

Race Report

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2015 NASA Eastern Championships

September 3-6

944 Spec Class

The 2015 Eastern Championships took place at the scenic, historic, and challenging Virginia International Raceway. It was one of the hardest fought championships in history, with top contenders from many regions all capable and determined to take home the crown. Drivers and crew journeyed as far as 1700 miles to participate in this fantastic NASA event. Dan Williams' car saw both coasts this year, such is the draw of the Championships. Five different drivers nosed into the lead at some point during the three official races, leaving the Championship wide open even through the last lap. This and changing conditions made for exciting racing action throughout the weekend.

Qualifying Race 1:

What started as a hot and humid morning turned into thunderstorms and a soggy race. Despite the change in conditions and poor visibility, all the competitors managed to cope with conditions well and come out unscathed. Thanks to the driver-friendly chassis of the 944 and great talent among the competitors, some heated racing broke out with the top 3 drivers swapped positions several times. Neal Agran started on pole, but was quickly shuffled back to third by Dan Piña and Dan Williams. In short order, Agran went back by Williams and Piña as they battled and didn't relinquish his hold on P1 for the rest of the race. Behind him, Jason Stanley snuck into the mix, moved up 3 positions to 3rd and ultimately finished 4th. The race for second place was most hotly contested. Despite coming from the sunny Colorado, the tenacious Williams pulled off a great race in the wet, swapping positions with Piña many times. Piña used his pro-drifting car control skills to good advantage, coming away with second. After the race, Agran stated that when Williams was in P2, he was "all over me like a cheap suit". The rest of the field was unable to overcome the poor visibility and monsoon conditions, falling out of contention but finishing the race undamaged. Final finishing order was: P1 Neal Agran, P2 Dan Piña, P3 Dan Williams, P4 Jason Stanley, P5 Jason Walsh, P6 Michael Dearstyne, P7 Michael Cooper, P8 John Torgersen.

Qualifying Race 2:

Grid was set based on fastest times in the wet race Friday, with Dan Williams on pole. The next 3, Piña, Stanley, and Agran, followed closely behind with only a spread of a half second between them. Race time found the weather dry and hot, which suited Jason Walsh much better. Walsh jumped from the back of the pack to 4th on the start, and with a last lap pass ultimately finished 2nd. But it was Williams who

emerged from the starting pack first, and took the early lead. Piña got by Williams in lap 2, and Williams attempted to reciprocate in lap 4. Williams got a run down the front straight, going door to door with Piña, and both went deep into turn 1 with Agran tucked closely into their slipstream. Williams went wide on the outside, allowing Piña, Agran and Walsh to freight train by, shuffling Williams to 4th. Nose to tail racing ensued among the leaders, until late in the race, when Agran made his move on Piña to snatch the lead. Piña tried to retake the lead in the last lap, but he put wheels off, allowing Stanley and Williams to take the final two podium spots.

Championship Race:

Sunday grid was set with Agran on pole and Williams off pole, followed by Piña, Walsh, Stanley, Dearstyne, Cooper, and Torgersen. At the green flag, the field went deep into turn one, with Agran and Williams emerging side-by-side. The winner of this skirmish did not emerge until turn 3, when Agran finally tucked in behind Williams. One row back, Walsh and Piña were running door-to-door, but this ended when a curb hop side stepped Walsh into the side of Piña in turn 4, sending Walsh lightly into the wall and leaving Piña with some added toe out and camber. Walsh retired, and Piña gave up one spot to Jason Stanley, which he reclaimed a few corners later. The red mist claimed another on the second lap when Williams braked deep into turn one to fight off a pass attempt by Agran on the outside. Unable to hold his line, Williams had his back end slide out into Agran. The resulting hip check left both cars off track left, and Agran -- with toe-out visible from trackside -- facing backwards. Both cars were able to continue.

Meanwhile, up front, Stanley and Piña swapped the lead a couple of times, allowing Williams to close the gap up after his off, and put himself back in the mix of the leaders. Stanley and Williams were the next to do-si-do, swapping the 2nd place position 3 times, before Williams set his sights on Piña. Williams set up the draft pass down the back straight, only to have Piña get back by in an over-under move in turn 1. Having a front row seat for this move, Stanley decided to try it for himself, and executed the same pass in turn one on the last lap to wrestle 2nd place from Williams. Behind him, Agran had gamely piloted his wounded 944 back through the field to cross the line 4th. Dearstyne improved on his grid position finishing next in line. The field was rounded out by Cooper, and Torgersen, who were both new to NASA Nationals this year, and improved both their cars and racecraft throughout the weekend.

In a show of sportsmanship at impound, Williams voluntarily accepted his DQ for at fault contact with Agran before the podium ceremony, which allowed Agran to spray the bubbly on the 3rd step of the podium. This left the final Championship standings as follows:

Dan Piña

Jason Stanley

Neal Agran

Michael Dearstyne

Michael Cooper

John Torgensen

Jason Walsh

Dan Williams

Normally, the credits would come next, but there is a story that needs to be told. The 944 Spec East Coast Champion this year did not know he was coming until a day before the event started. Having a new baby and the expenses that come with that, Dan Piña had decided to sit this year out. The responsible thing to do, certainly, but clearly painful. Steve Brewster of the Great Lakes Region injured his shoulder shortly before Nationals, and in an incredibly generous gesture, offered his entry to Piña. The deal was sweetened (literally) by Tara Brewster offering to crew for the event. Before it was done, the Brewster Transportation motor coach was thrown in! Ray Freundt of the Midwest Region provided the Toyo Proxes RR tires to make this all happen. All that was left was to drive 18 hours through the night, and then go on to win the Championships. The 944 Spec “Band of Brothers” (and a sister) at work, combined with a superhuman effort by Piña. A “Cinderella Story”, to be sure!

By all accounts, much fun was had at all at this event, and those who sat out this year missed out on a great event, a great track, and great camaraderie. Let's make this big next year!

Thanks to:

NASA Pro Racing

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The wives and families of the competitors for the support!
