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M4 GTS LA & TOKYO

THIS ISSUE:
LA AUTO SHOW
TOKYO MOTOR SHOW
BMW BERLIN MARATHON

A TALE OF TWO RACES

BMW'S ONCE AGAIN TAKE TOP PLACES IN THE 25 HOURS OF THUNDERHILL.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY INGO SCHMOLDT

Haven't you heard, people? We have a drought going on here in California! Well, apparently Mother Nature didn't get the message, and in an El Nino year, we had one event that became two very distinct races.

The 25 Hours of Thunderhill is one of the most grueling endurance races in the world. Run by the North American

Sports Association (NASA), this was the thirteenth version of the winter endurance race that began as a twelve-hour race on the Thunderhill race track in the Northern California town of Willows. In 2015, the green flag dropped at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, December 5, and the checkered flag came out at noon on Sunday.

In endurance races, there are many different classes running on the track at the same time, and speed differences can be astonishing. The fastest lap time during the 2015 25 Hours was set in Davidson Racing's Norma M20F Sports Prototype: 1:39.937. The slowest was the 2:11.573 of a Honda Civic. This kind of speed differential means that it's vitally important for



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The El Diablo Motorsports/Bimmerworld #30 leads a BMW pack through the Turn Twelve-Turn Thirteen esses.

everyone on the track to pay the utmost attention at all times; the opportunity for mayhem is literally waiting at every corner.

But speed is not the most crucial component of this event. Consistency and reliability are what's needed if you hope to podium here.

The three-mile course features fifteen turns; it's a good mix of full-throttle straights, interesting elevation changes, and tight off-camber corners. For the 25 Hours, NASA combines cars from nearly every sanctioning body in the country into six classes: ES (anything goes), ESR (anything goes for sports racers), and E0, E1, E2, and E3, depending on prep level. BMWs ran in three classes this year: ES, E0, and E1.

25 hours straight? A demanding course? Vastly different racing vehicles sharing the same space? To add even more spice to this mix is the variability of December weather in this part of the country; the 25 Hours has been known to have freezing cold, pea-soup fog, torrential rain, and

hail—potentially all in one race. The 2014 event saw pouring rain during qualifying on Friday, yet miraculously the rain stopped just hours before the race started, and did not resume until an hour after the race was over.

But 2015 might have been different; rain had been falling on and off all week in the run-up to the race. Drivers qualified under mixed conditions, with everyone cautiously keeping out of trouble. After all, in a race of this length, it's definitely not where you start, but where you finish!

Race Day itself began with a beautiful dawn. It was cold, but not the sub-freezing temperatures we've seen in the past. All forecasts showed that rain would show itself in the evening hours, but should subside before dawn on Sunday, and sure enough, the race began under clear and fast conditions.

A few spins in the early laps showed some of the built-up tension in the drivers; no major accidents, however, and after half an hour or so, the race reached a good tempo. Unfortunately, the people

photographing the event—like me—were dismayed to see the clouds come in thick and fast, and by 4:00 p.m., it was so dark that it seemed like midnight; there would be no spectacular sunset for this race.

Just after 9:00 p.m., earlier than expected, the rain began to fall softly. It would intensify at times, and then slack off to a light drizzle, but never completely abated. This led to some tough tire choices during pit stops for the faster cars: Would they stay on slicks or move to rain tires? Many teams had intermediates, but how long would they last?

It was around this time that we saw some crashes and some eventful moments. The achingly gorgeous Ginetta LMP3 car run by Ryno Racing spun coming out of Turn Fifteen and crashed directly into the pit wall, ending its race. Fire befell another familiar competitor, a Lotus Exige by V/M Racing that would become fully engulfed at the end of the front straight by Turn One and have to retire. Overall, however, driving talent prevailed, and it was a relatively



The Stammer Racing E46 M3 runs ahead of the Ginetta LMP3 and the Factory Five GTM car.

trouble-free race as the rain intensified.

Warmer-than-normal temperatures greeted the race teams in the early hours of the morning as the rain continued to cycle through. There was no dawn, just a gradual lightening of the gloom that surrounded the track. Doppler radar showed

that the rain should stop just an hour or so before the race ended, potentially setting up some memorable sprints to the finish. Alas, that was not to be—the skies failed to clear. In fact, the race almost finished under a full-course yellow flag; fortunately, the course was cleared with a



Grip Racing's #95 E46 runs just ahead of the Ginetta LMP3 early in the race; #95 would eventually finish second in the E1 class.

few minutes left, setting up the prospect of an exciting last few laps for some of the competitors.

