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HEADLINE: Ricky Hendrick's sixth spot a triumph

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BODY:

As Ricky Hendrick closed in on the bumper of defending NASCAR Craftsman truck series champion Jack Sprague, he heard a familiar voice.

"Do not, do not bump Jack," Rick Hendrick told his son over the headset.

"If I can, I'm gonna pass him," Ricky radioed back, creeping up to Sprague's bumper.

"I am your owner," said Rick, who also owns Sprague's truck, "so you will not hit Jack."

An hour later, Rick, back from beating cancer, smiled broadly as he watched Ricky get out of his truck after finishing sixth in the Grainger.com 200 Sunday at Pikes Peak International Raceway.

The older Hendrick said the recent death of Adam Petty made him question his decision to invite his son into the racing industry.

"It's been hard since Adam died - he and Ricky raced in the Legends (series) in Charlotte when they were 15 years old," Rick said. "I don't know how racing families handle this. I wondered if Ricky might not want to get into the automobile industry in another capacity.

"It's just so hard for me to think of him as a racer, and not as my son."

That's not the case for anyone else. The younger Hendrick already has begun earning his stripes in the Busch Grand National Series, finishing fifth in the BellSouth Mobility 320 at Nashville last month. Sunday at PPIR, Hendrick would have had a shot to win, if a late caution flag had tightened the field.

"He did a great job today - at least he didn't pass me," said Sprague, who finished fourth, two places ahead of his teammate. "There's a lot of talent there."

After watching Hendrick Motorsports' Winston cup drivers - Jeff Gordon, Terry Labonte and Jerry Nadeau - compete in The Winston on Saturday, Rick flew from Charlotte to Colorado Springs in his private plane to see his son race.

"It's easier for me to talk to Jeff Gordon on the headset than to talk to Ricky," Rick said. "It's a whole different game when it involves your own son."

Yet the early results are very Gordonesque for the younger Hendrick.

"I'm establishing myself as a race car driver, not just as Rick Hendrick's son," Ricky said. "But I'll tell you this much: I sure am proud of my dad. A year or so ago, he'd be on his feet for three hours

and then he'd be down the rest of the day from the cancer. Now, he's just going everywhere."

So is Ricky. Except those places his dad tells him not to go.

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