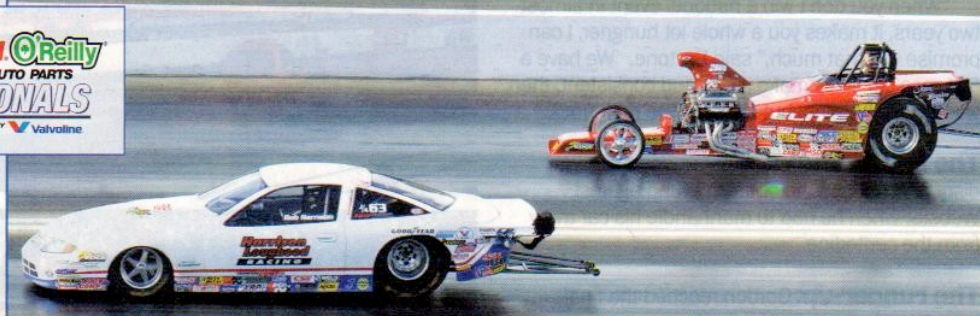


Harrison, 'Igor' have a monster weekend



by Phil Burgess



After 10 years of backbreaking, nerve-racking, and head-scratching work, scores of broken parts, and hundreds and hundreds of dyno pulls, "Igor" finally reached the winner's circle at an NHRA national event, and partners Rob Harrison and Al Lougheed can finally rest content — for now — that their labor of love and sacrifice has finally realized its true potential as a race engine that promised a higher torque-to-weight ratio than even a Pro Stock car.

The unique inline-six-cylinder powerplant beneath the hood of the J/A Ford Escort propelled Harrison to victory at the Kragen O'Reilly Auto Parts NHRA Winternationals presented by Valvoline, his first such triumph in a quarter-century of racing. He did it in convincing fashion, qualifying No. 3, repeatedly blasting the index, and, in the final, putting away the biggest dog of them all, David Rampy, to secure the emotional victory for the Vancouver, B.C., residents.

"Two weeks ago, I said to our team manager, 'Super Steve' [Wellenbrink], I know we have a bad hot rod right now. If we are able to make it to the final, I hope it's Rampy in the other lane," said Harrison. "You talk about karma. Going into that round, it was, like, 'Wow. Here it is: the holy grail.'"

Harrison, who had won a half-dozen events on the divisional and National Open trail in Division 6, didn't falter when the light turned green against Rampy in the final, cutting a clutch .017 light and winning with a (-.55) 7.61 to Rampy's later (-.56) 7.24.

The team's website proclaims that its efforts are "where inline meets insane," and Harrison and company have the scars to prove that, with tales of broken crankshafts, split blocks, misshapen



Harrison defeated former world champ Vinny Barone in the semifinals with a (-.52) 7.65 to earn final-round lane choice. Barone's street roadster, saddled with a .14-second CIC penalty, finished second with a (-.44) 7.74.



the awesome potential of the one-off-block casting that was born to be "Igor."

After years of just trying to make the engine live — Harrison calls them "the torture years" — they ultimately were able to conquer a vexing harmonics problem that allowed them to finally concentrate more on horsepower and longevity, and the results, after a 22-hour tow south to Pomona for their first Winternationals appearance in a decade, was an off-the-trailer .69-under blast that qualified them No. 3.

"'Igor' at this point is the first time since we started it 10 years ago that we have it configured and running in a design for horsepower," Harrison said. "Even the second qualifying pass, where we didn't get to make a full run, it was faster to 330

Rob Harrison drove his J/A Escort ZX3, near lane, to his first national event victory by holding off the class' all-time winningest driver, David Rampy, in the final round, (-.55) 7.61 to (-.56) 7.24. Harrison and crew were joined in the winner's circle by their mascot, "Igor."

pistons, and more in the decade-long odyssey to realize

feet than our first pass, so we knew we had something that could win the race."

After being parked from Thursday afternoon until 4 p.m. Sunday due to weather, Harrison needed a .64-under pass to beat Scott McClay in round one (see The key race) that earned him a hefty Competition Index Control penalty, but he then got a pair of freebies in the first two rounds of the event's Monday conclusion — on a bye run when Tyler Hogan was a no-show and Ron Weems' red-light — before defeating former world champ Vinny Barone in the semifinals and Rampy in the money round.

