



Jonathan Zimmer and Amsoil Shock Therapy

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-Jon Zimmer

Jon Zimmer is the recipient of Monster Jam's 2009 "Rising Star" award, given to the driver the voters feel is poised for a breakout season. Though Zimmer says he had "no clue" he was receiving the award, other drivers and fans alike have been buzzing about the Rutland, Vermont native's abilities behind the wheel of Amsoil Shock Therapy. Zimmer was kind enough to speak with AllMonster recently. We thank him for his time.

Robert Haught-Jon, it's been quite a few years since you were first involved in the industry. For those of us that don't know, give us a little bit of background about yourself and how you got started in monster trucks.

Jon Zimmer-I started as a little boy with a dream, and I never thought I'd actually be involved in monster trucks. I guess it's been eight or nine years now that I've been in it. I got a chance to meet John Seasock (Sudden Impact/Batman) and Andy Slifko (Eradicator/Backdraft), and started crewing for both of those guys, first with John and his Sudden Impact truck. I did that off on for him for six months to a year, and I hit it off with Andy Slifko and the Eradicator team. Those guys are real laid back, and all about having fun. I started traveling with him a lot, mainly during the busy season, learning mechanics of the truck, loading and unloading it, that kind of thing. After four or so years, he gave me a chance

to drive Eradicator at a show in Florida. He drove the first two days of a three-day show, then on the third day, out of nowhere, he said, "Your turn, you're gonna drive Eradicator," and he told me to go out there and do whatever I wanted. He wanted to see what I could do. He didn't really give me any pointers that first show; he just told me to hit stuff hard, and apparently, I did a good enough job. That year he acquired the Backdraft truck and name from Rick Disharoon, and that was my truck. Andy taught me a lot. He's an independent, and one of the things he taught me is to respect my truck, to drive it hard and keep the fans happy, but not break a lot of stuff either. Since then, that was my stepping stone--Andy was



awesome; his son Jeremy and I were close, and they were really who helped me start my career. I then met Brandon Lagarde while I was still with Andy.

Zimmer and Amsoil Shock Therapy in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, January 2009. Photo by Dustin Hart

Brandon's team (Sudden Impact Racing) was growing leaps and bounds at the time, and I got the chance to drive one of his Sudden Impact trucks at a few shows, did really well, and it fit me a bit better than with Andy, you know, I was growing so much. I've been with Brandon three years now, and he is a great owner. They're his trucks, and he's always making jokes. He'll say, "They're your trucks; you're the one that works on them, so drive it however you want!" Because of that, and the Bush family in Michigan, they're a big part of my career--without Tim and his dad giving me parts through Brandon, I wouldn't be able to do what I do now. As far as now, I'm a different driver. I

drive the truck very hard all the time, not because I feel that I have to, but I remember being a little kid going to Lebanon Valley, New York and seeing guys like Dan Runte and Tom Meents when he first started, and Dennis (Anderson of Grave Digger). In 1986 I was a little kid, and those guys just always ran super hard, and it turned the kids on. Even the adults loved it. That's how I feel when I drive. I just feel people that people all pay the same money to see us go out there and have a blast, and I try to do that. Hopefully when I'm done, whatever I do, the fans like it. That's really what I go on.

"I run every ounce that AMSOIL makes in that truck, and that truck takes more abuse than most trucks I've ever seen," says Zimmer (video courtesy TheMonsterBlog.com).

RH-You won Monster Jam's "Rising Star" award at their banquet in March. What was going through your mind when you won it, after all of your

progress so far?

Zimmer-That was definitely awesome, and it kind of goes back to when I was with Carl VanHorn. Carl and I are best of friends, and Carl taught me a lot. We learned a lot together. He is an amazing driver without a doubt, and a lot of my style came from seeing things he does and how he is. Last year Brandon picked up the Amsoil deal, and I got to debut Shock Therapy, and now that's my name, my truck, and I love that. The AMSOIL people--Jeremy and all the guys there are great. Towards the end of last year I found out that I was going to get a new truck to go with the new AMSOIL look. So when I started 2009, it was in my head that I wanted to go out and have a strong truck, perform well, and do the best I could. I had no clue when I was sitting in Las Vegas at the banquet that I'd even be nominated for anything, and then to get the award in front of everyone there---the Basl brothers, Team Scream, all those guys---it was an honor to me. In my heart, I'm a fan, so to get an award like that a few years into the business is huge for me. It was great to have Sudden Impact Racing a part of that. It's definitely the biggest thing in my career. It's a blast knowing I have a truck that I can win with consistently, and that's because of Brandon and AMSOIL, without a doubt. I run every ounce that AMSOIL makes in that truck, and that truck takes more abuse than most trucks I've ever seen.

Whether it's a huge stadium

show (Minneapolis, above, courtesy Josh Rhodes)...

...or a smaller arena (Winston-Salem, courtesy Dustin Hart), Zimmer's number one goal is to run hard and make the fans happy.

RH-You mentioned Carl being an influence to your driving. Would you say that he is your biggest influence as far as monster trucks in general?