When 25 hours struck the digital clock on the race tower, the checkered flag flew for the Flying Lizard Motorsports Audi R8 LMS to claim the overall and ES Class victory. The car and team were a model of consistency throughout the race; they finished a dominant 690 laps—35 laps clear of the rest of the field! Fast and sure, the Audi was piloted by notable professional drivers including Johannes van Overbeek, Darren Law, and Guy Cosmo.

The highest overall finisher in a BMW was the Stammer Racing/Bavarian Performance team, which took fourth overall in their E46 M3, with 626 laps completed—another strong result for the Stammer team, who finished second in the ES Class, third overall in 2014. The last two years have been focused on being quick enough to stay in touch with the fastest prototypes, Porsches, and Audis, while relying on great reliability—and on drivers who don't put a wheel wrong. In 2015, as the yellow flag lifted with only ten minutes left in the race, they had the Gryphon Racing Praga Prototype behind them, on the same lap



Grip Racing's Tic Tac-livery #0 car leads the El Diablo Motorsports #30 coming out of the esses into the morning's damp gloom.



and easily turning fifteen seconds a lap quicker. With just two laps left, driver Derek Welch had his mirror filled with the red prototype sitting on his bumper. For those two laps, he made that E46 exceedingly wide, and finished ahead of the Praga by only 0.697 seconds—yes, after 25 hours, less than a second separated these two teams.

“On the next-to-last lap, the Gryphon made up the gap and was within a few car lengths,” said Welch after the race. “I had to really focus—work traffic and begin taking risks. This was it: last lap, hero or zero. They had the cornering speed, but luckily not enough to make it happen. Turn Ten, I got slightly over-ambitious with the throttle; the car snapped sideways, but I gathered it up and sneaked past a Miata just before the back straight. With a decent run and two corners remaining, I managed to hang on—with him on my tail.” The driver smiled, “Crazy stuff! In the past ten years, I’ve never had a 25 Hours finish even on the same lap, much less within a second. Considering the ups and downs during the race, it felt like a win. The team did awesome, the car didn’t skip a beat, and in two consecutive years we’ve finished strong. I’m very proud of everyone involved.”

In another example of the dangers of endurance racing, Stammer team-owner and driver Jeff Stammer would suffer a race-ending injury: a compound fracture of his leg. How bad was this racing accident? It happened in the pits!

The One Motorsports Team, with its ultra-fast Radical, was pitting right next to the Stammer team. Around 2:00 a.m., there was a miscommunication within the team, and the driver drove off with the air-jack hose still attached. The metal fitting ripped off, and the high pressure hose began to whip around the adjoining pits. In the melee, diving out of the way, Stammer broke his leg. One Motorsports

Pizzino, Akhromstev win at Thunderhill



Club Racers take to the track at Thunderhill.

Three races were on tap at Thunderhill in November when the Golden Gate Chapter hosted Tire Rack BMW CCA Club racers as part of a driving-school weekend. I managed to grab the pole for the first race by a tenth of a second—in a B-Modified E90 M3—over Daniel Akhromstev (C-Modified E36 M3), and was able to take the lead into Turn One with Akhromstev, Vic Pizzino (C-Mod E46 M3), and Gil Caravantes (B-Mod E92 M3) right behind me.

Akhromstev and Pizzino got me on lap four, but Akhromstev dropped two wheels and spun, leaving Pizzino and me to battle it out. We finished in that order. Caravantes fell into the clutches of Andrew Morton (GTS E36 M3), and the two had a great race. Julie Wolf (I-Prepared E36 M3) had her hands full with a charging Dean Mansour (C-Mod Z4 M coupe), who started from the back after missing qualifying. Tom Bell (J-Prepared Z3) and Joseph DePillo (Spec E46 330i) were close the whole race, with Bell just ahead at the finish line.

Race Two saw Pizzino on the pole, with Akhromstev back on form on the outside of the front row. I sat on the inside of Row Two, with the outside position held by Brett Strom in Caravantes’ car. Strom got a great start; he was in first by Turn Two and was slowly pulling away from the field when he was sidelined by a blown power-steering hose. Akhromstev drove a solid race for the win, and I was just able to hold Pizzino for second. Wolf and David DePillo (Spec E46 330i) had a great race, with Wolf just holding DePillo off. Bell bested Joe DePillo again by a second at the finish line.

