

Infineon Race Report

March 19-20, 2011

The Art of Racing in the Rain.....*with No Roof!!!*

The second round of the West Coast Championship found the Factory Five Racing Challenge Series drivers returning to the hills and sweeping esses of Infineon Raceway, in Sonoma, CA. Three brave and hearty spec racers arrived on Friday afternoon amidst a driving rain, and temperatures that would not move the mercury above 45 all weekend. With a 90-100% chance of rain in the forecast, series veterans TC McNett, Jeff Awender, and Tom Coon donned the rain tires long before they arrived at the track. With unrelenting rain falling steadily into the night, everyone was thankful for the decision to house the racecars in the garages for the weekend, As the racers turned in for the evening, the Bay Area would experience wild weather, including hail and high winds that would turn out to be an F-1 tornado passing just 18 miles to the west. Wicked weather for sure!



Morning practice was held in a steady downpour, and under double yellow conditions. All of the spec racers did a masterful job of keeping their cars on the track and slowly increasing the pace, however, in spite of the reduced speeds, several racers in other classes weren't as fortunate, spinning off track into the muddy grass. One unfortunate racer hydroplaned into the front straight wall, which brought the session to an early end.

The rain continued through qualifying, gaining strength just as the spec racers took to the track for their 10:45 AM session. The Challenge Series racers would be paired up with racers in the Camaro-Mustang Challenge, American Iron, Super Touring, Super Unlimited, German Touring Series, and Honda Challenge.....Quite a mix of cars and speed disparity; however, the rain would prove to be the great equalizer. TC McNett would secure the pole with a very quick 2:41.xx, with Jeff Awender turning a 2:50.xx, and Tom Coon posting a 3:03.xx. The spec racers again drove with great skill and avoided any off track excursions. Their fellow competitors were not as fortunate, with several again spinning off track and donny-brooking through the lush, green grass.

The rains continued into the afternoon, and Race Group B took to the track in a steady downpour. The CMC/FFR racers would take the first green flag for the group, and at race start, the spec racers would be at the back of a massive mist and spray field, with a CMC car spinning just before the crest of the hill.



TC, Jeff and Tom navigated the exceptionally difficult conditions with great skill, with TC snaking into the lead and working his way through the CMC pack, all the while Jeff and Tom were working their way through the pack close behind. All three racers avoided the many on-track incidents (and off track excursions) by their competitors in other race classes, but all three raced clean....TC would hold the lead throughout the race, and Jeff worked hard to keep him in the crosshairs. All three racers posted their best laptimes of the weekend (in a driving rain), and at the checkered, it was TC McNett for the victory, with Jeff Awender taking second, and Tom Coon securing third place. Racers passed impound with flying colors, and everyone was glad to pull the garage doors down on the wicked weather with all three cars safe and ready to race in the morning.

Sunday Race Report

The wild weather continued overnight, with severe winds damaging the track. Power was out across the facility, with back-up systems being pushed into service to secure timing and scoring as well as safety lighting systems. Karen got some trial by fire safety crew experience, doing a ride along with Mike and Andy and all of the on-track crews, helping these awesome folks repair the Turn 2 catch fence that had been destroyed in the high winds from the previous night. Track operations were delayed some 40 minutes due to the repair, and the schedule suffered the rest of the morning, delaying race groups, sessions cut short through lunch time. Repairs were made in very quick order though, and all things considered, operations resumed relatively quickly.



FFR owner/builder (and now "movie star" Mike Easton (ACMikee) provided the lifting force to raise the catch fence. Mike Eastin and his green/orange spec racer were featured in the SpeedMasters episode entitled "Super Kits" last week on Speed Channel. Fellow spec driver Donny Edwards (the new "Stig" behind the wheel in that episode) was also racing at Infineon this weekend, scoring an overall race victory and a second place finish in his competition efforts. That's NASA's CEO/Owner Jerry Kunzman in the blue

jacket, out there prying and lifting in the mud right along with the troops. Nice work everyone!

Jeff's computer decided it didn't like having 25 gallons of water dumped on it....A brief visit with the hairdryer and a zip lock bag fixed the problem, and Jeff was ready to go for qualifying



The Qualifying Race was another donneybrook and fiasco, due to the shortened/modified schedule. Racers were told that all groups were experiencing a 45 minute delay, however, were completely caught off guard when the call came some 30 minutes earlier than expected for Race Group B to report to grid. TC barely made it to pre-grid on time, however both Jeff and Tom scrambled to suit up and strap in, with both racers falling in at the back of the group (Hey, that's racin'!). Confusion dominated the session, and the racers never got a green flag

for their qualifying race. All three racers drove well though, and at the end of the session, it was TC for the win, however, it was Jeff Awender posting the fastest time, with Tom Coon dropping another few seconds off his best laps for the weekend as well.

Racer spent the remaining four hours taking in some warm eats to sustain them for the next session. The group was very pleased to see fellow spec racer Robert Walter stop by with his very cool grandson Blake, and everyone enjoyed the opportunity to visit and catch up on things. Robert has been busy with his Z-Car project, as well as getting his spec racer ready for a return to the Series (fingers crossed...Yea!) in May. ;) Robert's the quintessential racer, and the most seasoned veteran racer among the group, having cut his teeth in SCCA racing back in the 70's. The group was very pleased to hear that he will be running the 3 hour enduro at Buttonwillow in April, driving his CMC Mustang in the E-1 class.

In what seemed like a bit of good luck, the racing gods sent the spec racers a small reprieve by mid-afternoon, lifting the rain and clearing the skies just as they were called to pre-grid. The track was still filled with many small rivers of water and standing ponds in the low lying areas though, but at least the downpours were over.



At the green flag, TC went left and Jeff went right, with both of them literally splitting the group of CMC cars, passing half the pack on either side as the group ran up the hill. TC, Jeff and Tom were entrenched in traffic, and TC retained the lead through Turn 2, with Jeff hot on his heels as the group crested the hill to Turn 4. The pack was still very tight as the group wound their way into the Carousel, and then things went a bit haywire for Jeff, as he was forced to take evasive action to avoid a CMC car that had pitched sideways in front of him. Jeff and several other racers elected to head for the grass, and he had his own

donneybrook around the outside rim of the Carousel, rejoining the racing surface at the entrance to the drag strip. TC was gone by then, and Tom had slipped by as well, so Jeff set out on a mission to write his own version of "The Art of Racing in the Rain. "



Tom Coon darted past as Jeff struggled to regain control, as did several CMC cars. TC would lead the race from this point forward, however, Jeff drove the wheels off his car, steadily chipping away what had begun as a 16 second lead for TC, closing in to a 6 second difference by the time the checkered flag fell.

Tom passed several race group competitors along the way, and again, posted his best laps of the weekend. TC would go on to win the race, with Jeff taking a hard-earned 2nd place on the podium. Tom Coon would cross the line in 3rd place, and everyone was grateful to drive their cars back to the garage in one piece.



Next race: April 9, 2011 Buttonwillow (regular sprints and 3-Hour enduro)

Karen

