



Chicago, June 11, 2009, NASA Midwest, Inc.

Grattan Raceway/June 5-6, 2009/NASA Great Lakes

GTS Drivers Set 8 Lap Records, 5 New Class Winners at Grattan!

Were you at Grattan last weekend? No, I didn't think so. Me neither. My tummy can't take all the ups and downs and backs and forths--it makes me want to throw up halfway through each session. I don't know a lot about women but I can tell you chicks DO NOT dig racing drivers with puke all over their driving suits. Accordingly, I spent the weekend driving my armchair at home in front of the TV.

As it turns out, you and I both missed a great weekend of racing at Grattan. Here's why...

Grattan re-cap

With GTS cars running in every class from GTS1 to GTS5, Grattan's cool air and clear skies contributed to some of the toughest and fastest racing this season, all of which on a 3-race Friday/Saturday "weekend."

How tough was the competition? Consider that two of the classes, GTS1 and GTS5, saw new track records set in EVERY race of the weekend. Plus, there were new records set in both GTS2 and GTS3 and there would have been yet another, lower GTS3 record--set by a GTS2 car no less--except for the little detail of a missed yellow flag.

Add the fact at least five of the weekend's GTS winners were on the top step of a NASA podium for the first time and that one of them was a friggin' rookie and another a kid and, well, those of us who stayed home missed out.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

GTS1 set the stage

GTS1 was an epic battle between Christian Cook and Jean-Pierre Verbunt. In Friday's qualifying, Cook, the GTS1 lap-record holder coming into the weekend, smoked Verbunt by nearly four seconds in qualifying. It looked to be no contest but apparently nobody remembered to mention that to Jean-Pierre. In the race, Verbunt came out on top, not only beating Cook but also stealing his lap record by a mere .004 seconds at 1:34.392.



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But Cook was not quite yet ready to just roll over and die.

In Saturday's one-qualifying-for-two-races session, Cook pulled himself back in front with a smoking 1:33.564 (not a lap record because it wasn't done in a race), but Verbunt was less the .040 behind and nipping hard at his heels.

In the first Saturday race, Verbunt came out on top again but made it to the line just 0.965 seconds in front of Cook after 15 hard-fought laps. He took his win while lowering the lap record--again--to 1:33.221. Saturday's second race saw both drivers letting everything out of the bag with Cook turning a blistering 1:32.524 only to be eclipsed--again--by Verbunt's 1:31.954. And, Verbunt once again came home with the win.

So, for the record, that's three new track records in three races and a total drop in the lap record of nearly 2.5 seconds. And that's just GTS1...

The big boys

Grattan, if you've never been there, is a small track with twists and turns and hills and, if I remember correctly, several loop-the-loops, too. Okay, maybe not that last but it's more of a go-kart track than it is a place for the big cars. So, imagine somebody bringing a full Grand Am-spec BMW M3 to race there. Got that picture in your head? Now imagine THREE of them (give or take).

Yep.

Fall Line Motorsports unloaded not one but two (count 'em) Grand Am M3s AND an E46 with an M5 V8 stuffed into its nose, all there to fight it out for GTS5 bragging rights, and fight it out they did. On Friday, it was the Padertas, John and Matt, going at it with 16-year-old Matt showing his Dad who's who with a 57-second margin of victory and a new GTS5 lap record of 1:25.845. Life was good. Things were going good. Or, they were until Jack Kachadurian showed up and things got a little more interesting.

In Saturday's race 1, Matt Paderta again came out on top but Kachadurian, who finished a close second, kept him honest while dropping the lap record four-tenths to 1:25.483 in his pursuit. In race 2, Jack put a nail in the coffin by not only beating Matt to the line by 10.5 seconds but also laying down a 1:23.546 lap and lowering the record another two seconds. Two seconds is a lot but imagine that a 1:23 means he somehow managed to AVERAGE over 86 mph on Grattans' goat-path of a track.



Amazing.

It was a great win for Kachadurian but I have an idea we haven't heard the last of Matt Paderta.

So, if you're counting, that's three more lap records logged and people going way too fast. But if you want to talk about going way too fast, you want to talk about Paul Milligan.

Kicking butt, taking names

Milligan--apparently--doesn't get it. I mean...seriously. He's driving a BMW 318i. You know, the one that looks like half a car? You can't go fast in a 318. Going fast requires an M3. EVERYBODY knows that. And, let's face it, he's a rookie. Still has the orange stickers on his car, for crying out loud. Rookies aren't ALLOWED to go fast. Everybody knows that, too. I'm pretty sure it's in the rule book.

