

Tough Weekend for the Great Lakes FFR Racers

May 14-16 saw some of the Great Lakes and Midwest Factory Five racers return to Putnam Park for what would be a long and wet weekend. In attendance at the event were Brian Sanders - 49, Gregg Wellinghoff Sr. - 29, Greg Wellinghoff Jr. - 77, along with Lyle and Julie Riggen - 09.



Friday

The weekend started on Friday with Brian taking advantage of the test and tune session in the 49, only to find his car overheating on his first on track session. Inspection of his car after the session found a lot of water missing. He rectified this situation by adding water and burping his car and hoped this would solve his problem. It was at this time that the Wellinghoff's arrived (just in time for lunch). Greg Jr. was planning to have the 77 compete in the 3 hour enduro later in the day with Brian and Gregg Sr. as co-drivers. Brian took his car onto the track for his next session and again the car began overheating after only a few laps. The trio took a lunch break, while the 49 cooled, to think things over. After lunch the trio began work on the 49 to replace a feared and later confirmed head gasket failure. Brian and Gregg Sr. did most of the work while Greg Jr. performed pit setup and final preparations to the 77 for the enduro. As the day grew later the work on the 49 confirmed a head gasket failure and it did not look like Brian would be able to compete in the enduro and get his car back together.

Greg Jr. took the first stint in the 77 in what was pre-planned to be a 2 stop race. Greg Jr. ran hard early and took a strong multi lap lead over the competition in the E1 class in the first hour. Greg Jr. entered the pits with the overall enduro lead on lap 37. Unfortunately, a lengthy first driver change from Jr. to Sr., due to an arm restraint mix up, hurt the team. The team was able to maintain its E1 lead after the stop, but fell to 9th place overall. To make matters worse a fuel spill during the stop hurt the 77 team and Sr. was forced to come back in to serve a five minute black flag penalty. It was during this penalty that the 77 team lost the E1 lead and fell to 12th overall. Greg Jr. went to rehydrate and check on the 49 and after brief discussion with Brian, it was agreed that Brian would pass on taking the third stint enabling Brian to focus on getting the 49 back together. Gregg Sr. returned to the pits on lap 53 as he began to feel nauseated due to the belts being too tight and had to come in early and turn the car back over to Greg Jr. During the second pit stop, the 77 fell to 3rd place in E1 and 13th overall. A much better second pit stop put Greg Jr. back on the track trying to make up some of the lost time from the first pit stop. Greg Jr. moved back into 2nd place in E1 on lap 65, and 8th overall on lap 79 where the car would remain until the completion of the race after 101 laps. The E1 winning Porsche completed 104 laps. The 77 team did learn a great deal from the enduro and believes it can take this experience into future enduros and perform better. At the completion of the event the trio managed to finish up the work on

the 49 slightly before lights out at Putnam. The Wellinghoffs had left and Brian and the Riggins were in the process of leaving when the Rigger's truck appeared to have transmission problems. They limped the truck back to the hotel hoping it was just a fluke.

Saturday "After you, no after you, no no I insist after you"

Saturday morning found Brian at the track early to finish up work on the 49, unfortunately this was not as simple as adding coolant and burping the engine. The Rigger's arrived with their truck just barely making it. Borrowing Brian's truck, the Rigger's set out for Plainfield to the repair shop. The 49 began the day having electrical problems that seemed to get worse as the day went on and the 49 missed morning practice and qualifying. Morning practice was uneventful as was qualifying (the quiet before the storm). Qualifying found Greg Jr. on the pole, followed by Lyle and Gregg Sr. Shortly after lunch, Brian found the root of his electrical problem was his G2X sending misinformation to his cars ECU. Unfortunately this easy fix for the problem (reboot the G2X) was only found after testing/changing many of the electrical components on the car (coil, distributor, ECU). Brian was then able to sweet talk the NASA folks into letting him take his car on track and test it in an HPDE session, where the 49 tested out satisfactorily.



