

Factory Five's Literally Burn The Tires Off Their Cars

Six Great Lakes Challenge Series racers made their way to Putnam Park this past weekend, May 12-13. Arriving Thursday evening, the first order of business was to request that the track management team mow the paddock. The grass was just tall enough to potentially cause problems for hot race cars sitting on it. With the mowing complete, Brian Sanders, Paul Arnold, Rafe Baskin, and Eric Kostamaa began setting things up for the weekend.



As the sun rose on Friday, these four were joined by Gregg Wellinghoff Sr. for the test day. The morning sessions showed that the cars in the 2012 trim would be fast at Putnam. But as the day wore on, problems started to plague the drivers. Tire wear is always a problem at Putnam. It is hard on tires. Rafe was still battling a fuel pump issue and Eric suffered a near catastrophic failure when the lower ball joint popped out of its seat in the lower control arm. Luckily, Brian was carrying a spare control arm and Eric's chief mechanic Roger set to work on the swap and had the car ready for Saturday's competition.

As the drivers arrived at the track Saturday morning, Greg Wellinghoff Jr. pulled in to fill the field. Mike Tuck was also in attendance with his newly acquired Challenge Racer in HPDE. The morning warm-up proved uneventful. Everyone was fast except for Brian who could not come close to his Friday times. Back in the paddock, the tires told the story, left side tires were toast. Unfortunately, Brian had not brought a second set. He had a single spare and Greg graciously loaned one his spares. Qualifying set the grid for the race with Rafe on the pole followed by Paul, Greg Jr., Brian, Eric, and Gregg Sr.



At race time, the FFR's would take the second green flag. Early in the race, Paul, Rafe, and Greg Jr. pulled out to a sizeable lead while Brian, Gregg Sr., and Eric had their own race. After about four laps, Brian could do nothing more hold off Gregg Sr. Near the end of the race, Rafe found himself off track as Gregg Sr. and Brian passed him. Rafe quickly caught up to Brian and got one spot back and set his sights on Gregg Sr. Going into turn five side by side, Gregg Sr. overcooked it and locked up the brakes leaving the racing surface allowing both Rafe and

Brian to get by. In the end, it was Paul taking the checkers followed by Greg Jr., Rafe, Brian Gregg Sr., and Eric. But this wasn't the end of the story, both Rafe and Paul were deemed to have jumped the start and penalized 30 seconds. This shuffled the finishing order, giving the win to Greg Jr. followed by Paul, Brian, Gregg Sr., Rafe and Eric. Rafe set a new track record of 1:19:115.

Back in the paddock, stories were exchanged, jumped starts were debated, and Greg Hall, the Wellinghoff's chief mechanic, set out to diagnose a complaint of vibration and noise on Greg Jr.'s #77. After tearing into the car, it was found that the engine builder had installed a pilot bushing instead of a bearing.

Sunday's qualifying definitely had it high's and low's. Paul Arnold went out and ran the fastest lap of the weekend at a 1:17.358. On the second lap of qualifying, Brian's car lost a cylinder. Later it was discovered this was due to a broken rocker stud. Greg Jr. had his qualifying time disallowed after being found underweight in impound. So the cars would line up in the order of Paul, Rafe, Eric, Brian, Gregg Sr. and Greg Jr. Due to other commitments, Greg Sr. was not in attendance on Sunday and with Brian's car out of commission, it was decided that Brian would start the race in Gregg's #29 to make the field five cars deep.



As if he had not suffered enough pain this weekend, the start of the race was no better for Brian in the #29. By turn seven, on the pace lap, Brian was not able to keep up with the field as the car ran low on fuel and went into limp mode. Luckily, he was able to make it back to pit road as the cars took the green. No one thought to fuel this car since it was not slated to race.

At the start of today's race, the FFR's were gridded behind the AI cars and over the first few laps, Paul and Rafe had better luck than Greg and Eric working through some of the traffic. This gap, left Greg and Eric chasing them for the race. Rafe continued to have issue with the fuel pump and Paul was able to run off and leave him. Late in the race, Eric noticed that he was losing battery voltage and suspected that the alternator had given up and retired from the race. In the end, it was Paul with the win, followed by Rafe, Greg, and Eric.

Next up for the Great Lakes Region is the "Rollercoaster", Grattan in Belding Michigan on June 2nd and 3rd.

Brian Sanders
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