

California. When you think of California you might think of the sandy beaches of Los Angeles. You might think of the tech monkeys in Silicon Valley. You might think of the bottle of wine on your table from Napa Valley. But no, this is Monterey: The Historics, Pebble Beach and Laguna Seca raceway, home of NASA's Northern California/Southern California crossover event. Drivers came from Arizona, Nevada, and our fine Golden State. New friends were made and past acquaintances renewed for a race around an old dry lagoon.



We were expecting a little more temperate weather than what greeted us on Friday as we dropped off the cars and settled in for the weekend. Saturday would remain at elevated temperatures in the 80s, the occasional breeze to take the edge off. It wasn't high desert heat, or a smothering central valley blanket but our warmup session was already hot, seemed like it may have been sapping some performance from the engines as most of the times felt a second or two off our practice pace last year.

I'd just gotten my car back from some extensive body work and a few minor tweaks, wanted to get a feel for a couple laps before I got aggressive. Brake markers and shift points were all jumbled in my head, much as our 944s were mixed in with a group of Spec E30 BMWs. I caught a few E30s tossing their cars into the dirt, especially around turn 6 and 9. Turn 6 is a high-speed kink into an uphill. To get it right gets you a great pull up-slope into the legendary corkscrew. To get it wrong at best leaves you bogging, a duck on a pond for your fellow racer to hunt down. At worst you'll be in the barrier at 70mph. Turn 9 is a big downhill sweeper that you have to get the line right for unless you want understeer and a sand trap to beach you. I mentioned old acquaintances: One of the E30s in our run-group was piloted by our friend, Charlie Buzzetti, turning up in a Roundel coat instead of the accustomed shield of Stuttgart. At least we got to crack jokes at the driver's meeting.

Qualifying:

Jim Hicks, fresh off a great run at Sonoma Raceway and utilizing the age-old power of "lots of seat time" would take pole. He was nearly a half second up on Ken Myers. I ran third, less than a tenth behind, and on the desirable inside grid position. Steve Lewis, fourth, Thomas Atteberry fifth and Jim Richmond, sixth. Less than two seconds covered the top seven qualifiers. The field rounded out with John Niedernhofer, Mary Riddel, Everett Delano, Simon Peck and Jason Jane. The pace was picking up.

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Tuesday, 29 July 2014 23:25

Saturday Race:

It was almost over before it began. Several minutes after we gridded, officials told us that "it would be a while." Gary Walton, PRC's chief steward, informed me that Jerry Kunzman's brand new tow truck had gotten stuck at the top of the corkscrew while trying to pull someone out. Nearly ten minutes of track time elapsed. I felt like an overcooked burrito as the sun beat on us, engines idle, no air conditioning, three layers of fireproof clothing, helmet, gloves, the works.

Finally the flags came down and they waved us onto the track. The pace car was trying to make up for lost time and took an aggressive trot out the gate, which spread the field. I took my spot behind Jim Hicks, Steve next to me. Jim did a slight gas/brake and I lifted right when the green flag flew. It dropped slightly early (what did I say about making up for lost time?). I felt the entire field open its mandibles to chew me up and hammered the throttle in a belated attempt to stay alive. Steve slipped neatly in front of me and Jim Richmond pulled his rear quarter panel past my door. We were three wide as the heavy braking zone of Turn 2 fast approached, Steve held off my inside dive on entry while making his car wide enough mid-corner to lure Jim Richmond into the marbles. Steve flashed some oppo right in front of us to seal the deal at the exit. Showoff.



Jim Richmond recovered enough to give me a run inside of 3. I gave room at the apex, then was able to pull ahead into Turn 4, a quick right-hander. I got a brief run on Steve up the hill, but a missed shift and overrev made me think better of it and I backed out, trying to keep my momentum up so I could see what was going on behind me.

What was going on was an epic battle between Thomas Atteberry, Jim Richmond and Simon

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Peck. I was gapping them steadily while Hicks, Myers and Lewis were gapping me. It wouldn't last.

Simon Peck had broken free. I had a good gap and tried to manage it. Mis-shift here, coasting too much there, a little wide somewhere else. Small mistakes ate into my lap times. Lap by lap number 52 was steadily eating into my comfort zone. I was holding myself on track and everything felt good mechanically, but the pace wasn't coming together, I was hoping for the checkers to drop. What was once a comfortable margin was now a white bumper with blue and red stripes filling my rearview. Simon Peck put together a good run on me through the infield and was able to make a pass stick at the corkscrew. We came around turn 11. White flag: One lap remaining. If only.

