

Gregory Wellinghoff Claims First Great Lakes Championship with Weekend Sweep at Autobahn

Saturday September 17, 2011.

A cool morning greeted racers Lyle Rikken – 09, Brian Sanders – 49, Gregory Wellinghoff – 77. John Tomgish from California was also in attendance in his street roadster. Morning practice was uneventful with Rikken setting fast time of 1:39.805 followed by Sanders at 1:40.964, and Wellinghoff at 1:41.038. Qualifying saw Rikken take the pole with a 1:39.383, followed by Wellinghoff at 1:40.855 and Sanders at 1:41.717. A long break awaited the racers who relaxed with some of Julie Rikken's cherry pie. Wellinghoff and his crew chief Greg Hall worked on repairing the 29 of Gregg Wellinghoff Sr. during the afternoon. As race time rolled around, the racers came down for the start with Rikken filling in a hole and moving up one row to start on the outside. As the racers took the green flag, Wellinghoff passed Rikken on the inside going into turn 1. Rikken stayed right on the rear bumper of Wellinghoff through the first 15 laps of the race, trying to retake the lead to no avail. Finally with 2 laps to go, Wellinghoff was able to open up a gap as he moved through a number of Spec Miata's quicker than Rikken was able to. At the checkers it was Wellinghoff, Rikken, Sanders. This win and 100 points effectively clinched the 2011 championship for Wellinghoff.

Sunday September 18, 2011.

Rain and fog were on tap for the racers on Sunday morning. None of the factory five cars chose to attempt morning practice, or qualifying for that matter. Instead they entertained themselves for the day, eating, napping, watching movies and stupid human tricks. As the forecast was not improving, Lyle and Julie Rikken decided to pack it in and head for home. Gregory Wellinghoff and Brian Sanders stayed to brave out the elements as Sanders needed the points to try for second place in the Great Lakes Championship. As the racers pulled onto the track, the weather was dreadful with a steady rain and winds greeting them. The field started conservatively, and perhaps too conservatively for Sanders, as the inside lane barely moved while the outside lane had use of the wet line giving Wellinghoff more grip going into turn 1, enabling him to pass Sanders. Sanders stayed on Wellinghoff's rear through the first lap and into the second lap, when the wet conditions caused Sanders to spin on the back straightaway. Wellinghoff opened up some breathing room as a result, and Sanders gradually closed the gap, but ran out of laps to catch Wellinghoff. At the checkers it was Wellinghoff, then Sanders. The racers packed up and headed for home.

Next up for the Great Lakes racers is Road America on October 7-9.