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News

By: Tri-Point Motorsports

Espenlaub, Saini Visit Podium in Mosport Doubleheader

CANOGA PARK, Calif. (May. 22, 2009) - Charles Espenlaub and Jason Saini capped a double race weekend at Mosport International Raceway with second and third place finishes in Sundays Round Four of the SCCA Pro Racing SPEED World Challenge Touring Car series.



Charles Espenlaub in the No. 73 Tri-Point MAZDA6 at Mosport (Stephen Gardiner photo).

It was a weekend of uncertain weather and uncertain fortunes in Canada for the Tri-Point team. In Round Three on Saturday, Jason Saini led the trio of blue-and-white Tri-Point MAZDA6s, narrowly missing the podium to finish fourth. The cold, rainy conditions were less favorable to teammate Charles Espenlaub who remained mid-pack most of the race to finish seventh, just behind teammate Eric Foss in sixth.

Saturday Round 3

"Far from boring," is how Jason Saini described his race on Saturday. "I was in a fierce battle for second with Nick Wittmer and Pierre Kleinubing for literally the entire race. We were bumper-to-bumper out there in the wet, swapping positions, and the lap times were constantly dropping as the track dried.

The car was great in the wet conditions. The team has made great strides in our rain performance, commented Jason, I spent most of the race running third, briefly in second, but I made a mistake towards the end trying to pass Nick and that let Pierre by me, so I ended the day in fourth. Though it was a good result, we had a better car than that.

Saini's teammate Eric Foss agreed. He set the fastest time for the Round Three race in a thrilling qualifying session on a drying track. Competitors saw the top of the grid re-sort continuously as lap times fell throughout the session. Unfortunately, Eric's car stalled at the start of the race, sending him to the back of the field.

Foss joked, "You know, I love being a rookie in World Challenge this year, because I can use that as an excuse! After the start, I felt like I had a really dominant car, which gave me a lot of confidence, knowing I had another race the next day. He would go on to earn the Débaufre Fastest Race Lap award on his journey back through the field, eventually finishing sixth.

Charles Espenlaub, piloting the No. 73 Tri-Point MAZDA6, finished the race in seventh. "I fell off the lead pack a little, and wasn't able to close the gap in the wet, so I focused on keeping it clean knowing we had another race in less than 24 hours.

Sunday Round 4

The next morning brought sunny skies, a dry track, and another thrilling qualifying session to Mosport. The Tri-Point squad built on their speed from Saturday and, for much of the qualifying session, held the top three positions before losing second to RealTime's Pierre Kleinubing at the last moment.

Eric Foss once again qualified on the pole, but the top five would be inverted by a coin-toss, so Foss would start fifth, Espenlaub third, and Saini second. Once the opening laps had settled down, Espenlaub and Saini found themselves chasing Peter Cunningham's leading Acura.

Espenlaub recalls, "It took Jason and me a couple of laps to get clear of [Seth] Thomas and Kleinubing behind us, and that allowed Peter to open up a gap on us. We both worked together to mount an attack on Peter, and were able to close in on him later in the race. I ended up making a mistake in Turn Three with only a few laps to go, and we just weren't able to make it happen."

Sunday's second-place finish was especially sweet for Charles, who has gone nearly two years without a podium finish in World Challenge. "It's great to be up here after a string of bad luck. I really have to thank Mazda for all their support, and especially John Doonan who works tirelessly on behalf of all of Mazda's racing programs."

The champagne on the podium was shared by teammate Jason Saini, who echoed Charles sentiments. Today's race was a lot of fun. Charles and I were going back and forth on the radio, trying to figure out how to catch Peter. Even though we came up slightly short, it's great to see Charles back up there where he belongs."

After being demoted to the fifth starting position by a coin toss, Foss immediately started working his way back to the front when the start lights went out. His opening lap efforts earned him the AutoWeek Move of the Race award. I had a

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great launch and quickly got down the inside of Jason and Pierre. By the time we got around to Turn Five, I was glued to Peter's bumper and he had a little slide heading onto the back straight. That gave me some momentum and I was able to pass him on the outside going through Turn Eight. Unfortunately, Peter got a little loose and slid into my side and I spun off in the grass."

This was not to be the end of Foss' misfortune, as he would visit the pits for a flat tire only a few laps from the finish. "Even though this weekend was a bit disappointing, I'm still very thankful for the opportunity Mazda has given us to be here. I'm certainly learning a lot and I think we are going to be very strong at Watkins Glen."

Leaving Mosport, Jason Saini retains his Drivers Championship points lead over Pierre Kleinubing, and Mazda remains second in the Manufacturers' Championship, eight points behind Acura.

The series travels next to historic Watkins Glen for the July 4th weekend and Round Five of the SCCA Pro Racing SPEED World Challenge Touring Car series.

TV air times on SPEED:

Round 3 Mosport Race 1: June 16, 2pm EST.

Round 4 Mosport Race 2: July 7, 2pm EST.

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