said. "The highlight for me this year was winning every Women's race in Extreme Dirt Track. Key for me this year was learning how to be consistent, to ride conservatively in places where I might have ridden on the edge before. Of course, the award is nice, but just coming here is a real privilege."

The Youth riders of the Year were motorcycle racer Jake Lewis and ATV racer Mark Madl. Not only did Lewis win a national title in TT racing at the AMA Racing Dirt Track Grand Championships, the Kentucky rider also won the Expert 125 GP class at the AMA Racing Road Race Grand Championships. Florida's Mark Madl took the Youth Production (13-15) class championship in the ITP Tires/Moose Racing AMA ATV Motocross Championship.

"I just want to work hard and train hard and get overseas to the MotoGPs," Lewis said. "The best people in the world race there, and that's where I want to be."

Vet/Senior riders were honored as well. Michigan's John Grewe, who won two championships in the AMA Racing Arenacross Series, received the AMA Racing Vet/Senior Rider of the Year Award. Ohio's Dave Simmons brought home AMA Racing ATV Vet/Senior Rider of the year honors for crushing the competition in the Senior A (40-plus) class in the GNCC ATV series.

"When you've been doing this your whole life, it's so important to you as a racer to win an award like this," Grewe said. "It's such a great thing."

In addition to top competitors, the AMA Racing end-of-year banquet honors organizations and individuals whose contributions to the sport are made off the racetrack. Winners of these awards were the Square Deal Motorcycle Club for AMA Racing Club of the Year; Reads Racing, for AMA Racing Motocross Organizer of the Year; the North American Trials Council for AMA Racing Off-Road Organizer of the Year; BUB Racing Inc. for AMA Racing Track Racing Organizer of the Year; and Miles Mountain MX for AMA Racing ATV Organizer of the Year.

Dick Lague of Ignition 3 TV won the 2009 AMA Racing Media Award for his coverage of AMA

Team USA at the 2009 International Six Days Enduro and the 2009 International Speed Trials by BUB.

The celebration of motorcycling greats continues Saturday evening, Dec. 5, when the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony welcomes the Class of 2009: industry innovator Robert Bates, off-road champion Randy Hawkins, motorsports giants Bob and Geoff Fox, suspension pioneer Gilles Vaillancourt, off-highway rights activist Mona Ehnes, longtime motorcycle safety proponent David Hough, legendary race team manager Gary Mathers and successful dirt-track racer and tuner Chuck Palmgren. In addition, the 2009 Concours d'Elegance - a collection of some of the country's most phenomenal motorcycles-will be on display poolside at the Hard Rock between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Saturday.

Tickets can still be purchased for the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas Box Office on the day of the event. Ticket purchase includes dinner and costs \$59 (plus a service charge) per person. Admission to the Hall of Fame autograph session and the Concours d'Elegance, presented by FOX Racing Shox, bike show is free.

About the American Motorcyclist Association

Since 1924, the AMA has protected the future of motorcycling and promoted the motorcycle lifestyle. AMA members come from all walks of life, and they navigate many different routes on their journey to the same destination: freedom on two wheels. As the world's largest motorcycling rights organization, the AMA advocates for motorcyclists' interests in the halls of local, state and federal government, the committees of international governing organizations, and the court of public opinion. Through member clubs, promoters and partners, the AMA sanctions more motorsports competition and motorcycle recreational events than any other organization in the world. AMA members receive money-saving discounts from dozens of well-known suppliers of motorcycle services, gear and apparel, bike rental, transport, hotel stays and more. Through its Motorcycle Hall of Fame Museum, the AMA preserves the heritage of motorcycling for future generations.