

Close but no cigar

Written by Steve Lewis

Thursday, 11 November 2010 18:34

The final race weekend of the NorCal season took place at Infineon Raceway on the cool fall weekend of November 6 & 7. Attendance was light with rain in the forecast and an unfriendly run group situation (all closed wheel race cars in one group). Jerry, Rick, and I were the only racers fearless enough to show. The battle for the championship would come down to these two races for Rick and me. I had to win both and Rick had to finish 2nd or better.



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Saturday didn't start off well for me when the car sputtered in the corners of lap one in the warm up session. I knew I didn't have a lot of gas but I didn't realize it was quite that low! The good news was I had plenty of time to get gas since qualifying wasn't for another 6 hours and the race 2 hours after that. Rick did the smart thing and stayed in bed for the morning session.

We were all present for qualifying which was uneventful. Traffic really wasn't an issue for me and I set a pretty good lap finally breaking into the 1.56 range at Infineon. Ironically, I thought I was slow as I had major oversteer the whole session. Rick was quicker and took the pole by 2 tenths with me second and Jerry third.

For the race, we had our own green flag which was nice but they chose to put several much more powerful classes behind us which wasn't so nice. Rick took his usual inside pole position with me on the outside and Jerry behind Rick. We all got about the same jump on the green flag but two of the faster cars motored by on the way up the hill. One of those, an E36 BMW, was slow in the corners which I had noted in qualifying. Luckily, he moved over in front of Rick for T2 and I was able to pinch Rick out behind the BMW and grab the lead. Again the BMW used superior HP to pull away briefly then held me up through all the corners. Going into T11, I forced the issue on the brakes from about 100 yards back and got around him to stay. Rick wasn't so lucky and got held up longer which enabled me to pull a gap and hold it for the race duration. Jerry and I both turned some of our best laps ever at Infineon and I even briefly held the lap record again but then Rick took it back with a very quick 1:56.237. By the end of the race, we just about needed headlights to find the finish line but I managed the win with Rick second and Jerry third.

Sunday morning brought torrential downpours and a very wet track for practice. I had removed my wiper assembly earlier in the season to save weight (it never rains in CA, right?) but luckily I had it with me. Jerry and I had the forethought Saturday to Rain-X our windshields in anticipation of the rain (thanks Jerry!). Rick had wipers. Rick and Jerry both had R888's with a little tread. I had only RA-1's with nothing but a couple of lines left for "tread". Practice was an experience! The track literally felt like driving on ice. After a few laps and a few near death

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experiences, I came in to find Jerry and Rick already waiting in the paddock. At least we were all about the same.

After practice, I got to work installing my wipers, softening the shocks, and disconnecting the sway bars. Rick and Jerry had stock style bars which are not easily disconnected so they chose to hold with what they had. Qualifying was a night and day difference compared to practice for me. I managed to take the pole by about 2 seconds with Rick second and Jerry third.

We were supposed to have our own start again but the Spec E30s blew theirs so we had to do a second pace lap. Our pace car left our group and pulled us together with the Spec Miatas. This worked to my advantage when one of the Miatas forgot their hood pins and got a nice close up of the top of his hood (been there, done that). When he pulled off, I took his spot in the formation next to another Miata. That stuck Rick one row back and Jerry next to him. The Miatas accelerated way before the drop of the green and we all followed suit. I had an exciting moment when a yellow Miata lost it in T1 and spun across the track towards me.

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