

Anderson Takes Nor Cal Championship; Salvaggio Sweeps Weekend

The last time the Challenge Series racers were at Infineon, it was February, the hills were lush and green, and the first on-track session greeted racers with light rain and a slick track. October in Sonoma is very different....The hills were dry from the long summer, the evenings were warm, and the track was hot, hot hot....And that heat was not just from the rays of the sun!



Six Challenge Series racers found their way to the track by Friday evening, and after setting up the pit area, the group feasted on a wonderful BBQ of chicken, green salad, a fantastic fresh fruit salad, and pumpkin pie w/whipped cream. Of course, if you're racing in Sonoma, CA, there will always be plenty of vino fino on hand, and the racers were not to be shamed this go-round. Series regulars Rick Anderson, Jeff Awender, Tom Coon, Sern Clementson and Karen Salvaggio were on hand to greet Series newcomer John Teaby to the group, and these new racing friends quickly found common themes in their passion for racing and all things speed, which carried the bench racing well into the evening. Challenge Series driver Dr. Tom Coon recovering from an emergency root canal earlier in the day....Ahh yes...The healing power of self-medication. Napa-style!

Race Group B was comprised of American Iron/Extreme, Camaro-Mustang Challenge/2, German Touring Series (GTS), US Touring Cars (USTCC), and the Factory Five Challenge Series racers. All racers took to the track for the 9:25 AM practice session; each looking to improve upon their line from earlier in the season, and to assure their trusty steeds were ready for the weekend competition. After a couple of quick warm-up laps, Karen Salvaggio logged a smoking 1:53.1X laptime, a full second under the previous track record set in 2007 by National Champion Dave Standridge. It was the first practice session of the weekend, and Karen had hooked up with a GTS Porsche right out of the hot pits. She had been chasing that red beauty, not thinking about laptimes, and couldn't believe when her crew chief Andy called the time over the radio. She continued to chase the Porsche for two more laps, and in the process, set the new track record of 1:52.719 in that Saturday morning session. She would back it up with several 1:52.9x laps over the course of the weekend.



As mentioned, the track was hot, hot, hot all weekend, and laptimes for all Challenge Series competitors dropped steadily all weekend long. At the end of the weekend, a 1:54XX would be in the hands of several Challenge Series drivers.

The group drove a great qualifying session amongst nearly 40 racecars, and the results:



Saturday Qualifying:

Karen Salvaggio 1:52.950
Jeff Awender 1:55.745
Sern Clementson 1:58.390
John Teaby 1:59.720
Tom Coon 2:04.531

Following qualifying, Rick Anderson felt his car was seriously down on power, and began an afternoon of changing parts and chasing down those extra seconds prior to the 3:55 PM feature race.....His worked paid off.....



The group was to take the third green flag in their race group, however, that plan was quickly changed by NASA when Race Group A experienced a number of re-starts and then carnage at the start during their race, so....Plan B: FFR takes the first green with the CMC and AI cars...USTCC and GTS cars would take a second green flag.

At the start, it would be Karen leading from the pole, weaving her way through traffic up the hill to Turn 2. Rick Anderson, Jeff Awender, Sern Clementson, John Teaby and Tom Coon, all found themselves dodging and weaving through CMC, AI, and GTS traffic, while the fast FFR's held their own race in the midst of three other races. Sern would battle with John for a time, while Tom dropped his laptimes and dice with fellow competitors. Jeff had his hands full chasing Rick Anderson (who's car was obviously back up to speed), and both racer's set new personal best laps in the session. The group raced clean, and at the checkered it was....

Saturday Race Results

1st Karen Salvaggio 1:54.255
2nd Rick Anderson 1:54.723
3rd Jeff Awender 1:54.920
4th Sern Clementson 1:59.080
5th Tom Coon 2:03.407



Competition Note: John Teaby's 1:54.858 immediately proved he was a contender among the group, however, he's still working on getting the car completely within spec, so his times were unfortunately disqualified....Not to worry though...John brings years of successful driving experience and on track victories to this, his newest on track adventure....He's certainly a player!!!



Saturday evening, all racers were treated to the now legendary NASA Saturday night BBQ, which featured great food and some fantastic classic rock-n-roll sounds from the awesome live band. As usual, the bench racing carried well into the evening. Sunday morning would bring clear skies, and hold even greater on-track adventures. Challenge Series racers on the out-lap for the inverted start Sunday morning Qualifying race. Let the fun begin!

