



Chicago, August 18, 2009, NASA Midwest, Inc.

Mid Ohio Sports Car Course/August 15-16, 2009/NASA Great Lakes

I hope you were there. Really, I do.

Were you?

This past weekend?

At Mid-Ohio?

If not, stand up right now and kick yourself in the butt because you missed some seriously great racing. With big fields in GTS1, GTS2 and GTS3 we had a total of 28 GTS cars even after losing several during Friday's practice sessions due to mechanical woes. This was not only our biggest GTS field of the year, it is only a couple of cars short of the number currently registered for next month's National Championship races in Utah.

You, my friend, missed out.

Lots of cars or not, the weekend was HOT with temperatures in the low 90s along with high humidity. Not surprisingly, several cars succumbed to heat over the course of the three days but that didn't make the racing any less fierce.

Saturday night featured adult beverages and snacks provided by Tom Hatem Automotive (thanks Tom!) and NATURALLY, since nearly every BMW in the field had a Tom Hatem sticker on it someplace, Porsches dominated the weekend (sorry Tom!), winning every race except GTS4 (which HAD no Porsches), and Sunday's GTS2 race after Yours Truly left the race a little prematurely.

So, let's get to the messy details...

GTS1

In GTS1 there were a total of 9 cars--triple the usual GTS1 contingent--and John Graber made the most of it. He and his yellow 944 made like Usain Bolt and pretty much ran away from the field in both Saturday's and Sunday's GTS1 races, leaving everybody else to fight it out among



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themselves for second.

Well, actually, that's not COMPLETELY true as a fuel pick-up problem late in Sunday's race erased a 17-second lead and made Graber's winning margin just a teench under 3 seconds over Nick DeCuzzi who I'm pretty sure is too young to be legal. Isn't there a rule that you have to be able to shave to drive fast...or something like that? Sheesh.

Regardless of Graber's success, don't think there wasn't any good racing in GTS1. Quite the contrary, there was GREAT racing but it was mostly happening as tiny little dots in Graber's mirrors. While he ran mostly unopposed for President of GTS1, DeCuzzi (Porsche), Charlie Mason (Porsche), Kevin Gibson (BMW) and Brant Gierre (Porsche) were fighting like housewives at a Filene's sale, swapping places on pretty much every lap to see who was going to be second. The 944s of Gierre, Mason and DeCuzzi did their best to overwhelm by the force of sheer numbers but Kevin Gibson in his BMW was having none of it. He showed over and over again that his car has some SERIOUS stopping power by making one great pass after another under braking and then backing it up with more great moves under power.

None of these was more impressive than early in Saturday's race when, before Graber had checked out completely, Gibson saw Graber making a very late inside pass at the end of the back straight (hoping to put a car between himself and Gibson) and in response made an even more impressive pass on the OUTSIDE--the two of them simultaneously blowing BOTH doors off a slower 944 Cup car. Gibson nearly got around Graber, too, in the process although ultimately Graber maintained and extended his lead.

Great fun to watch from the hill.

Ultimately they ended up Saturday Graber, Mason, Gibson, Ginter and Gierre after DeCuzzi was DQ'd for contact.

Sunday's race was more of the same with The Kid showing his stuff without a penalty-inciting incident. Finishing order: Graber, DeCuzzi, Gibson, Mason, Giere.



GTS2

With 12 cars registered and ultimately 9 making it to the race (Brad Waite, among others, dropped out with an engine issue during Friday's practice) GTS2 had an excellent field. Sean Tillinghast made his 2009 racing debut in a Tom Hatem M3 and ended up with a hard-charging second-place finish on Saturday after starting at the back of the field. He also posted BMW's only legitimate win of the weekend on Sunday. When he gets a few things sorted out in that car, I have a feeling Mr. Tillinghast is going to cause some problems at the front of the GTS2 field. Stay tuned for that.

Saturday's race ended with me in first followed by Tillinghast and Paul Milligan, who was again fast and tough in his BMW 318ish. (See...it's a 318i body but it doesn't have a 318i motor...it has a bigger motor so it's not exactly a 318i, it's a 318-ish...oh, never mind...it sounded funnier in my head).

