

# RACE REPORT

**PAUL MENARD**

**PITTSBURGH PAINTS/MENARDS CHEVROLET**

MICHIGAN INT'L SPEEDWAY

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## Menard and Pittsburgh Paints/Menards Team Record Season-Best Finish at Michigan

Paul Menard and the No. 27 Pittsburgh Paints/Menards team brought home their best result of the 2011 season with a fourth-place finish at Michigan International Speedway in Sunday's Heluva Good! 400. For the third consecutive weekend, Menard started the No. 27 Richard Childress Racing entry inside the top 10 when he recorded the ninth-fastest lap in Saturday afternoon's time trials session. On Sunday afternoon, the first caution flag of the day was displayed on lap eight with Menard having already advanced to the eighth position. Crew chief Slugger Labbe made the call to change only right-side tires when Menard brought the neon yellow and black Chevrolet to pit road for service, leaping to sixth for the restart on lap 11. He moved up to the third spot on lap 20, where he remained until the next caution period on lap 26. He hit pit road pit stop for four tires, fuel and a track bar adjustment. Menard restarted sixth and, over the next 30 laps, struggled with a much-altered machine, sliding back to the 12<sup>th</sup> position. He reported the car had tightened up and lost significant grip around the two-mile speedway. As teams began to cycle through green-flag pit stops, Labbe called his driver to pit road on lap 61 and instructed the No. 27 crew to change the four tires, with a small air pressure adjustment to the right rear, add fuel, go back on the track bar change from the previous stop and put one round of wedge into the machine. A caution on lap 84 provided the team an additional opportunity to work on the car's handling. In addition to four tires and fuel, Labbe called for an additional round of wedge to be put in the left rear. The stellar performance of the pit crew moved Menard into the top 10 for the restart. He hovered in or just barely outside of the 10<sup>th</sup> spot for the next 35 laps. As green-flag pit stops began once again, the Chevrolet Impala's excellent gas mileage allowed for Menard to stay out and lead laps, gaining a valuable championship point. Another solid performance on pit road for four tires, fuel and an air pressure adjustment put Menard into a very favorable position should fuel mileage play its part in the outcome of the 200-lap event. Unfortunately, a caution on lap 158 changed everyone's strategies. It was back to pit road for four tires, fuel and a slight air pressure change for the No. 27 racer. Neither gaining nor losing positions during the pit stop, Menard lined up in the sixth position for the restart. Labbe informed him that the car was full of fuel and could complete the race without another stop, but to please conserve where he could, just to be safe. The restart on lap 163 proved dicey as cars went three wide around the race track. Menard grabbed the fifth spot on lap 164 and fourth on the following lap. He rode there for 15 laps and was overtaken on lap 185, returning him to fifth once again. It was widely known up and down pit road that some teams in the top five could not complete the race without additional fuel. With only 10 laps remaining, the caution flag was displayed for the final time and, again, pit strategy came into play. The Labbe-led crew quickly changed only the right-side tires on the No. 27 machine, gaining Menard one position on pit road and returning him to the race track to restart fourth. When the green flag dropped for the final five-lap dash, Menard elbowed his way through the crowded restart and hung onto the fourth position until the checkered flag was displayed, capturing his highest finish thus far in his inaugural season with RCR.

**Start – 9      Finish – 4      Laps Led – 2      Points – 16**

### PAUL MENARD QUOTE:

"We qualified in the top 10 and that's (track position) so important at these intermediate tracks. Slugger (Labbe, crew chief) made a good call to take two tires at the end. The guys gave me some good pit stops and the last stop we kind of went back and forth about whether to take two (tires) or four. A lot of people took two, just as we did. Clean air is so important. I was still a little bit too tight at the end but we definitely needed a good run and we got one today with the Pittsburg Paints/Menards Chevrolet. It was just a really solid weekend and that's what we needed."