But it seems like maybe Paul, in his exuberance to get on track, didn't quite finish reading the rule book because he doesn't seem to know that a rookie in a 318i can't kick some serious butt in GTS2 and then again in GTS3 just to make sure everybody is adequately humiliated.

What am I talking about? Just this: Coming into the weekend, the GTS2 lap record was 1:29.985, set last year by Enzo Campagnolo in a proper race car, a 944 S2. Campagnolo was there this weekend to defend last year's win and record but Milligan, showing no regard whatsoever for past accomplishments, went out on Friday and both won the race AND dropped the lap record by more than a second to 1:28.682 just to make sure everybody knew he was there. That it was Paul's first-ever win in ANY racing ANYwhere, well, that just sweetened the deal.

Did I mention he's driving a 318i and that you can't win in one of those?

To add insult to injury and--in truth--to make the best of a dwindling field on Saturday, both Paul and Enzo bumped themselves up to GTS3 to get enough cars to be contingency-eligible. Campagnolo, flying in his S2 put down a 1:28.814 lap only to be eclipsed--again--by Milligan who managed a screaming 1:27.882--faster even than Scott Berkowitz's brand new, hadn't-even-got-it-out-of-the-wrapper-yet, lap record set the day before. A GTS3 record in, did I mention?, a GTS2 318i (well, nearly a GTS2 car...he took out 80lbs leaving him only about 600lbs over-weight for GTS3).



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After finishing the GTS3 race with Milligan and Campagnolo running 1-2, it was announced that both, in the heat of the battle, had passed under yellow, disqualifying them and promoting Bob Smith and his M3 to the GTS3 win. Another first-time winner (I'm pretty sure).

Berkowitz gets his name on the board

I mentioned Scott Berkowitz's lap record. To those who know him (or know of him), it will be a little shocking to find out he has no current GTS lap records. BMW Club, sure, but NASA GTS? None. Nada. Zip. Zilch. Scotty B drives like lightning but somehow he's not (currently at least) anywhere on the chart. Until last Friday, that is. Driving a car that was beginning to come apart and would later have to retire prematurely with a broken suspension, Berkowitz grabbed Sasha Clark's previous record (1:29.049), tore it to shreds, threw it on the ground and set fire to it.

Here is Scott's description of events: "...I got the jump on the start and led into turn 1 and for the first lap. Got passed on the front straight by the GTS5 car and settled in. Ran that way for the first 6 laps, then I heard a weird noise going into the downhill left-hander (T3). It seemed OK so I continued. Next lap it went pop at the same turn and I couldn't get it to turn left. So I throttle steered it for a lap or so...."

Note the lap numbers here. Scott set the lap record on lap 7. That's after the "weird noise" and maybe or maybe not during the part where he throttle-steered because the car wouldn't turn left.

Yeah. Exactly.

Considering the condition of his car, Berkowitz's 1:27.917 may be an early sign of the second-coming. I only wish we could know what he'd have done with two more races to put it truly out of reach. Maybe next year we'll find out. Shortly after setting his record, Berkowitz parked the car with what turned out to be a disconnected control arm mounting point. He was done for the weekend.

In GTS4, Jamie Frauenberg dominated from flag-to-flag both days. Unfortunately, he was the only GTS4 car at Grattan. Where all the rest of you guys with 4-cars? It's time to get them out of the garage and and heat up the tires. Jamie needs somebody to pick on!

And, as it turns out, there is a great opportunity to do that in just a few weeks at one of the greatest road-racing tracks in all these great United States, our very own Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course.



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Mid-Ohio, July 10, 11 and 12. Don't miss out!

Okay, so, you weren't at Grattan. MAYBE you weren't even out racing with us Easter weekend. I'll give you both of those. Questionable track, tough scheduling. Fine. Done. You're excused.

But now it's almost July and it's Mid-Ohio again and you're running out of excuses not to come. It's time to get your car on the trailer, your helmet out of the attic and your rear in gear. July should be a big turn-out and YOU NEED TO BE THERE. Registration is already open for both July and August, so get in there and get signed up.

I hope to see you (soon) at the track!

Scott Good
NASA Great Lakes GTS Series Director

Contact:
Bryan Cohn
Director of Competition
NASA Midwest, Inc.
bcohn@nasamidwest.com
316 452 5033 Office
316 251 5109 Mobile