

Wellinghoff Sr. Wins First Race

Lexington, OH – Four drivers managed to get their cars together and to the 2010 Great Lakes season opener at Mid-Ohio. After a long cold winter, Brian Sanders and Mike Dzuirgalski showed up Thursday evening, both with replaced fuel cell bladders and Sanders with fresh paint. Gregg Wellinghoff Sr. and Greg Wellinghoff Jr. would not arrive until Friday evening. While Friday was a traditional test-n-tune day, it was also a “traditional” first day at Mid-Ohio in April. Just as drivers were getting ready for their first session of the day, the rain began to fall and it was not long until that turned to sleet/snow. However, by the noon hour all precipitation had moved out and it started to turn into a very nice day with occasional sunshine.

Saturday morning started out cool but we were promised plenty of sun and moderate temperatures. Mike, Brian, and Gregg Sr. went out for morning warm-up, only to run a lap or two due to a Corvette blowing up. Greg Jr. missed both practice and qualifying, while he finished putting his car back together. Following both sessions, Sanders spent his time trying to figure out a brake pedal throb. While the car would stop every time, it did nothing for his confidence in them. Qualifying ended with Brian on the pole, followed by Gregg Sr. and Mike.

As the green flag flew, Brian jumped to the lead with Gregg Sr. glued to his tail and Mike attached to his. On the second lap, Gregg Sr. took advantage of Brian’s lack of confidence in the brakes and made the pass entering the keyhole. On the fourth lap Brian got a good run on the pit straight and was able to retake the lead entering turn one. This was also about the time that the faster GTS cars, which had a split start behind us, began catching us and became a factor. Some distance began opening up between all four drivers dealing with traffic. By lap nine most traffic had cleared and Gregg Sr. set his sights on catching Brian and Greg Jr. began his pursuit of Mike. On the next to last lap, Gregg Sr. made his move and took the lead heading into the keyhole again. Gregg Sr. was able to hold on for those last two laps and claim his first dry weather win by two tenths of a second over Brian. Mike was able to hold off a hard charging Greg Jr. by just over a half second. Back in the paddock all four drivers climbed out of their cars, high-fiving and slapping each other on the back. Close clean racing is what it is all about!

Sunday brought more good weather with a small chance of afternoon rain. All four drivers took to the track for qualifying. When the session ended and the cars had been parked, it was time to find out who ran what. “Not that my confidence had improved, but I decided to just hold my breath and hit the brake pedal,” said Brian. And it paid off. Brian took the pole by nearly five seconds. He was followed by Greg Jr., Gregg Sr., and Mike.

Just as we took the cars to grid, the skies started to darken. And as the cars completed the pace lap, the first drops of rain could be seen on the visors. Brian was caught sleeping on the start of the race and found Greg Jr. sticking his nose up the inside of the first turn. However, Brian was

able to shut the door and keep the lead. After getting up and over “madness,” a quick mirror check and there was Gregg Sr., big in the rearview. Can you say déjà vu? And it continued as Gregg Sr. again tried his now patented late brake into the keyhole to pass. However, this time he couldn’t make it stick as Brian pulled the old over-under to reclaim the lead on the exit. Two laps later Gregg Sr. tried it again. This time he thought he would pinch the inside on exit and make Brian go the long way around. But to Brian’s surprise Gregg Sr. came to all but a dead stop on exit and was barely missed as Brian took evasive action. It was later learned that Gregg Sr. had actually hit his ignition switch and shut the car down. This, along with traffic, allowed Brian to pull out a nice lead from the others. While all this was going on up front, Greg Jr. and Mike were once again having their own battle. Oh yeah, I mentioned rain earlier. Well, it never amounted to much. A couple places on the track got slick so it was a matter of staying very aware what was happening in each braking zone and corner. As the race continued, Gregg Sr. began clicking off some of the best laps he has ever ran at Mid-Ohio and with only a few laps left, he had Brian within sight again. In the end, it was Brian taking the win followed by Gregg Sr., Mike, and Greg Jr.

Next stop for the Great Lakes FFR’s is Putnam Park on May 15-16.

C’ya at the track!

-Brian Sanders