In the eighteen-lap feature race, Akhromstev missed a shift going into Turn One, putting his M3 mid-pack as Pizzino, Caravantes, and I worked together to distance ourselves from him as he worked his way back to the front. But Akhromstev methodically picked off one car at a time, and was in the lead by the tenth lap when Pizzino broke a shifter, leaving me to battle it out with the C-Mod racer for the win. We battled to the last lap; finally, Akhromstev held me off by 0.3 seconds at the end of the race.

Bell again threw the kitchen sink at Joseph DePillo, winning by just a second. Robert Seibel (PTB E36 M3) and Fernando Mujica (I-Sport E36 M3) also had a great race-long battle, with Seibel just holding off Mujica at the end.

Kent Williamson was the competition steward, Brett Strom was the tech steward, and Larry Fletcher was the timing-and-scoring steward.—*Ralph Warren*

Tire Rack BMW CCA Club Race at Thunderhill Raceway

11-15-2015 Golden Gate Chapter Feature sprint 18 laps*

Overall Position	Position in Class	Class	Driver	Model	Best time
1	1	CM	Daniel Akhromstev	E36 M3	01:52.3
2	1	BM	Ralph Warren	E90 M3	01:53.1
3	2	BM	Gil Caravantes	E92 M3	01:55.0
4	1	IP	Julie Wolf	E36 325is	01:58.4
5	2	IP	Vernon Anderson	E36 M3	01:58.8
6	1	Spec E46	David DePillo	E46 330Ci	01:58.9
7	1	J/P	Tom Bell	E36 Z3 roadster	02:00.5
8	2	Spec E46	Joseph DePillo	E46 330ci	02:00.9
9	1	PTB	Robert Seibel	E36 M3	02:06.6
10	1	IS	Fernando Mujica	E36 M3	02:07.7
11	2	CM	Jim Bassett	E36 325is	02:00.3
12	3	CM	Vic Pizzino	E46 M3	01:51.9
DNF	DNF	CM	Dean Mansour	E86 Z4 M coupe	01:57.6

* Results for the feature sprint is presented here. Results for all races are posted at www.bmwccaclubracing.com



◀ Lance Boicelli celebrates the El Diablo Motorsports/BimmerWorld victory in the E0 class.

▶ Stammer Racing demonstrates the aquaplane technique on Sunday morning; most years, the 25 Hours sees some rain, but 2015 was challenging.



A pre-race pose: the Stammer Racing/Bavarian Performance team.



First place in E1 went to Grip Racing Team drivers Mark Drennan, Addison Lee, Brian Ghidinelli, Mason Filippi, and Rylan Hazelton.

was disqualified, but the damage was done: Unfortunately for Stammer, it meant the end of the race and a visit to the hospital, followed, no doubt, by months of recovery. From all of us reading *Roundel*, get better soon, Jeff!

In the E0 Class, it was a podium sweep by BMWs—and no more broken legs. The El Diablo Motorsports/BimmerWorld 325i took the top step with 617 laps, only nine laps behind the Stammer & Gryphon Dice and ten laps in front of the Edge Motorworks E46 M3. Finishing a further four laps behind for third place was the RoadShagger Racing M3.

James Clay, founder of BimmerWorld and member of the El Diablo Motorsports team, talked about what it took to take the car to victory. “Every step we took this weekend, from the time we arrived, was in a forward direction. The

car, the drivers, and the team as a whole progressed and improved every lap and every turned wrench. We solved problems permanently, got through a long work list, and amazingly had zero issues for the duration of the race. This is a true testament to Lance Boicelli and Scott Smith’s tireless work, and to the fantastic crew they have assembled over the years. I drove with Lance in his first 25 Hours effort, and it was special to return to his team, get to drive one of our previous cars in classic livery, and score a meaningful win in this grueling race.”

Boicelli puts an even finer point on it by recalling what it means to compete in an event like this as an amateur: “Fun—it has to be fun!” he says. “That has always been a fundamental goal of mine every time I run a car in the 25 Hours.”

One class level down, E1 racers saw the

dominant Grip Racing Team take both the first and second-place trophies. In fact, this “BMW class” saw six of the top seven spots garnered by 330i’s or M3s.