Simon Peck went defensive into 2 and I had a glimpse of a look into 3 but it would have been total banzai. On the final turn of the final lap we both blew 11, Simon locked up a touch and my timing was not quite right mid corner. That was that.

Saturday finish:

The podium would be: Jim Hicks, Ken Myers, and Steve Lewis. Simon Peck served notice with the fastest time of the race, 1:58 and change, during a storming drive from second-to-last through the field.

Sunday:

Mother Nature had it in her mind to mess with us. Sharp winds and steady rain came down through early morning. California's in a drought so we'll take what we can get, but really? Rain in July? The forecast said there was a 1% chance of precipitation. We should've all bought lottery tickets. And it had to rain again right before our session started. I was all prepped and I could hear the cars in the run-group before us throttle up, pull off, and throttle down as drops fell on them and track conditions varied. It didn't make for much more than speckled Tarmac but it added some tension.

Jim Hicks would set the fastest time of the weekend thus far with a 1:48.279. I somehow managed second fastest with a 1:50 while mostly working brake and turn-in timing in several specific areas that had vexed me yesterday. The rest of the field fell in line doing course checks, installation laps and running to conditions.

Qualifying:

All this set up a gonzo qualifying session. Jim Hicks was a broken record with pole. The next seven drivers were all within a second! Tomas Atteberry was the story, in the two hole at 1:49 flat. Ken Myers had a spin at the top of the corkscrew mid session, but he kept the car going and safety vehicles remained off-track. The rest of us were able to stay out of trouble. The grid: 1:48.564 Jim Hicks

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1:49.037	Thomas Atteberry
1:49.107	Steven Lewis
1:49.279	Simon Peck
1:49.535	Auburn Schmidt
1:49.576	Ken Myers
1:49.927	Jim Richmond
1:49.950	Everett Delano
1:50.719	John Niedernhofer
1:52.158	Mary Riddel
1:58.671	Jason Jane

Sunday Race:

Nothing is like the start of a race with a decent field. Kept my eyes on the flag this time and improved my start even though I still wouldn't call it good. Held position and we were three wide again into Turn 2, this time myself on the inside, Simon Peck outside, making a Tom Atteberry sandwich. We ran:

Jim Hicks,
Steve Lewis,
Simon Peck,
Auburn Schmidt
and Ken Myers
through the infield.

Simon Peck carried a run uphill and pulled out for a look on Steve Lewis into 6. I reacted with an early lift, cautious of contact or spins at a corner I had history with. It gave Myers just enough momentum to slip even with me outside of the corkscrew and he took it down the crest while Lewis held Peck tail to bumper through 9, 10 and 11.

On the next lap Peck had a look on Lewis into 2. Lewis went deep and held it wide, door to door on the exit of 2 but took a gap into 3. Myers made his presence felt and went bumper to bumper on Peck through 4 and 5. I got a brief run on Myers but couldn't get enough speed to attempt a pass. Peck had a good run out of the corkscrew and opened some space on us as we streamed downhill, again on Lewis' tail through 10 and 11. I was right at Myers into 11 but he got a better exit and opened some space on the main straight. Meanwhile Hicks was off into the sunset.

Steve Lewis was again very wide around 2, but held his momentum and maintained position. Simon Peck stayed on his bumper, and made a daring show again into 6, claiming the apex in a risky corner. Steve Lewis relented, costing him precious momentum and three positions on the upslope, Peck, Myers and myself able to slip by.

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Ken Myers was able to stay with Simon Peck, I was able to hang onto Myers' bumper and Lewis was all over me. Myers had a look at Peck into 5 but couldn't draw any overlap. We continued

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nose to tail for a few laps, Lewis taking a couple looks at me into 2 on consecutive circuits. Lewis got a run on me out of 4 and made it stick through 5, so I was resigned to front row witness of another fantastic four-way battle.

Resetting the order: Jim Hicks in the distance. Simon Peck from Ken Myers from Steve Lewis from Myself. Jim Richmond hung around in the rearview, tailed by Atteberry, Niedernhofer, and Delano.



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