Zimmer-Carl's weird, in the sense that, when you're with him...when he and I first went out (Zimmer and VanHorn's trucks were teamed together in 2008), I was like, "Wow, this is my long lost brother!" We listened to the same music, had the same work ethic, all that. Carl works his tail off, and that's how I am too. I like getting up in the morning, working my butt off, and then at noon or whatever, you can relax the rest of the day because everything's ready for the show. When it came to the work stuff, we were so similar that it was awesome. Driving-wise, he had quite a few years on me, and he was known for the stuff he did in Grave Digger. I would have hated to be Carl, because when he got into T-Maxx and made a name with it so quickly, everywhere he went, he had to drive "CVH-style." He was subtle; you didn't know that you learned anything from him right away. Carl's not the type of person that would come up to you and say, "You need to totally change the way you're doing that." He's good at telling you all the good things you did, and then he'll slide in

out of nowhere and say, "Well try this," and what was cool with him was that he liked my style, so I slowly picked up on stuff with him. He taught me a lot about the trucks and having confidence in your equipment. If you work as hard as you can, day and night sometimes, the truck will take what your mind wants it to take. I can remember trying to do donuts--the truck would rock up and go slower, and that's because I didn't just do it, just commit to it, and that's what Carl did--he committed. That's a lot of where my style comes from. Charlie Pauken is without a doubt a big influence. Just running in a show with him...now, I've been able to drive hard enough where sometimes, I might get a tie in freestyle with him like a few times last year. All of a sudden, Charlie will just do something out of nowhere, and everyone will say, "God, how's he do that?" so watching him, Tom Meents, Dennis Anderson, those type of people helps a lot, and so did crewing for Andy getting to see that. If you sit back and just close your eyes, and you listen to the motors, and their throttle rhythm...

RH-You can tell who is behind the wheel.

Zimmer-Exactly. That's where you learn it all right there.

Zimmer took second place in freestyle to go with a racing victory in Anaheim earlier this season.

RH-You were talking about having confidence in your

equipment. I could tell a big difference in your confidence by around March this year. The show I remember most is Pocatello, Idaho, when you went out first in freestyle, launching all over the place, and the truck sucked up every landing, didn't break. You don't always have a crew person with the trucks on the road, so you work on the truck yourself constantly. What's it been like working with Kristy Edge and Chris Ryan, building a team of confidence?

Zimmer-Well, as far as Pocatello, it started more last year, when I was in what is now the Excaliber chassis. That is one of the best trucks we ever put together. That thing has seen plenty of abuse from Carl and I, and around that time, Carl and I hit on some things as far as shock packages that worked amazing. When I got the chance to build the new chassis I'm in now, I went with the same setup there. I run Chris Holbrook motors; they're just nasty! They help a lot, letting me do what I do. Like you said, the truck sucked up everything and didn't break in Pocatello. It's a good, solid truck. Brandon's tires make a huge difference. The Sudden Impact Racing tire is lighter and more absorbent on jumps; you can tell the difference between them and, say, a Firestone. One of the big helping factors this year was Mullet (Tim Messentzis) crewing for us. He's a quiet kid, but like you said, in Pocatello I could go out and drive the wheels off the truck knowing that I had him

behind me as far as working.

(fast-forward to 1:00 mark)
Zimmer puts Shock Therapy through its paces in freestyle. Nowhere was that more evident than his stellar run as the first truck out for freestyle in Pocatello, Idaho (courtesy TheMonsterBlog.com).

I want to see him go farther as far as driving; he's a talented kid and I wanted some things with him that didn't happen for us, but Kristy Edge came on. I wanted Kristy because I had never met someone so young that had the heart for driving and working. She's truly like one of the boys. It's so funny at a show, I'll hear fans say, "So you just get to come here and drive," to her, and it's comical, because she does everything I can do as far as working on the trucks and all that. Panda Bear, that's what we call Chris Ryan...I've known him for awhile, and bringing him in to sub in Excaliber was great. I've met people through the years that I'd like to help or bring in, but I can't always do it. This one worked out. Panda and I get along great, we have a blast, and he puts his head down and works hard to get the job done. Panda won't hurt a truck that can't hurt him, you know? It'll be fun to see where things go with us. At Sudden Impact Racing, things are getting better all the time. Tim Bush is instrumental. Brandon is probably the oddest team owner you'll ever meet; people always say to us, "Does Brandon get mad when you do stuff?" Well, no, not really. Brandon's the type of guy that'll

sit back, and you may not hear from him for two or three weeks, then call you out of the blue and say, "Hey, I just watched a video of you. Man, you're nuts! Truck looks good, everything's going good." As long as you make him happy and the fans are happy, that's really Brandon's theory about the trucks, and that's what I like.

Zimmer is quick to point out that it is a team effort, and without Amsoil, Brandon Lagarde, Tim Bush, and his crew, his dream would not be possible (photo courtesy Robert Haught).

RH-What are your goals for the future? What do you want to happen for you and the team in 2010?

Zimmer-Wow, good question. Well, I want to keep having fun. I have a little boy at home that comes with me during the summer, and I know how that was. If it stops being fun for me, then I won't drive anymore. If we can have some fun in 2010 and hopefully win some big shows, that'd be great. We proved last year that our trucks are capable. I'm excited to see what Kristy does in Excaliber; she is a lot different driver in our trucks because they're different than what she was used to. Our trucks aren't wheelie trucks; they're very balanced and love going big. The future with Sudden Impact Racing is huge. With Cult Energy on Sean (Duhon)'s truck, stuff like that, it's endless. Goals-wise, a big goal would be to run in Las Vegas. I never really thought I'd get over there. Last year, I got

to practice, and I ended up as one of the fastest trucks there, period (Zimmer ran the third-fastest time of the weekend, all times included). That made a lot of people say, "Holy cow, where'd he come from?" After getting a taste of that, I definitely want to go to Vegas, and go with the AMSOIL name on my truck, and see where the cards fell out there. I don't ever try to win a show so much as have fun at the show, and usually when I have fun, that's a win.

AllMonster.com thanks Jon Zimmer for his time. For more information on Sudden Impact Racing, AMSOIL, and more, check out the following links:

www.amsoil.com

www.suddenimpact.com

www.hollbrookracingengines.com

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