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## GTS Drivers Enjoy Mid Ohio for the last time in 2010

Last weekend's races at Mid-Ohio were, well, great. With 28 GTS cars taking the various green flags, and with big fields of other cars along with us, the driving was truly fast and furious. And did I mention fun? Fun, too, in spades. Of course, there was a little drama here and there.

When Dave Royce, Regional Director of NASA Great Lakes came up with the names "Thunder" and "Lightning" for the two race groups for this weekend, he wasn't kidding around. Saturday afternoon, about fifteen minutes after the completion of the Thunder race and an hour before the scheduled Lightning roust-about-joust, the skies opened and showed us what REAL thunder and lightning are all about.

I'm not just talking rain here; I'm talking RAIN, in capital letters. It DUMPED on us with serious wind whipping in from the West combined with sustained lightning and thunder--the real kind--enough to send anyone sane running for cover. Just ask Mike Ward who, for reasons I have yet to work out, spent an inordinate (I promised I wouldn't use the word "stupid" here) amount of time out in the heart of the storm fiddling with a \$100 canopy while lightning and thunder crashed all around threatening to let his wife collect on the Whole Life policy gathering dust in his desk even before he made it to the Awards Ceremony. For other reasons I also don't understand, he survived unscathed but...dude. Seriously.

The rain was so bad and lasted so long, Saturday's Lightning race was postponed until 8:00 AM Sunday, displacing both the Thunder and Lightning Warm-Up sessions to, as far as I could tell, no one's displeasure.

## **GTS1**

GTS1, a class of just three cars for most of last season, has turned into the hottest field in Great Lakes GTS racing. This weekend there were ELEVEN GTS1 cars fighting for position including newcomer Thomas Stein, fresh out of comp school; Greg Coward, a reformed 944 Cup (and former GTS1) driver; Christian Cook, back for his first Mid-Ohio race in two years; and Paul Milligan who stuffed a 4-cylinder motor where the (now somewhat damaged) six sat in July moving him down a class. Joining them were



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regulars Bill Edwards, Brant Giere, Ed Baus, Greg Panik, John Graber, Kevin Gibson and Shannon McCue.

In Saturday's qualifying on the Club Course, and thanks to all the rubber left on the track by the Grand Am drivers the weekend previous, Baus was 0.8 seconds under Graber's track record, an unofficial number, of course, and one he wouldn't get to make stick due to slippery conditions in the actual race.

Sunday morning's Lightning race (postponed from Saturday due to the monsoon) started promptly at 8:00 AM under wet conditions and used the Pro Course in spite of qualifying on the Club. Moments before the send-off, however, and well inside the 5-minute warning on the grid, Paul Milligan looked down in horror to see the bolt holding his steering wheel backing itself off with the vibration of his new not-as-smooth-as-a-six 4-cylinder motor.

With eyes the size of pie plates, he slammed it into gear, shot off the grid and came screaming up to the open rear door of my garage yelling, "GET ME A FIFTEEN MILLIMETER DEEP SOCKET! FIFTEEN MILLIMETER DEEP SOCKET! FIFTEEN MILLIMETER DEEP SOCKET!," pointing frantically at the steering wheel center. They grabbed the specified tool and hurried it over only to discover it wasn't big enough so Paul's now slightly-higher pitched mantra changed to "GET A SIXTEEN! GET A SIXTEEN!..." Between the three of us, he, Brad Waite and I managed to get the wheel re-attached and Milligan then roared off to jump back into his position on the grid with a cool 1:46 in hand before he had to roll off for the race.

Whew. You can see it all here: <http://vimeo.com/14241447>

After that, the race was nothing. :-)

Actually, that's not exactly true and, as it turned out, Paul really needed that steering wheel.

While all that fussiness was going on, and thanks to his stellar qualifying time, Baus sat calmly on the grid enjoying his class pole over Graber, Cook, Panik and the rest. As soon as the green flag fell, however, he was anything but calm, going immediately to work distancing himself from the boys. Even with a (slightly) split start, Baus was already past the first two



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of the Spec Miata's before completing the first turn of the race and from there on, well, it was a Miata-fest for him, passing something like eight in the first full lap (count for yourself: <http://www.vimeo.com/14206892>).