As is the tradition for West Coast racers, the group would compete in three races for the weekend, with the Sunday morning qualifier being driven as a Qualifying Race...With one caveat....The grid would be inverted based on the results of the Saturday race, and would form up behind the Camaro-Mustang Challenge series cars. Tom Coon would lead the group to the green flag, in tight formation behind the CMC's and with Sern, John, Jeff, Rick and Karen close behind.

At the green, to say it was a donney-brook would be an understatement. The FFR's scattered like quail, darting through the back of the CMC pack, all the while chasing each other. 18 cars sped through Turn 1 and up the steep hill toward the sharp righthand Turn 2. Jeff Awender would secure the lead out of two, with Rick Anderson in hot pursuit. Tom Coon and Sern Clementson would do a masterful job of working traffic, while John Teaby yet again proved his racing skills, all the while keeping Rick Anderson in close proximity. In an effort to keep the pack in striking distance as they sped toward Turn 3, Karen would make a pass on the right of a CMC car, and get her left front slammed when the driver made a sudden move right. Fortunately, it was an off track excursion, but no harm to either car, and they both continued. Jeff, Rick, Karen, John, Sern and Tom were off to the races.

Jeff would have a masterful drive and hold onto the lead for several laps, while Rick, Karen, and John battled for position close behind. Karen would get by Rick several laps in and set off to chase down Jeff. Meanwhile, Rick and John's race would turn into an epic battle for position. Lapped traffic was an issue for all of the racers, and when the checkered flag fell, John would cross the line in third position, with several battle scars (nothing that some blue racing tape couldn't hold together) from his bout with the #6. John would get his grid position for the final race, but his position would again be disqualified due to spec rules.



Sunday Qualifying Race Results

Karen Salvaggio 1:52.984
Jeff Awender 1:54.015
John Teaby 1:55.051
Rick Anderson 1:55.299
Sern Clementson 1:57.903
Tom Coon 2:01.089

The Sunday afternoon race would be delayed until 4:15 PM, and racers were more than ready to go from their long (all day) wait to get it on out there on the track. With the sun now setting directly into the racer's eyes as they approached Turn 2, the green flag fell with Karen on pole, and leading the group up the hill. Rick, Jeff, Tom, Sern and Tom would again do a masterful job of weaving through the CMC and AI traffic.

The race was run "flat out" for its entire length, all that is, until the last lap when a Porsche had contact with the wall out of Turn 7 on the white flag lap. Karen had secured an eight second lead over Jeff, and was approaching the checkered flag when the safety vehicle flag was displayed just prior to start-finish. Just eight seconds back, Jeff had his hands full battling with Rick Anderson throughout the length of the race. Jeff and Rick would swap places several times during the session, with both showing their true racing skills in a tight, clean battle lap after lap. Karen crossed the line and took the checkered, and then as Jeff and Rick rounded the kink to the finish, a track safety vehicle pulled on course directly ahead of the battle, and a lapped-traffic car [B]way[/B] over-checked up, and Rick and Jeff immediately found themselves with simply no where to go. Jeff was able to pull off a swashbuckling maneuver to avoid; however, Rick pitched his car right, and pancaked into the wall, hard, at well over 90 mph...He managed to limp the car across the line, but he and his car were hurt and could not continue.

Rick rode back to the pits in the rescue truck with sore ribs and the effects of a 90 mph slam on the wall, with his wounded racecar in tow behind. Fellow racers helped load the car, and the damage appeared to be significant, with the rear end now adjusted more than 2 inches to the left, a couple of wheels toasted, shocks relocated, with the front having that heart-sinking look of positive camber, as well as a panhard rod now bowed into the shape of a banana, indicating some serious frame/suspension issues.

If there was a silver lining to all the action, it would be that Rick Anderson secured the 2009 FFR Nor Cal Championship this weekend, and all of the racers wish him a speedy recovery. Congratulations Rick!! Hats off to Jeff Awender as well, for securing a podium spot in his first complete season!

2009 Nor Cal Championship

- 1st Rick Anderson
- 2nd Karen Salvaggio
- 3rd Jeff Awender
- 4th Tom Coon
- 5th Sern Clementson
- 6th Tim Knokol
- 7th Rich Norgrove
- 8th Ron Stebles
- 9th Mike Beeler

Next Event: November 13-14, 2010 Buttonwillow Raceway.

Karen