Despite a cautious .124 light against Barone in the semi's, Harrison was easily able to fend off the A/Street Roadster with a (-.52) 7.65 to Barone's (-.44) 7.74. The win came at an additional .02 CIC penalty, but it earned him lane choice against index-conscious Rampy in the final, and despite

About the winning car

The Rob Harrison and Al Lougheed J/Altered machine that houses "Igor" is a Don Ness-built Ford Escort ZX3 that actually began life as a 7/8th-scale Cavalier before some fans told them it looked more like an Escort. In the engine bay is the star of the show, a 351-cid inline-six-cylinder powerplant topped with Motec fuel injection and a homebuilt billet manifold. Brad Claridge built the billet cylinder head. Power is funneled to the ground through a Ram clutch and Liberty five-speed transmission. Additional product and technical and moral support came from Manley, Mondello Performance, Neil & Parks, David Janes Race Cars, Steve Lowe Sr. and Jr. and Alin Draginlou at LSM Systems, Ken Dutweiler, Jim Lindholm, Lynn Wellfringer, Pat Norcia at Ram, Don Ness, Eric Davis at Penske Shocks, Ed Urcis at CP Pistons, Frank and Scott Parks, Mission Raceway, and Jonathan Adams and the entire Division 6 team.

Harrison acknowledged the help on the "Igor" project of Mark Stewart; Sonny Leonard; V. Gaines; Randy Winberg; Rodger Brogdon; "Super Steve;" Les Davenport ("God"); Tony Cook; "the Franks;" Webb Reid; "Rob the Wrench;" Pat Spencer; Brian Knott; Ted Mercer, who named "Igor"; Jack Mezzomo; Larry Locite; Joe D'Ovidio, "our version of Vinny Barone"; and the instrumental assistance and brainstorming of dyno operator Ron Parr of Parr's Dyno Service.

"I'd also like to thank my sons, Rob and Jeff, and especially the final two people: Al, the quiet genius and my partner of 27 years who had the ingenuity and perseverance to get through this project, and my best friend and wife, Dolly, for a lifetime of support and sacrifice and being in front of my race car for 35 years," said Harrison.



(Above left) Rampy advanced to his 123rd career final round by tying a solid .018 light to a (-.44) 7.36 to defeat surprise semifinalist Pete Adams' game (-.44) 7.36. (Above right) Rampy was sharp on the Tree in round three, too, slicing a .021 bulb and running (-.53) 7.30 to defeat Doug Lambeck's .050-initiated (-.55) 8.38.

being down .16-second in CIC penalties to Rampy's .03-second, Harrison liked his odds.

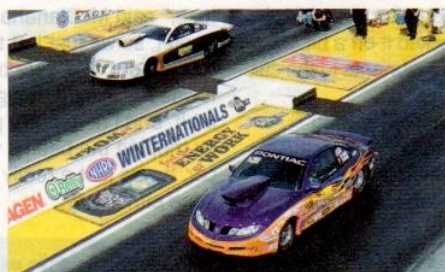
"I knew it wasn't going to be as impossible as it looked on paper," he said. "I knew we could still go fast and also that Rampy, being a professional racer, doesn't sacrifice index just for the win very often. Once I left the line, I knew I had a good light, he was in trouble, and that he wouldn't just hold his foot to the floor, and he didn't. I never saw him.

"It was an incredible feeling to win the race, and it just got better when we got back to the shop and had so many phone calls from so many people," he said. "I had no idea what we were doing mattered so much to so many people who know what we've been through. We even had people crying on the phone for us. I was amazed. It's really a dream come true."

The key race: Pitted against McClay's faster C/ED, Harrison used an index-smashing (-.64) 7.67 to advance over McClay's (-.61) 7.25, and, despite the CIC penalty incurred, Harrison still thought it was the key to his victory. "We knew he'd gone .66 under at the Finals in November, and he had a new motor, so we knew he would be tough," said Harrison. "I drove to the point on the track where we agreed I'd run it, then lifted and hoped he didn't come by me. We needed to win that round because you have to win the first round to win the race."



(Above) Ron Weems turned the Tree red against Harrison in the third frame with a -.049 foul start. (Below) In the same frame, Adams powered to a (-.53) 7.39 to send Ross Wilson to the trailer.



The runner-up: Rampy didn't get what would have been his milestone 75th career win, but he did claim sole possession of third place on NHRA's all-time finalists list with his 123rd appearance in a national event money round, breaking his tie with the great Bob Glidden. Only John Force (213) and Warren Johnson (151) have more final-round appearances. Rampy qualified his Elite Motorsports A/EA No. 5 at .646 under, then got past red-lighting Chuck Moore on Sunday and received another freebie in the second round when former Pomona winner Randy Jones was a no-show Monday

morning. He then beat Doug Lambeck and Peter Adams to reach the final round.