Milligan, meanwhile, steering wheel now fully cinched, had started back in 6th position due to a lack of front end grip in qualifying. It seems he tore everything below the front bumper off the front of his car in a little off-track excursion during Saturday's practice session and, lacking the parts to fix it with, was making the best of a bad situation. That, combined with the nice big double-element wing on the back of his car conspired to deliver terminal understeer in spite of the meaty Hoosiers on all four corners. Ah, but dry-track understeer turns into wet-track speed and Milligan and his newly-tight steering wheel made the most of it.

From the start, Milligan, like Baus, was a man on the move. Between the green flag on the backstraight and the start-finish line on the front, Paul moved up six spots (mostly Miata's) in half a lap. The next full lap, five more, including GTS1 cars. The third lap, ELEVEN cars dropped into the tail wake of his BMW, including a completely unsuspecting Ed Baus as Milligan passed him (and two or three other cars) around the outside of the turn at the end of the back straight in a great move thoughtfully performed right in front of the crowd on the hill at Madness. Mrs. Baus claims she warned Ed that Milligan was on a flyer but Ed, maybe still coming off a sugar high from his Friday the 13th birthday festivities claims he never heard the call.

Regardless, at that point the race was on, with both cars running nose-to-tail for the remainder. Milligan held onto his first place position to take the top step on the podium with a margin of just 1.049 seconds but Baus swears that with another lap he would have had a shot at the lead.

Sunday's Pro Course qualifying saw Christian Cook back in racing form as he put his wingless red 944 on the pole in front of a gaggle of aero-laden cars led again by Baus and Graber. To make matters more interesting, however, both Ed and John asked to be moved to the back of the GTS1 field (no complaints from their competitors, of course) so, with a little shuffling on the grid, back they went.

Here's what Cook had to say about it: "After being away from Mid-Ohio for 2 years, I was thrilled with my pole position qualifying run for GTS1. This



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thrill was enhanced given the significant advancement of the GTS1 cars during my absence (think big tires and big wings). Given that the pole earned me a spot behind 30 slower Spec Miata's, traffic management and luck were clearly going to be required to hold the spot.

"After a terrific start, 3 turns later, I lost P1 to Paul Milligan thanks to a Miata which decided to cut some grass and then return to the tarmac right in front of me. Going 3 and 4 wide into Thunder Valley, I was able to regain my position, but by then the 'Polizei Porsche' of Ed Baus was now on my bumper. After keeping him at bay for a full lap, I hopped into the wrong SM line as we went 3 wide into the Carousel, which not only allowed Ed, but also John Graber, past. Damn, back to P3.

"I stayed close to both Ed and John for the entire race, but never managed traffic well enough to get into position to make a run. One of the highlights of the last lap was watching Ed and John carve (or push) their way through no less than five Spec Miata's which were all fighting for the SM victory and not interested in giving an inch. This resulted in the Miata of Chris Price doing a little 'lawn maintenance' at the entrance of Thunder Valley which somehow caused a water drainage cover to be thrown about 50 feet into the air.

"By the end of the race, I had passed over 25 cars, which was a blast."

The final lap of the race, to which Cook eluded above, was a one-lap shootout after the race was stopped briefly to clean up an on-track incident. That meant lots of cars in close proximity and a race on the line, a formula for great, hard, racing. Ultimately, Baus and Graber, in that order, made it up to 2nd overall in the race group and first and second in GTS1. A single Miata was able to keep them at bay but otherwise it was a dominating run. Cook finished third in class, a handful of Miata's back, followed by Milligan, Edwards (nice job Bill!), McCue, Stein, Coward and Gibson.

After a strongly competitive drive, Greg Panik was DQ'd for a pass under yellow but also found himself on the restart with a gearbox full of pudding. He was towed off the track as the only GTS1 casualty of the weekend. Hopefully it's something minor.