On Sunday, things were going perfectly according to plan after I got a great start and was beginning to put a gap between myself and the hard-charging Tillinghast until ugly noises came from under the hood and I was forced to pull off after just three laps. From there on out it was all Tillinghast as Sean maintained a safe but modest lead over Jim Child (Porsche 968) throughout most of the race. Child ultimately retired with over-heating problems, leaving second to Mike Ward and an excellent third place finish to Matt Markowitz in his Audi A4.

GTS3

In GTS3, Scott Berkowitz spent the weekend chasing a broken front shock absorber, opening the door for somebody else to win some free Hoosiers for a change. As it turned out, both Saturday and Sunday that somebody was Christian Maloof in his very red and very fast Porsche 993.

GTS3 ended up Saturday as Maloof, Deason, Berkowitz with Berkowitz complaining about the problems of driving with only three shock absorbers ("it was good for the first few laps but then I couldn't get it to turn in and practically ran it off the road at the exit of all the fast turns..."). The thing is, I've seen him drive...he rarely has more than three wheels on the ground at a time anyway, so what's the big deal?



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Although Sunday's race sounds like mostly a repeat of Saturday's, in truth Maloof only won after Korey Deason three-wheeled himself into the sandbox on the outside of the Keyhole. However, unlike Berkowitz's three-wheeling shenanigans, Deason was REALLY three-wheeling after all five studs sheared off his left rear hub and the wheel removed itself. This, after having replaced every stud on the car in the last month, left the Deasons shaking their heads with confusion. Nobody is quite sure yet the source of the problem but it made for a bad ending to what was easily Korey's best drive ever. Until the incident he was dominating the race after posting a smoking qualifying lap. Sorry, dude.

Behind all this, JB Knopp was flying in his white M3 and managed a well-deserved second step on the podium. Sunday's finishing order: Maloof, Knopp, Berkowitz. When was that last time Scotty B was "only" third two races in a row? Rumor has it the rest of the GTS3 field is putting together a collection to get Tom Hatem to permanently disable one of his front shocks....

GTS4

GTS4 was a two-car field and Jamie Frauenberg spent most of the weekend nursing overheating and other problems, leaving Gian Bacardi (yes, THAT Bacardi family) from Miami, driving Ryan Osieski's former M3, to win relatively easily both days from the GTS pole.

GTS5

Even though GTS5 was just a single-car class, it is in many ways my favorite story of the weekend. Chris O'Donnell, in his beautiful, fire-breathing, white 911, hauled his trailer all the way from California to be here. Chris' name may be familiar to a few of you...he is a former SCCA Solo II National Champion who drove a wickedly-fast Cosworth BDX-powered Lotus Elan in D Modified back in the late 90s. Even with that background, this past weekend was (a) the first time he'd ever seen Mid-Ohio, (b) the first time he had ever taken a green flag in wheel-to-wheel racing, and (c) only the second time he'd even driven his massively-fast GTS5 Porsche 911. You want to talk about learning curve?



From his first on-track session Friday, to his 5th-position starting place on Sunday's grid (and 3rd place GTS overall finish), Chis lowered his lap times by a staggering 30+ seconds. In Sunday's race he finished ahead of all the GTS3 cars which, if you've spent any time racing with this bunch, you know is saying something. His best lap of his weekend was a 1:35.207--still not fully up to top-level GTS5 times--but fully six seconds faster than his time in Saturday's warm-up session and getting down to the point of being seriously fast. Long drive notwithstanding, Chris spent the weekend with a huge smile plastered on his face. I hope we see him again soon.

Next: Gingerman

Since I'm pretty sure you're not going to the Nationals in Utah (at last check, I was the only GTS driver East of Colorado signed up...and last weekend's motor problems have probably put an end to that) that must mean you're going to Gingerman! This is the first time Great Lakes has been there since, I believe, 2005 so everybody is working at a disadvantage. Get yourself signed up and let's see who's the fastest learner.

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