The mid afternoon saw the skies open up over Putnam providing a steady and almost constant rain. The four drivers considered sitting out the race due to the amount of moisture on the track, but in the end Greg Jr. and Gregg Sr. decided to brave the elements and at least start the race. Greg Jr. managed to somehow spin his car off the track on the pace lap, but correct and still make it to start finish in time for the standing start. Greg Jr. took an early lead in the very slick conditions on the track at the start of the race, before sliding off track in turn 4 on

the first lap. Gregg Sr. took the lead until the front straight on lap 2 where Greg Jr. took it away, and then slid off in turn 7 relinquishing the lead to Gregg Sr. again. Despite the obviously slick conditions, neither driver was apparently willing to be smart and pull into the pits before the other driver. Gregg Sr. was forced off track by an ST-1 car (who he'd just given a point by to) on lap 10, giving the lead back to Greg Jr. Greg Jr. gained a tremendous amount of track on Gregg Sr. as a result of this incident and relaxed, however Gregg Sr. realized the track was drying and put a hard charge on the relaxed Greg Jr. passing Greg Jr. on lap 12 and holding onto the lead for the next three laps and the win. Greg Jr. kept babbling on excuses about a bad clutch and pulsing brakes as reasons for his loss to his old man. To emphasize the point, Greg Jr. even went so far as to change his brake rotors. The tired racers retired for the evening with everyone looking forward to getting away from the track and into dry clothes.

Sunday – "Maybe we can get all four cars on track at the same time today"



The morning started with Greg Jr. finishing his rotor replacement. Shortly thereafter all four of the Factory Five racecars in attendance took to the track together for the first time of the weekend. This feat was short lived however as Gregg Sr. had a transmission failure on the first green flag lap and pulled off course. The remaining three cars all ran

well and their drivers returned to the pits happy after the session. Gregg Sr. was somewhat dejected and believed his weekend to be over, when Greg Jr. (formerly referred to as a lousy parts guy) pulled a spare T5 out of his van (becoming a great parts guy). Once the 29 made it back to the trailers and cooled, the team began thrashing again. With Brian, Greg Jr., Joe Gilmartin, Greg Hall, Lyle, Julie, and Gregg Sr. all working on the transmission swap, it was replaced within 90 minutes and ready to go. Julie Riggen took the wheel of the 09 for qualifying to try her hand at driving her husband's FFR. Brian set fast lap in qualifying, followed by Gregg Sr., Greg Jr. and team Riggen. Finally the FF racers were able to relax and enjoy Sunday afternoon lazily sitting around their trailers waiting for the afternoon race.

The entire day had been one of grey skies but little to no rain, and the racers hoped it would continue that way through the race. Unfortunately as the racers sat on grid waiting to go out, the rain began to fall lightly. The race began with a relatively dry track and the racers drove accordingly. Brian leapt out to an early lead followed by Greg Jr., Gregg Sr., and Lyle. The rain began to fall a little harder every lap and Lyle chose to retire on lap 7. Brian, Gregg Sr., and Greg Jr. stayed after each other nose to tail, barely backing off, yet each wondering when the rain was going to turn the track too slick to maintain this pace. On lap 8, Gregg Sr. was able to pass Greg Jr. on the outside of turn 9 to take over second place and was able to get around Brian on lap 9 for the lead. The skies chose this time to open up on the racers and the track became inundated with water. The goal was no longer about trying to pass the car in front of you, it became trying to see the car in front of you. Greg Jr. went off track in turn 8 on lap 10 but recovered, and Brian Sanders slid off in turn 8 on lap 13. The conditions continued to worsen and Sanders, using his head, retired on lap 14 realizing the likelihood of wadding up his car in these conditions was not worth the potential reward. Gregg Sr. managed to keep the car on the asphalt for the duration and went on to take the checkers for a weekend sweep in the rain. Greg Jr. finished second with Brian and Lyle being scored in 3rd and 4th respectively. The racers returned to their trailers and packed up their cars grateful no one tore up their car.

The Great Lakes racers will meet next at Beaver Run on June 26, when the East Coast racers come to challenge for regional bragging rights.

--Greg Wellinghoff Jr.
Photos by Julie Riggen