

Paul Arnold Wins Two in Great Lakes Season Opener

Paul Arnold wins his first two Challenge Series races in the 2011 Great Lakes season opener at Mid-Ohio.



Thursday April 7, 2011

Regional Series Director Brian Sanders - #49 set out for Mid-Ohio after a long yet busy winter. Unfortunately for Brian his truck decided to go to White Castle the night before without telling him and its rear end developed a serious case of the bubbly bubbly's before he ever reached Mid-Ohio. Mike Dziurgalski - #169 wasn't too far behind Sanders, and lent his assistance in changing the rear differential fluid in Sanders truck. Brian and Mike finally made Mid-Ohio in the late afternoon, but with obvious rear end problems.

Friday April 8, 2011

Heavy April showers greeted the racers on Friday morning. Brian spent most of the day pondering how the truck, car, and trailer would find their way home while Peter LaRose - #39 and the series newest racer, Paul Arnold - #5 ran in all the wet sessions. Mark Daugherty, his wife, and son Matthew also came to the track to support Peter and coupe driver, Howard (please forgive us for not knowing your last name). Although the sessions were wet, Peter used them to reacquaint himself with his car and Mid-Ohio after a year off from racing. As a veteran racer, Paul did his best to learn the rain line at Mid-Ohio, exploring every possible line, even helping the Mid-Ohio grounds crew with their early

season grass mowing. The Wellinghoff, father #29 and son #77, duo arrived in the evening, just in time for dinner. The racers retired from the track after Peter's last session to enjoy a wonderful meal at the Roadhouse. Everyone was glad to see Peter back to racing again and welcomed Paul to the series with open arms.



Saturday April 9, 2011

The morning started off with a light rain/mist falling around the track, giving to wet conditions. This was the first event of the season for Mid-Ohio, so the track was very green. Combine this with very cool temperatures and you knew no track records were in danger of being broken. By the time morning practice rolled around the precipitation had stopped and the racers were ready to go out to bed brakes, break in new clutches, and make sure the cars ran properly on Mid-Ohio's club course. Paul Arnold set fast lap of the session at 1:55:117. Gregory Wellinghoff - #77 came off the track to a dead battery, apparently the alternator to battery cable wire retired over the winter.



The racers had a very short break between practice and qualifying with just enough time to make a few adjustments to air pressures. Qualifying found Paul setting fast time of 1:50.542, followed by Gregg Wellinghoff - #29 at 1:56.509 (later moved to the rear for being under weight). Brian Sanders at 1:57.474, Gregory Wellinghoff at 2:00.246, Peter LaRose at 2:07.908. Mike Dziurgalski did not register a time after pulling in early when he believed he had a tire going down. The session times were slow across the entire Thunder race group due to an Exxon Valdez sized oil spill all over the braking zone at the end of the back stretch before China beach. With the starting grid set, the racers retired to work on their cars and relax for a few hours before race time.

Some problems started for the racers before race time as Gregg was unable to get his car to start while sitting on grid. The grid Marshal's were kind enough to get him push started after the field had pulled out of the grid, but he was forced to start at the back of the GTS group. As the green flag flew, the inside line took off while the outside line didn't move. Paul, Gregory and Mike moved up the inside line quickly around Brian and Peter. Paul immediately put some distance on Gregory at the start and Brian was able to get around Mike for third. The racers ran like this for the first half of the race. Gregg Sr. finally caught up with the field and managed to get around Peter before he began having issues with his car. Peter moved back into fourth place briefly and then was overtaken again by Gregg Sr. a lap later. Brian and Gregory had a good battle for second place going until an AIX mustang got in between them and decided to race out of class against Brian. Yes, you read that correctly. Brian was being raced by an AIX car. Gregg Sr. broke with electrical issues with 3 to go. Paul clinched the win easily followed by Gregory, Brian, Mike, and Peter. Mike's transmission was kind enough to wait until turn one right after the checkers flew to break third gear.



After the race everyone was congratulatory to Paul. As the race was early it gave the racers plenty of time to work on their cars for the rest of the afternoon.

Sunday April 10, 2011

Heavy fog settled over the track on Sunday morning and rather than run qualifying at 8:00AM on a wet track, the racers decided amongst themselves to do an inverted start for the Sunday race, based on the results of the Saturday race. This gave the racers all morning to relax in the paddock before race time. Mike Dziurgalski was forced to leave the track Sunday morning due to work commitments.

The track was warm and dry when race time rolled around on Sunday afternoon. The start of the race saw Gregory Wellinghoff Jr. shoot to the outside around Peter LaRose and Gregg Wellinghoff Sr. taking a quick lead before Paul Arnold came up the inside and took over. The racers were unable to catch Paul for the remainder of the race. Outside or inside, it didn't matter for Brian Sanders as whatever line he was in did not get a good start. The outside line slowed and allowed Gregg Sr. to take over second place through thunder valley and as the racers came across the line it was Paul followed by Gregg Sr., Greg, Brian, and Peter. Brian and Peter had a short battle for fourth while the Wellinghoff's spent the entire race nose to tail swapping second and third between them. Brian caught up in the last third of the race to make it a three car battle, but was unable to move past either of the Wellinghoff's due to how close together they were running. The final position swap came on the front straightaway as the white flag was waving. Gregory got the back end out of sorts coming through the carousel and was unable to carry a lot of speed into the front straightaway, Gregg Sr. pulled even at the flag stand and the two ran side by side down the front straightaway, through turn one and up to the chicane, where Gregg Sr. had the line and Gregory had to give up the battle. Brian was immediately behind the two nervously watching for the two Wellinghoff's to make contact with each other. As they came through the keyhole with Gregg Sr. in front Gregory made one last run down the backstretch, but could not get position before turn seven and remained in third as they finished the race. Peter finished in fifth place.

After the race, the exhausted racers congratulated each other on a good race and a few onlookers came by to tell the Wellinghoffs how exciting their battle was. Everyone bid their farewells to each other before heading out.

The Great Lakes region heads to Putnam Park in Indiana on May 13-15 for its second event of the year.

Gregory Wellinghoff - #77, Photos Courtesy of Kerry Turner