Sunday's afternoon race, again from Ed Baus' car:



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## **GTS2**

GTS2 started the weekend a man down as Yours Truly was suspended one race for being an idiot on Friday. Therefore, Saturday's GTS2 field was six cars. Sean Tillinghast, Mike "Lightning ain't no thang" Ward and Brad Waite all qualified within six-tenths of one another and were gridded sequentially. A few ticks back were Matt Markowicz, Wellborn Jack and Breck Lewis.

At the start, Joe Magalotti's pretty green GTS4 911 got past Waite and Ward and acted as a buffer for Tillinghast who managed to get past a couple of GTS3 cars as they negotiated very heavy traffic under threatening skies. Those of us sitting on the hill at Madness felt just a few drops of rain but it turns out that at more or less the same time it was absolutely POURING in the Carousel.

Waite, who has criticized himself in the past for easing up too much in inclement conditions, was determined not to let up a bit, not in the least, NOT AT ALL until the track conditions changed. As it turned out, they changed A LOT just about the time he was cresting the rise into the Carousel and hit the wall of water. That spun him off (without hitting anything, thankfully) dropping him out of the battle and leaving Ward alone in his quest to run down the flying Tillinghast.

Within a lap or so there was a full-course yellow and a Pace Car, conditions that should have given Waite a chance to get back within striking distance. Unfortunately, he was stuck behind a Factory Five unable to run fast enough to close the gap. Waite's screaming and (possibly obscene) gesturing did little to change the situation and when the green flew again he was still nearly half a lap behind Tillinghast and Ward with no real chance to make a three-way race out of it.

On the restart, Tillinghast, being the gentleman he is (actually, I'm being serious here), let several GTS3 cars by so he wouldn't be in the middle of their battle. His kindness gave Ward the chance he needed to close the gap and the two of them ran for five hard laps with Ward ALL OVER the rear bumper of Tillinghast's Tom Hatem BMW. I doubt there was ever a full one-car gap between the two of them during that time, and whenever we



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could see them in the Madness complex it was more like three or four feet. VERY close. It was tough racing and GREAT to watch.

Finally, two laps from the end, Tillinghast was balked slightly by a slower car in the Keyhole and Ward managed to get himself alongside at the exit, preventing Tillinghast from being able to take advantage of the defensive line. They both ran DEEP into the braking zone at the end of the straight but Ward, on the inside, willed himself past and into the lead. A momentary lapse going over Madness almost gave it back to Tillinghast, but then Ward put his head down and went to work on hitting his marks and quickly pulled out a 50-yard lead all the way to the checker for his second-ever win.

So, Saturday's race ended Ward, Tillinghast, Markowicz, Waite, Lewis and Jack.

Afterward, Ward was, as John Graber said it, "on Cloud 9." Absolutely joyous about the win. Almost as fun to enjoy his enjoyment as to have done it yourself.

Well, okay, maybe not that good but, still, he was in a really swell mood.

Sunday, GTS2 was back to a seven-car field and the Mid-Ohio Pro Course. Good managed to put in a 1:38.9 to barely out-qualify Waite, Ward and Markowicz, all of whom were in the 1:39s, followed by Tillinghast, Lewis and Jack. The top five were all gridded together save the GTS3 911 of Ralf Lindakers slotted between Markowicz and Tillinghast.

On the run down to the first turn, Waite managed to out-drag Good who was then also passed under braking by Tillinghast, capitalizing on a spectacular start. Waite, Tillinghast, Good and Ward were locked together in battle with Markowicz and Jack just one car back and Lewis a car behind them (video of the start from Wellborn Jack's car is here:

<http://www.vimeo.com/14193023>). The lead four ran VERY hard for several laps with everyone looking for a way around everyone else. At the expiration of a full-course yellow, Good managed to work his way past Tillinghast after the two went side-by-side at full speed through turn 1 with Tillinghast, covering the inside, leaving enough room for a 944 plus an inch or two and NO MORE.

