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Putnam Park Road Course/October 2-4, 2009/NASA Great Lakes-Midwest Crossover Event

GTS Wraps up the 2009 Season at Putnam Park

Well, it's done. The year is over. Last weekend were our final races of the year and, oh by the way, they were pretty darned good.

How good?

I'm glad you asked... (apologies in advance for the length of this missive but, hey, it's the end of the year):

Putnam Park

Saturday, somehow, was dry. With threatening skies most of the day and even a light dusting of moisture during the second race (not enough to matter, even on slicks), somehow we managed to practice, qualify, race and race again (there were two that day) in the dry. GTS had an excellent turnout with relatively large fields in GTS2, GTS3, GTS4 and even GTS5, for a change. And, as you already know, a number of Regional Championships were on the line.

Oh wait...did I neglect to mention GTS1?

Well, yes I did.

And, no...I didn't.

Kinda...but, not exactly...let's just start there....

GTS1

Normally, the story of a class with no cars in it is quick and easy, but not this time because, well, it's GTS1 and sometimes GTS1 kinda does its own thing. You see, this time there was gaming going on...or at least a little bit of gaming. **ORIGINALLY**, which is to say way back when we registered for this event a week or so ago, there were three cars signed up for GTS1. But then the dribbling started. **NO**, not the dribbling on their shirts--that's normal in GTS1--the dribbling into other classes. **PTD**, I believe, was the class of choice. In any case, eventually everybody bailed from GTS1 to race in a class with more cars and more competition.



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Can't blame 'em for that.

Well, COULDN'T blame them until **John Graber** came back in from Saturday's first-thing-in-the-morning Practice session and discovered he'd turned a lap that would have easily been a new GTS1 lap record. Except--did I mention?--he wasn't IN GTS1 anymore, he'd moved to PTD (or whatever). So, the Catch-22 was he could race in a class where he'd actually have people to race with (and maybe contingencies) OR he could race in GTS1--all by himself--and potentially set a new track record.

Decisions, decisions.

In the event, he made the right choice and stayed where there were people to beat (and, for the record, he DID beat them) and I can tell you from first-hand knowledge that there were some excellent pre-race strategy sessions about how John in his 135hp 944 was going to keep the big V8 Mustang in his class behind him on the run down to the first turn so he could escape into the twisties. I can't disclose the EXACT solution but I can understand why you might suspect collusion with competitors and some minor blocking may have been included in the plan....

As outlined a week or more ago in my also-too-long e-mail about regional points, **Kevin Gibson** walked off with the GTS1 Regional Championship in spite of missing the weekend. Congratulations, Kevin!

GTS2

Unlike GTS1, we had an excellent GTS2 field at Putnam, with eight GTS2 cars. Now, you may have noticed that for pretty much all of 2009, GTS2 has mostly been a cakewalk for yours truly and mostly a run-for-second-place class for everybody else.

Um...yeah. Well, that seems to be over.

Brad Waite and **Sean Tillinghast** had different ideas from mine about who should be winning in GTS2. Brad's car (also a 944 S2) now sports a big-ass rear wing and front splitter and he is suddenly running laps within a few tenths of the best I can squeeze out. And, he hasn't even started tweaking it yet.

That just doesn't seem right.

Sean, in **Tom Hatem's** BMW 325, was even worse. Case in point: Going into the weekend, the GTS2 track record at Putnam was a 1:18.873 set earlier this year by, well, me. In Saturday morning's practice (which doesn't count toward the



official lap record, but STILL...) I went out and put down a cool 1:18.055 just to announce my presence. Sean, with a terrible disregard for the now long-established practice of not going faster than the GTS Director (I'm pretty sure it's in the rules), countered with a 1:17.095 which, in all seriousness, I am pretty certain is the first time ANYBODY in a GTS2 car has ever been into the 17s on any tire, in any situation, at Putnam Park. That was a damned fine lap.

But, really. So rude.

