

**Buttonwillow Raceway**  
**April 9-10, 2011**  
**Salute to Our Troops Race Report**

Three Factory Challenge Series racers made the trek to California's Central Valley for Round 3 of the West Coast Challenge Series. Jeff Awender was the first to arrive Friday afternoon, and quickly unloaded his racecar and strapped in to get some much needed seat time on a racetrack configuration that he had never driven before. As luck would have it, Jeff arrived under darkening skies, and took to the track just as the clouds opened up to a steady rain. Driving on shaved Toyo RA1's (and fresh off last month's racing in downpour conditions at Infineon all weekend), Jeff drove masterfully, piloting his yellow/white Challenge car around Buttonwillow in the rain. The rain turned to snow up in the local mountains, forcing racer Mike Beeler to take the long route over Highway 58 from the LA area to avoid the treacherous Grapevine/I-5. As it turned out, Mike navigated his rig through a small blizzard along the way, and arrived at the track by nightfall. Tom Coon arrived later in the evening with his enduro and spec racing prepared Challenge racer. Karen had arrived earlier in the day for a test and tune with her Coupe in preparation for the night enduro the next day, and the group headed to town for some social time before the racing commenced the next day.

Saturday morning arrived bright and beautiful, and morning warm-up went well for everyone. Qualifying found Mike Beeler posting top time and securing pole position for the race. Jeff Awender would be an eye blink behind, with Tom Coon rounding out the field. Race start found Mike, Jeff and Tom all battling hard for position. The FFR's were in a mixed group of Camaro-Mustang Challenge and American Iron racers, so it was a hornets' nest at Turn 1 following the green flag. Mike and Jeff and Tom would skillfully dance their way through traffic, managing to avoid competitors in other classes spinning off track or dropping wheel, all the while keeping their sights on their competitor. All raced clean though, and at the checkered, it was Jeff Awender for his first victory at Buttonwillow Raceway, with Mike Beeler a close second, and Tom Coon, again, dropping his lap times to an all-time personal best and securing the third spot on the podium

Sunday warm-up was without incident, and following tradition here on the West Coast, the Qualifying session was held as Qualifying Race with an inverted field. The racers were again paired up with the CMC and AI cars, and with Tom on pole, the group took the green and quickly found themselves going from 5-wide to a 2-car space in Turn 1. Mike snaked into the lead, and roared through the Buttonhook, the Grapevine, the Bustop and into Talladega leading Jeff all the way. Tom Coon drove with precision and excellence, and had Jeff's car clean in his sights entering Talladega as well. By the time the racers arrived at Sunset and were ready to make the turn onto the front straight, Jeff took the inside, held the power an instant longer, and applied some heavy braking, drifting onto the front straight and into the lead. Mike kept Jeff within striking distance, and each used traffic between one another and their fellow competitors, all the while Tom kept chipping away at his laptimes throughout the race. Jeff would go on for the win, with Mike taking second place, and Tom finishing in the third position.

The main race would find Jeff on pole, and at the green it was Mike and Jeff dueling for position down the front straight. Jeff would take the lead, with Mike in close range the whole race. Tom would post his best lap of the weekend (Congratulations!), and after a late race full course caution, and Mike Beeler giving great chase the whole way, Jeff Awender would go on to sweep the weekend with his 3rd win.

Our Challenge Series drivers again impressed the spectators and their fellow racers with good, clean racing, and each should be commended for their skillful driving in what was at times, a chaotic race environment. Everyone avoided incidents, and our drivers were among the best of the best in the field. These are great cars, and our group definitely has the fun factor on overdrive!!! Kudos to everyone for a great weekend!!

Next event: May 13-14, 2011 Thunderhill Raceway