Good then took off after Waite (who was only a handful of car-lengths



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ahead at that point) while Ward started working on Tillinghast. Eventually, both got past and while Good opened up an eventual 20-second lead, Ward and Waite locked horns in another pitched battle. The two of them fought tooth-and-nail for the rest of the race, swapping positions as often as a politician in an election year with Waite eventually prevailing and getting the nod for second. Ward finished third followed by Tillinghast, Markowicz, Lewis and Jack.

Scott Good managed to lower his own GTS2 track record by a negligible .001 second to 1:37.211.

After the race, both Ward and Waite climbed from their cars dripping with sweat and looking at least as excited as Ward had been the day before over what a great race they'd had. It was excellent, EXCELLENT racing!

### **GTS3**

GTS3 enjoyed a field of five cars this weekend, one of the best turn-outs of the season and, except for Korey Deason, was made up of cars we haven't seen this year in Great Lakes GTS fielded by Kevin Ogrodnik, Vern Anderson, Paul Davison and Ralf Lindakers. Deason's plan for the weekend was simple: Qualify well, get a good start, then run your own race. In Saturday's race, Deason, Anderson and Ogrodnik ran 1-2-3 for almost the entire race although lapped traffic was pretty much constantly providing a nice cushion for Deason. Just before the white flag Anderson and Ogrodnik were passed by the overall Thunder leader leaving the official record to show them a lap down but they were closer than it looks.

Sunday's qualifying saw Deason and Ogrodnik less than two-tenths apart with Anderson another six-tenths back. In the race, Deason pulled out to an early lead he never relinquished, eventually finishing with a nearly 8 second buffer between himself and Ogrodnik who, in turn, finished just 1.2 seconds ahead of Anderson. Those two--Anderson and Ogrodnik--spent the entire race locked in battle, rarely with more than a few car-lengths between them. Paul Davison finished fourth after Ralf Lindakers was DQ'd at the dyno.



## **GTS4**

If GTS3 was all Korey Deason, GTS4 was all Jeff Amos in his silver 911. Qualifying on the GTS pole Saturday and off-pole Sunday (behind Chris O'Donnell's pretty white GTS5 911), Amos pretty well had his way with the three-car GTS4 field comprised of himself, Joe Magalotti and new-to-GTS Tim Haines.

Of all the GTS4 cars, Haines may have had the most harrowing weekend. During practice on Friday he discovered a "grinding" sound in the front left corner of his black 944, a sound which turned out to be both the inner and outer wheel bearings basically grinding themselves into sand. And, although he gave serious consideration to just packing the whole rig up and calling it a weekend, sounder (if not saner) heads prevailed and after some rummaging through the various GTS parts bins here and at nearby homes, suitable--if not perfect--replacement parts were secured and installed, letting him finish the weekend.

In Saturday's race, Amos' GTS pole position advantage lasted about half the first straight as the superior power of O'Donnell's GTS5 911 beat him easily to the first turn. At that point Amos and Korey Deason (GTS3) started a race-long battle which saw them switch positions several times before Amos finally pulled in front for good. Not that it counted for points, but it was a good battle nonetheless. Amos finished a lap ahead of Haines and Magalotti in that order.

In qualifying Sunday, Magalotti gave Amos a bit of a scare, pulling within half a second of Amos' class pole-winning time and then did pretty much the same thing in the race, finishing just 6.3 seconds in Amos' wake. Both cars ran solid laps in the 1:36s with Magalotti posting the quickest GTS4 lap with a 1:36.2, more than a second under his qualifying time. Haines finished a somewhat distant third.

## **GTS5**

Originally slated to be a two-car class, GTS5 ended up being just Chris O'Donnell, back again all the way from his home in Southern California, a trip that seems to be becoming an annual thing for him. Hopefully next year with Nationals heading back to Mid-Ohio we'll be able to actually give him somebody to race with. As it was, he dominated GTS5 with the class pole



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both days and flag-to-flag wins.

For complete results and lap records, please see [www.nasagreatlakes.com](http://www.nasagreatlakes.com).

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