During qualifying Sean COMPLETELY smoked the GTS2 field with a 1:16.5 which even HE didn't believe...to the point that, of his own initiative, he disassembled his intake to verify his suspicion--that the restrictor plate was no more. Unfortunately for him, he was right.

In other words, the paper gasket which was supposed to be limiting the air going into his engine (and therefore the power it could make) had destroyed itself and he was suddenly making much too much power for the class. In a terrifically sporting move, as soon as he discovered the problem Sean went first to Bryan Cohn, the Race Director, and then to myself, and insisted he be disqualified. THAT, my friends, is the epitome of class--tattling on yourself when something's not right even if the rest of the group doesn't know about it. Unfortunately, as a result (and after fixing the problem) Sean had to start BOTH of Saturday's races from the back of the GTS field.

That meant I inherited the GTS2 class pole, starting with Waite to my left and **Mike Ward** behind. I got a great start, Waite missed a shift, and off we went. The two winged 944s (Good and Waite) more or less ran away from the GTS2 field but Ward and **Paul Milligan** had a tough battle for third place going until eventually Milligan forced his way past in Turn 5, sending Ward on a brief trip through the daisies. By the time he rejoined the fray he was too far in arrears to make up the difference.

The race ended Good, Waite, Milligan, 1-2-3. Tillinghast, for his part, spent the race trying to fight his way through a bunch of faster cars with slower drivers, which means he was getting left behind on all the straights and held up in the turns. Frustrating AND hard to do anything about.

The second race Saturday was a different (and, if I may say so, more interesting) story. Because there was only one qualifying session for both races, Tillinghast, again, had to start from the back. Ah, but this time things were a little different.

First, and I take full blame for this, I had a talk with 15-year-old **Matt Paderta** (15? Seriously? I have TVs older than that), who had the GTS pole, about not going out as crazy fast as he had the prior race when the guys in the back had a



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heck of a time catching up in time for the start. As it turned out, my advice was poor (sorry, Matt) and we were so far behind the first group (it was a double start) that they actually had to yellow-flag the whole track to keep them from running over us. That led into a couple of double-yellow laps while the track was cleared of NASCAR-truck debris before it was time to actually get going.

When we eventually got started two VERY TERRIBLE things happened. Well, OK, terrible from my perspective, at least. The first was Waite had correctly reasoned that since there had been a green flag (for the first group) and that we were now under double-yellow, that he didn't have to wait for the green flag but only for the yellows to go down to start racing. Accordingly, as soon as the flagger started taking down the yellow flags, he was fully on the gas and not only jumped ahead of me but also (temporarily) went around **Korey Deason** who was starting in front of him. It was a great move--unless you were trying to beat him to the first turn again, as I was.

Meanwhile, back at the rear of the pack, Tillinghast had decided he wasn't going to spend another race with his measly GTS2 car stuck behind much-faster GTS4 and 5 cars and so, as soon as the green flew, taking a page from the *Scott Berkowitz Book of Road Racing*, he put his right-side tires in the grass and just drove around the bunch of them. Easy as pie.

At that point, the race was on. Waite set a blistering pace in the early laps to the point I was starting to work on congratulatory statements to use from a lower step on the podium. He ultimately led for about two-thirds of the race as I chased behind, falling back a bit and then eventually closing the gap. Just as I was re-acquiring him as a target, Tillinghast started getting a little too big in the mirrors.

Just after Turn 2 on lap 11, Waite's motor stumbled once briefly (a fuel pick-up problem, he thinks), but just enough for me to get alongside as he turned into Three. Unfortunately, his commitment to the turn forced me to complete the pass mostly through the grass...which I did, thinking it might be my only chance to get by. While congratulating myself on a spectacular move, I glanced in the mirror and realized with shock that Tillinghast had followed me through the grass (it's becoming A Thing with him, apparently) and was becoming impatient with his view of the rear of my car.

VERY impatient.