Fast facts: Justin Lamb captured the No. 1 qualifying position at .701 under on his first pass Thursday and maintained it through the shortened qualifying routine, which included just two sessions. ... Twenty-eight cars comprised the field, but the first 18 were all at .56 under or quicker. ... Just two .00 lights were recorded in eliminations, with Lambeck's quickest .006 and Ross Wilson at .009. ... Four classes received permanent index reductions after the event. J/A took the heaviest hit with a .06-second reduction, from 8.32 to 8.26; C/TA and A/SR both were reduced .04-second, from 9.13 to 9.09 and 8.33 to 8.29, respectively; and C/ED lost .01-second, from 7.87 to 7.86.

Did you know: In its 10-year lifespan, the "Igor" project has garnered attention from a number of fans outside of drag racing, including NASCAR owner Jack Roush, Bonneville land-speed record racers, and many more, offering advice, inspiration, and asking questions. "Jack Roush was incredible, because he had already worked on the Trailblazer engine," said Harrison. "He was able to tell us where we had to get our crankshaft ratcheting down to and even sent us a tool to measure it. We put 550 dyno pulls on the engine over two years

before we ever went to a racetrack, and during this time, we were dealing with a problem called 'the four-cylinder harmonic' even though it's a six-cylinder. Once we solved our problem, we saw a 70-horsepower increase on the very next dyno pull."

Quotable: "We once blew the head gasket 65 runs in a row on the dyno. Another time we had a horrendous failure on the dyno, where the engine sheared the crank off at 8,400 rpm and blew parts into the dyno wall. It was like a bomb went off. One of the roller tips was even welded to the end of a valve. It was ugly." — Harrison **ND**

COMP QUALIFYING

(Top 16 of 28 qualifiers)

1. Justin Lamb, Henderson, Nev. (G/SMA '10 Cobalt)	8.599 (-0.701)
2. Sal Biondo, Maspeth, N.Y. (J/AA '07 Cavalier)	8.068 (-0.692)
3. Rob Harrison, North Vancouver, B.C. (J/A '05 Escort)	7.629 (-0.691)
4. Aaron Strong, Milton, Wash. (F/A '05 Cavalier)	7.925 (-0.655)
5. David Rampy, Piedmont, Ala. (A/EA '32 Bantam)	7.194 (-0.646)
6. Clint Neff, Arvada, Colo. (K/A '23-T Ford)	7.831 (-0.639)
7. Dan Fletcher, Churchville, N.Y. (B/EA '09 Cobalt)	7.702 (-0.618)
8. Vinny Barone, Dix Hills, N.Y. (A/SR '34 Chevy)	7.714 (-0.616)
9. Steve Graham, South San Francisco, Calif. (C/A '06 Stratus)	7.328 (-0.612)
10. Ed Sigmon, Chatsworth, Calif. (C/SR '34 Chevy)	8.478 (-0.612)
11. Phil Cocuzza, Acton, Calif. (A/SMA '10 Cobalt)	7.876 (-0.604)
12. Mike DePalma, Glendale, Ariz. (C/T '00 S-10)	8.161 (-0.599)
13. Dale Giroux, Canyon Creek, Alta. (B/AA '04 Cavalier)	6.973 (-0.597)
14. Brian Fitzpatrick, Lake Havasu City, Ariz. (H/D)	6.381 (-0.589)
15. Alan Ellis, Mapleton, Utah (A/AA '23-T Ford)	6.528 (-0.582)
16. Tom Mettler, Bakersfield, Calif. (PSTA '01 Dakota)	7.641 (-0.579)

