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Michael Altobelli, Jr. Wins a MAM Thriller Over Mike Corbin and Rick Hulson at Hagerstown Speedway

April 28, 2018 (Hagerstown, Maryland) – by Mike Donald
photos by Jimmy Saffell/wrtspeedwerx

Two drivers competed for the lead, and neither knew if they would win…yes, the Hoosier Tire Mid-Atlantic Modifieds (MAM) Series race at Hagerstown Speedway, Saturday, was a thriller. The driver who led 12 laps finished third; the race had three lead changes under green, and it featured a final pass for the top-spot with two laps remaining.

“This was the best race I’ve been in a long time,” said race-winner Michael Altobelli, Jr. in Victory Lane. “I didn’t think I was going to get him,” he added in reference to Mike Corbin who led 12 of the 20 laps. “I couldn’t ask for a faster car. We are very happy,” Corbin stated after the race.

After winning their respective heat races, Altobelli and Corbin started on the front row. Altobelli grabbed the early lead and the two ran nose-to-tail for the first five laps. On lap five, a caution slowed the field after Brandon Churchey came to a stop in turn four. On the restart, Altobelli and Corbin engaged in side-by-side competition until Corbin grabbed the lead on lap six.

Corbin led the next five circuits as he and Altobelli battled for the top spot. The race was brought under caution, again, on lap 10 when Chris Fletcher spun in turn three. The 11th lap turned into a marathon as three more cautions were displayed, albeit for minor mishaps. On a lap-12 restart, the duo resumed their side-by-side battle with Corbin occupying the top groove and Altobelli running on the inside line.
While the two continued to dazzle the crowd, fifth-starting Rick Hulson had mounted a charge toward the front of the field. Hulson battled with last week’s winner, Ray Kable, and Alyssa Rowe in the top five before securing third place on lap 14. As Hulson set his sights on the top two, things got even hotter between leader Corbin and Altobelli. On lap 18, Altobelli moved to the inside of Corbin to take the lead.

Altobelli inched away from Corbin, as Hulson gained quickly on Corbin. On the race’s final lap, Hulson moved by Corbin for the runner-up spot as Saxton, Pennsylvania’s Altobelli scored his third win of the MAM season. Hulson, of Glen Burnie, Maryland, held on for second, and Winchester, Virginia’s Corbin settled for third.

“In the middle of the race, the car went away,” Altobelli explained. I noticed he (Corbin) got tighter, but he never messed up. My tires just finally came in,” he added. Hulson, who finished second at Winchester last week, believed the multiple cautions on lap 11 hurt his chances of winning. “The cautions killed me,” he said. “The car was pretty good. If the race could have stayed green, I would have had something for him (Altobelli).” Although he had a great night, one could sense the disappointment in Corbin’s voice. “The car got tight in the center and it killed me,” Corbin said.

Rowe, of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, finished fourth. She remains the only MAM driver to finish in the top five in every race in 2018. Sykesville, Maryland’s Kable rounded out the top five. Multiple drivers swapped positions in the top-10 throughout the race. At the conclusion, Manchester, Maryland’s Justin Cullum was sixth. His efforts were quite impressive as he began the race from the 13th spot.

Hagerstown, Maryland’s Keith Reed claimed seventh; Hollywood, Maryland’s James Sparks took eighth; Sharpsburg, Maryland’s Bryan Green finished ninth and Winchester’s Haley Kaiser rounded out the top 10.

Eighteen of the original 20 entries finished the event. Churchey, of Martinsburg, West Virginia, was the only driver unable to complete the race. Fairmont, West Virginia’s Vic Vandergrift, who has five MAM wins in his career, broke a fuel pump shaft in his heat race and was unable to start the feature. The Series returns to Hagerstown Speedway, Saturday, May 5.

Feature results (20 laps) – 1. Michael Altobelli, Jr., 2. Rick Hulson, 3. Mike Corbin, 4. Alyssa Rowe, 5. Ray Kable, 6. Justin Cullum, 7. Keith Reed, 8. James Sparks, 9. Bryan Green, 10. Haley Kaiser, 11. Kyle Lloyd, 12. Chris Fletcher, 13. Frank DiBella, 14. Jeff McCauley, 15. Josh Hughes, 16. Hunter Nester, 17. Rusty Pennington, 18. Gary Moreland, Sr., 19. Brandon Churchey (DNF). Vic Vandergrift (DNS)

Heat No. 1 (8 laps) – 1. Michael Altobelli, Jr., 2. Ray Kable, 3. Rick Hulson, 4. James Sparks, 5. Chris Fletcher, 6. Hunter Nester, 7. Justin Cullum, 8. Frank DiBella, 9. Jeff McCauley, 10. Josh Hughes (DNF)

Heat No. 2 (8 laps) – 1. Mike Corbin, 2. Alyssa Rowe, 3. Keith Reed, 4. Haley Kaiser, 5. Bryan Green, 6. Rusty Pennington, 7. Kyle Lloyd, 8. Brandon Churchey, 9. Gary Moreland, Sr., 10. Vic Vandergrift (DNF)

About Michael Altobelli, Jr. - 33 years old; former Late Model champion at Bedford and Hesston Speedways; chassis is Rocket by Ruhlman; car owners are Dan and Roy Harding; crew chief is Gerald Markle; sponsors are Dan’s Auto Body, Davin Hardwoods, Inc. and Rick Steele Surveying.

About MAM-An open-wheel, or economy modified, racing series sponsored by Hoosier Tire Mid-Atlantic. The Series has been in operation since 2014 and competes at multiple dirt tracks throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. The Series owner/promoter is Ryne Pennington of Woodstock, Virginia

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