For the remainder of the race we ran, if you'll pardon the expression, balls-out, nose-to-tail and Tillinghast took a couple of almost-but-not-quite shots to get by (many thanks to the slower Mustang who acted as a pick for me on the front straight at one point). Ultimately, we finished Good, Tillinghast and then Waite in the first three spots, with Good lowering the official GTS2 record (only race times



count) to 1:18.324.

It was great racing, great fun and all of us were all smiles afterward.

In case you're interested, my view of the GTS2 race (with needless captioning) is here: <http://www.vimeo.com/6930567>

It's worth mentioning that the GTS2 races had implications in the Regional Championship. Coming into the weekend, **Matt Markowicz** held a small lead in GTS2 followed by me and then Mike Ward in third. Contrary to my earlier missive, Matt ultimately didn't make it to Putnam (he went to his own wedding instead) and when all was said and done the GTS2 Regional Championship ended up Good, Ward, Markowicz.

Paul Milligan won the NASA Great Lakes Rookie of the Year award, well-deserved after a year of excellent racing near the front of the field. Congratulations to him!

GTS3

The GTS3 Championship was also up for grabs with **Korey Deason** leading **Scott Berkowitz** by a small margin coming into the weekend. Their battle was complicated by a solid GTS3 field of seven cars, including **Christian Maloof** who was taking a break from Grand Am in his very fast red 993.

Berkowitz sat on the class pole, third overall, for the first race with Maloof aside him and Deason one row back. Berkowitz got a typically-good start and was able to keep the others behind while chasing down the two front-running GTS5 cars (**Jeff Herrmann** and **Matt Paderta**). As the race proceeded and they got into traffic Berkowitz was able to put some extra distance between himself, Maloof and Deason. Late in the race, in heavy traffic, he managed to find a way past Paderta Jr in the GTS5 M3 and move himself into second place overall, a position he was able to maintain (just barely!) to the end.

During the race, Scotty B lowered the GTS3 track record to a smoking 1:15.837, beating out Sean Tillinghast's prior 1:16.038 from May 2008. But then, Tillinghast doesn't really need that track record anymore...he has a shiny new one in GTS2 now he can put on the shelf and enjoy...darn it.

Berkowitz's video from race #1: <http://vimeo.com/6920280>

Dann Nelson, a PCA convert, was in from Decatur, IL for his first NASA race in a GORGEOUS red, black and silver Porsche 993. He had a strong qualifying session only to be sidelined with gear-selection problems. However, I think we'll



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be seeing a lot more of Dan in the future.

In the second race on Saturday--once we finally got the green--Berkowitz and Maloof both got great starts and ran nose-to-tail for half the race until Berkowitz managed to trap Maloof behind one of the Factory Fives for several turns and pull out a substantial gap. Ultimately he built a large enough cushion to hold onto the lead and take both the GTS3 win and the Regional Championship.

The second race ended Berkowitz, Maloof, Deason followed by **Vince Ko, Roy Lipner** and **Kyle Burkhardt**

Korey Deason ended a mixed season filled with excellent drives and strange mechanical issues with a strong 2nd in the championship, followed by **Breck Lewis** (who also missed the weekend for Matt Markowicz's wedding) with an excellent third. Congratulations to all.

GTS4

With three cars, GTS4 was a little fuller than normal after two of the SIX (count 'em) GTS5 drivers registered for the event discovered their cars were delivered with DOT instead of "real" race tires, which moved them into the GTS4 power-to-weight ratio range. **Chris Streit** was the class of the GTS4 field but unfortunately missed qualifying worrying over what turned out to be an inconsequential noise in the engine compartment, allowing both **Thomas Herb** and **Jim Hamman** to start in front of him. On the other hand, it's a lot better to start a little farther back than to have to buy a new motor....

