

Nine Challenge Cars Battle Wheel to Wheel at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course

Friday

The Mid-Ohio Factory Five Snake Pit was full on Friday August the 13th. Despite the ominous nature of the date, the weekend turned out to have minimal trouble and lots of enjoyment for the racers in attendance. Ed Boothman returned to Mid-Ohio in his #85 for a weekend of time trials to shake the car down. He expressed that he prefers the grip of the Hoosier tires to that of the Toyos. Among the racers were: Carl Thompson - #1, Gregg Wellinghoff Sr. - #29, Thomas Lavell - #42, John George - #48, Brian Sanders - #49, Jim Schenck - #52, Wayne Patterson - #62, Gregory Wellinghoff Jr. - #77, and Mike Dziurgalski - #169. The majority of the racers arrived on Thursday evening to take advantage of the Friday test & tune, with only Mike & Greg Jr. not participating. Jim's truck barely made it to Mid-Ohio due to three of his fuel injectors going bad on the drive. Tom had to go and rescue Jim's trailer and finish the pull as Jim's truck was no longer up to the task once he arrived in Akron. Everyone's car ran good on Friday and it appeared everyone had their gremlins worked out.

Saturday

As the racers arrived on Saturday, they kept their eyes on the ominous forecast for the afternoon, as thunderstorms were predicted to move in around race time. Morning practice went smoothly with everyone taking few laps on the club course. Greg Jr. took the opportunity to bed in new rear brake pads. Brian had fast practice time among the challenge racers, followed by John, Gregg Sr., Tom, Carl, Wayne, Jim, Greg Jr., and Mike (who's transponder was not working). Qualifying was a different story, with John taking the pole at 1:42.755 (a FFR club course record) followed by Jim, Brian, Gregg Sr., Wayne, Tom, Greg Jr., Carl, and Mike. The racers retired to their trailers to relax until race time. Greg Jr. made a spark plug change after noticing a slight power hesitation during qualifying. Carl was kind enough to grill lunch for the racers along with their attending friends and family.

As race time approached, the forecast showed storms fast approaching and John made the decision to go to full treads, expecting rain. The start saw the nine racers jockey for quick position with John jumping out to a sizeable early lead followed by Jim, Brian, Greg Jr., Gregg Sr., Wayne, Mike, Tom and Carl. The rain arrived towards the end of lap 3, and Greg Jr. went off in the carousel, giving up 4th to Gregg Sr. Then the 77 went off again coming onto the front straightaway giving up positions to Wayne, Mike and Tom. The slick conditions and a corvette off track in the keyhole led to a full course yellow on lap 4. Gregg Sr. missed the flag in his position battle with Brian and became the first Factory Five disqualified during the race. Tom also missed the flags and advanced his position passing Mike, Wayne and Brian under yellow becoming the second car disqualified. Brian was frantically pointing at the yellow flag as Tom passed him. Unfortunately Wayne and Mike misunderstood Brian's pointing and also passed under yellow, leading to their disqualifications as well. Jim pulled into the pits and then the paddock, not wanting to race in the wet, but no sooner did he get out of his car, than the rain stopped. As the field retook the green on lap 6 it was John, Brian, Greg Jr., and Carl. Greg Jr.

picked up a draft off of a fast moving corvette down the backstretch to move around Brian, which Brian quickly moved back alongside Greg Jr. As faster traffic moved through the racers, Greg Jr got offline and went off track just before the carousel, giving up third to Carl. The rest of the race would remain relatively uneventful with John taking the win, followed by Brian, Carl, Greg Jr. and Jim. Carl ran the fastest race lap at 1:43.145 and claimed the NASA Challenge Series track record. The racers returned to the paddock and some discussion took place regarding the meaning of the double yellow flag during a race.

The racers barely had time to unwind and get their hot cars under cover before a strong storm came over the track bringing heavy rains and strong winds. The drivers were seen scrambling to put away equipment and secure their canopies for the duration of the storm. Once the weather had passed, the drivers headed out for a hearty steak dinner together at the Roadhouse.

Sunday

Today, all on course activities would be held on the Pro Course configuration. As a result of the previous day's storm, the NASA schedule was adjusted to accommodate the small bore race cancellation from the prior day. The thunder group sacrificed their morning practice. Qualifying saw John on the pole again with a 1:39.450, followed by Jim, Wayne, Brian, Gregg Sr., Carl, Tom, Greg Jr., and Mike. (Mike did not run and Greg Jr. had no transponder signal). The racers relaxed until race time with Carl providing breakfast and NASA doing awards for lunch.

The Sunday green flag found John missing his shift at the start of the race, Jim jumped to an early lead followed by Brian, Jon, Carl, Gregg Sr., Wayne, Greg Jr., Mike, and Tom. A full course yellow came out again on lap 2 bunching the field back up. The field retook the green on lap 5 and John quickly shot around Brian into second. Greg Jr. and Wayne had a great nose to tail battle going for 6th until Wayne spun on lap 10. In another great side by side battle John took the lead from Jim on lap 8 and they would remain nose to tail until the end of the race. Mike retired on lap 11 when his brakes went soft and he had little stopping power. Tom spun in the keyhole on lap 12 and ended up stuck in the gravel trap. In the end, it was John followed by Jim, Brian, Carl, Gregg Sr., Greg Jr., Wayne, Tom, and Mike. In the paddock, it was discovered that Mike actually had no front brakes and it appears to be due to a failed master cylinder.

In conclusion, it was great to see the level of competitiveness among the 9 racers over the course of the weekend and no one went home with a broken racecar.

The Great Lakes region travels to Autobahn next, September 11-13, while the East Coast racers next stop is the NASA nationals.

-Gregory Wellinghoff - 77