ROUND ONE

Driver, Hometown (Class/Car)	Index	R.T.	E.T.	Over/Under
Tyler Hogan, Santa Maria, Calif. (C/DA Sarmiento)	7.56	(.029)	7.141	(-.419)
Ed Sigmon, Chatsworth, Calif. (C/SR '34 Chevy)	9.09	(-.007)	8.876	(-.214)
Clint Neff, Arvada, Colo. (K/A '23-T Ford)	8.47	(.111)	7.880	(-.590)
Tom Brown, Riverside, Calif. (F/ED)	8.72	(.021)	8.280	(-.440)
Peter Adams, Chatsworth, Calif. (C/A '09 GXP)	7.94	(.028)	7.422	(-.518)
Brian Fitzpatrick, Lake Havasu City, Ariz. (H/D)	6.97	(.203)	6.381	(-.589)
Alan Ellis, Mapleton, Utah (A/AA '23-T Ford)	7.11	(.012)	6.653	(-.457)
Justin Lamb, Henderson, Nev. (G/SMA '10 Cobalt)	8.30	(.021)	9.316	(+.016)
Scott Hedlund, Anaheim, Calif. (A/SM '10 Cobalt)	8.36	(.071)	8.287	(-.073)
Phil Cocuzza, Acton, Calif. (A/SMA '10 Cobalt)	8.48	(.130)	14.632	(+6.152)
Doug Lambeck, Irvine, Calif. (D/SMA '07 Sunfire)	8.97	(.006)	8.810	(-.160)
Steve Graham, South San Francisco, Calif. (C/A '06 Stratus)	7.94	(-.019)	8.039	(+.099)
Ross Wilson, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. (B/SMA '05 Sunfire)	8.63	(.009)	8.050	(-.580)
Aaron Strong, Milton, Wash. (F/A '05 Cavalier)	8.58	(.035)	8.160	(-.420)
Rob Harrison, North Vancouver, B.C. (J/A '05 Escort)	8.32	(.048)	7.676	(-.644)
Scott McClay, Tehachapi, Calif. (C/ED)	7.87	(.103)	7.253	(-.617)
David Rampy, Piedmont, Ala. (A/EA '32 Bantam)	7.84	(.097)	7.808	(-.032)
Chuck Moore, Castrol Valley, Calif. (AA/AM '63 Corvette)	7.07	(-.108)	6.600	(-.470)
Randy Jones, Monarch Beach, Calif. (C/TA '01 Truck)	9.13	(.077)	8.487	(-.643)
Mike DePalma, Glendale, Ariz. (C/T '00 S-10)	8.76	(.076)	8.242	(-.518)
Dean Carter, Glendale, Ariz. (B/ND)	8.77	(.025)	7.307	(-.203)
Dan Fletcher, Churchville, N.Y. (B/EA '09 Cobalt)	8.32	(.041)	9.472	(+1.152)
Sal Biondo, Maspeth, N.Y. (J/AA '07 Cavalier)	8.76	(.020)	8.182	(-.578)
Tom Mettler, Bakersfield, Calif. (PSTA '01 Dakota)	8.22	(.097)	7.771	(-.449)
Ron Weems, Riverside, Calif. (A/AA '07 GTO)	7.11	(.183)	6.809	(-.301)
Dale Giroux, Canyon Creek, Alta. (B/AA '04 Cavalier)	7.57	(N/A)	NT-No Show	
Vinny Barone, Dix Hills, N.Y. (A/SR '34 Chevy)	8.33	(.021)	8.046	(-.284)
Matt Hartford, Phoenix, Ariz. (A/DA Spitzer)	7.13	(N/A)	NT-No Show	

ROUND TWO

Wilson	8.55	(.040)	12.451	(+3.901)
Hedlund	8.36	no-show		
Weems	7.11	(-.204)	6.777	(-.333)
Neff	8.38	(-.019)	8.322	(-.058)
Lambeck	8.97	(.014)	8.440	(-.530)
Biondo	8.69	(.038)	8.189	(-.501)
Rampy	7.84	(.017)	7.595	(-.245)
Jones	8.99	no-show		
Barone	8.33	(.052)	7.684	(-.646)
Ellis	7.11	(.028)	6.732	(-.378)
Harrison	8.18	(.080)	9.094	(+.914)
Hogan	7.56	no-show		
Adams	7.93	(.837)	27.816	(+19.886)
Carter	7.51	no-show		

ROUND THREE

Harrison	8.18	(.112)	7.708	(-.472)
Weems	7.11	(-.049)	7.095	(-.015)
Adams	7.93	(.177)	7.396	(-.534)
Wilson	8.55	(.068)	8.474	(-.076)
Rampy	7.84	(.021)	7.308	(-.532)
Lambeck	8.94	(.050)	8.384	(-.556)
Barone	8.19	(1.684)	took the green	
bye				

ROUND FOUR

Rampy	7.81	(.018)	7.369	(-.441)
Adams	7.90	(.029)	7.455	(-.445)
Harrison	8.18	(.124)	7.654	(-.526)
Barone	8.19	(.059)	7.742	(-.448)

FINAL ROUND

Harrison	8.16	(.017)	7.610	(-.550)
Rampy	7.81	(.076)	7.249	(-.561)

*red-light