Because of that, like Tillinghast, Streit started at the back of the GTS field for race 1. The good news (if there is good news in that situation) is that starting at the back is always good for entertaining video. You can see Streit's here:

<http://vimeo.com/6899000>

In addition to seeing him eventually work his way to the front of GTS4, you'll also see periodic flashes of Tillinghast (black BMW with a red wing) trying to fight his way to the front only to be thwarted by the straight-line speed of the 911. Particularly spectacular is an ultimately-unsuccessful Banzai pass in turn 7 which ends with Tillinghast taking a run through the weeds. Watching this helps you appreciate the logic behind Sean's opening-lap Pass In The Grass at the start of Race #2.

Race 2 was between just Herb and Hamman with Hamman eventually leading to the checker by a cool 12 seconds.



GTS5

GTS5 was a classic battle of old age and treachery against youth and enthusiasm. Well, really, that's not quite fair. There were four GTS5 drivers, **John Paderta** (the father), **Matt Paderta** (the son) and **Jeff Herrmann** (no, NOT the Holy Ghost but if you've seen the way he drives that old white Beemer, you might wonder) and **Thomas Barrick**.

Paderta Jr, only 15 years old, without a real drivers' license and probably still wet behind the ears, put his shifter-kart experience to good use and took the overall GTS Pole position with his fire-breathing Grand Am BMW. He was followed closely (0.18 seconds back) by Herrmann in his ancient, outdated, can't-possibly-go-that-fast original-edition M3 (a crowd favorite). Paderta Sr qualified fourth overall and started on the second row, while Barrick luxuriated a bit farther back in the field.

In race 1, Herrmann got the lead and never looked back, leading every lap of the race, followed by Matt Paderta nine-and-a-half seconds back, with John fading a bit as the race went on. **Barrick** had to pull out with 9 laps remaining after his shift linkage came loose.

Race 2 was a little more interesting with Paderta Jr getting the jump at the start only to get passed a few turns later by Herrmann. Jeff built up a pretty substantial lead until getting stuck in traffic several times. Matt was able to slip past at which point the two of them started a darned good race, supported by excellent front-and-rear video (which you can see here: <http://vimeo.com/6938204>). Great racing at the front of the pack.

Ultimately it was Herrmann again by a scant 1.011 seconds over Matt Paderta, followed further back by John Paderta and Barrick at the rear.

Because of attendance requirements there was no Great Lakes GTS5 Champion but congratulations are still in order for Jeff Herrmann who won led our points race and won the Midwest Regional Championship.

Saturday's year-end banquet

I'll be the first to admit that when I hear the word "banquet" I immediately picture YOUR grandmother with her walker, a plastic tray and a plate of Jello jiggling their way past a salad bar with sneeze guard at the Medicare Lounge (you know...MCL?...it's a cafeteria where old people go...get it? MCL? MediCare Lounge? Ugh. WHO LET THESE PEOPLE IN HERE...?).

Like you, I'll bet, I have been to entirely too many "awards banquets"



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that...well...to put it in a word...sucked. I am very happy to report to you that the **Great Lakes/Midwest NASA 2009 Annual Awards Banquet** did NOT suck. In fact--and it pains me a little bit right here in my side to admit this--it was actually very well done.

They had real live decorations. Before we were even inside the door, there was an up-to-the-ceiling thing made out of checkered flags and, I don't know, plants, maybe, and champagne bottles and whatnot that looked festive, welcoming and...great. (I won't name the GTS driver--who doesn't even drink alcohol, by the way--who, on the way out the door at the end of the evening said, "Hey! There's champagne here! Let's steal one!" No, I WILL NOT name him, but I can understand why you might suspect he drives a red 968 that says "Weed Man" on the windshield....).

But I digress.

Just inside the door were paparazzi--seriously...a big cluster of photographers--firing off endless photos with flashes flashing, while a cute blonde bimbo...er...MODEL with a microphone "interviewed" everyone about their races and the season. Inside, more decorations, mercifully dark lighting, a reasonably-priced bar with real live cocktails (plus one free beer or wine per person), a huge room of tables (more than 300 attended) and even a real live stage with a real live Jazz band.

And, you thought it was just going to be burgers, brats and a cooler full of Natty Lights. Tsk tsk.

The awards were many and mercifully brief. Award winners were escorted to the stage by more bimb...sorry, MODELS, and fired through the line, then staged in groups and whisked off to an adjoining room for group photos. It was fast and even though you might wonder why grown adults needed escorts (did I mention the, ahem, MODELS came from Craig's List? Draw your own conclusions) to find the stage, it was hard to argue with the entertainment value.

Between sets of awards were some great (and usually funny) videos put together specifically for the event (Dave...are you going to post those somewhere?). Even the food was fine. It was banquet food, yeah, but with everything else...nobody cared. I mean, really, other than the fact it conflicted schedule-wise with the Buckeyes game, it was about as perfect as it had any chance of being.

When I, fully amazed by this turn of events, made a comment to that effect to **Dave Royce**, he said, "Our goal was to have an event that didn't suck." Well, Dude, that is a set of marching orders they should have used at Chrysler and GM...and, to borrow a potentially-touchy sum-up phrase, Mission Accomplished!



The Putnam 100 Challenge

Saturday's two races were the final points-paying races of the season (so that all the points could be tallied for Saturday's gala). That meant Sunday was just racing for fun. A lot of drivers skipped Sunday either because it didn't sound like enough fun--racing for fun--or for other reasons (I bailed out with a nasty cold). HOWEVER, the ones who stayed had a great time in a race everybody was leery about beforehand...the Putnam 100 Challenge.

Here's the idea: You and a buddy team up. You each drive your own cars. It's a 57-lap, 100-mile race but BEFORE you start, you have to pick your team's target average lap time. You could pick 65 mph, 70 mph, 75 mph, or a fourth category which was Pick Your Own. Your goal was to get as close as possible to your target number without going over. One driver would drive the first part of the race, the other would come on the track after his teammate came off, and the total time for the two cars to complete the 100 miles would be worked out to an average speed.

That means you had to maintain your average through traffic and even count in the time you were in the pits during the change-over and the cold-tire lap(s) by the second guy. Ahead of time there were a lot of people not very interested in this format but I have to tell you that, afterward, everybody I've talked to who was in the race had a great time. So Kudos to Bryan and Dave for putting it on.

And why, you may ask, is this in the GTS update? Simply because two of our own, **Brad Waite** and **Mike "Champagne Weed Man" Ward** won both the Pick-Your-Own class AND took the overall win with an average speed just .4 mph off their target. Congratulations, guys!

The end of the season

And so, we reach the end of the season. Personally, I've had a great time racing and hanging out with all of you and I appreciate your patience as I figured out how to do this silly job. I hope those of you who raced with us felt fairly-treated and enjoyed your time on the track, and I hope those of you who didn't race with us this year will find a way to get out there next year. As far as I can tell, the more people we have at the track, the better the time we all have there.

I've been giving some thought to a few winter keep-you-in-the-loop activities and would be very interested in feedback from anyone inclined to give it.

One idea is a periodic e-mailing of things to think about during the winter to improve your driving, your car, or whatever. After a lot of conversations I've had this year with many of you, I'm particularly interested in subjects along the line of



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"How do I go faster without spending a big pile of money?" There is a lot that you can do with the car you have right now--which is to say FOR FREE--that, in many cases, will result in faster lap times. Most of that has to do with adjustments to the nut behind the wheel and/or becoming a little more methodical in your approach to car set-up.

Accordingly, I'm thinking of a page or so of thoughts periodically, along with, perhaps, a recommended book on a related topic.

Another idea is a mid-winter get-together somewhere on the same kind of subject. That, I suspect, would involve both comradery and alcohol (sorry...you'll have to steal your own champagne) as well as, maybe, some actual educational content.

If you have any interest in either of these (or have a better idea), I'd love to hear it.

Until then, thanks for racing with GTS, have a great off-season, and keep the shiny side up.

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