Grip Racing is a group of veteran Pacific Northwest racers led by long-time best friends Chuck Hurley and Jason Vein. Returning from the 2014 event with a second-place finish, the team fielded two Spec E46s built by Hurley in the E1 class, with the #95 Red Bull-theme car driven by Hurley and Vein, plus Andrew Newell, Spencer Trenery, Sean Wheeler, and Kevin York. The #0 Tic-Tac-theme car was driven by California racers Mark Drennan, Mason Filippi, Rylan Hazelton, Addison Lee, and Brian Ghidinelli. “It was cold, dark and nasty!” says Ghidinelli. “Teams have to be at their very best just to finish this thing, and Grip Racing brought expertly-prepared cars and



The Stammer Racing team executing a quick single tire change stop early in the race.



The Bullet Motorsports Team t 330Ci takes on fuel. They finished seventh in the E0 class.

performed nearly 50 perfect pit stops, keeping us out on track. This is my fifth attempt to conquer the 25, so watching the cars cross the finish line together in first and second was very special.”

On another very fitting note, Ghidinelli added that Garth Stein, author of *The Art Of Racing In The Rain*, a book based on one of the Grip Racing drivers, was in their pit box for the weekend. And each car had an extra name next to the drivers’ names: Enzo, the dog who narrates the book.

Editor’s note: Ingo Schmoldt is the owner of Ingo’s Images in the San Francisco Bay Area. He specializes in photographing automobiles for owners on location, and in creating one-off images printed on stretched canvas. This was Schmoldt’s seventh year of covering this race.—Brian S. Morgan

RACING BRIEFS

BMW announces IMSA driver lineups

At the annual BMW Motorsport gathering in Munich in December, driver lineups for both BMW Team RLL and Turner Motorsport in the IMSA WeatherTech Sports Car Championship series were announced. Team RLL will continue in the GTLM class with the same driver pairings, with Bill Auberlen and Dirk Werner in one M6 GTLM and John Edwards and Lucas Luhr in another. In the series’ long endurance races, the regulars will be joined by DTM racers Augusto Farfus and Bruno Spengler, Graham Rahal, and Kuno Wittmer, who comes to BMW after running in IMSA in a GTD-class Aston Martin in 2015 and winning the IMSA GTLM title in a Viper in 2014.

Turner Motorsport will run two M6 GT3s in the series’ GTD class. Michael Marsal and Markus Palmtala, who co-drove the Turner Z4 in GTD competition in 2015, will be paired in one of the cars, while Jens Klingmann and Bret Curtis, who campaigned a Turner Z4 in Pirelli World Challenge competition in 2015, will co-drive the other. Marco Wittmann, the 2014 DTM champion, will be added to the team at Daytona—history when you read this—as will Maxime Martin and BMW Junior Jesse Krohn. Ashley Freiberg, a BMW of North America Scholarship driver who raced a Fall-Line M3 in the Continental Challenge series in 2015, will join the team for all of the long endurance races.

BMW’s DTM driver lineup unchanged

The eight drivers who campaigned the BMW M4 DTM in 2015 will return for another year in the DTM Series. They are Marco Wittmann, Maxime Martin, Bruno Spengler, Timo Glock, Augusto Farfus, Tom Blomqvist, António Félix da Costa and Martin Tomczyk. They will run for the same four teams, including BMW Teams Schnitzer, RBM, RMG, and MTEK.

Specific driver assignments to team had not been announced at deadline time.

BMW Motorsport announces driver awards in Munich

A number of awards to drivers were announced in Munich in December. German Z4 racer Christian Büllesbach won the BMW Sports Trophy, and Swiss racer Louis Delétraz was named BMW Junior of 2015. Andy Priaulx, who is leaving BMW after sixteen years, during which he won three consecutive World Touring Car Championships, was given a BMW Sports Trophy Honorary Award. Priaulx’s plans had not been formally announced at deadline time, although most speculation was that he will join the Ford World Endurance Racing program, where he may well find himself teamed with former BMW driver Joey Hand. Among other awards were Duo Of The Year for Team RLL racers Bill Auberlen and Dirk Werner, Rookie Of The Year for DTM racer Tom Blomqvist, and All-Around Of The Year to António Félix da Costa for his performance in both DTM and Formula E

BMW wins two classes in 25 Hours of Thunderhill

Lance Boicelli, Cameron Evans, BimmerWorld proprietor James Clay, Dale Sievwright, James Colborn, and Charles Postins piloted an El Diablo Motorsports 2001 325i to sixth overall and first in the E0 class in the NASA 25 Hours of Thunderhill in December. The car, an ex-BimmerWorld E46 325i with an updated M3 engine, was prepped by a team led by Boicelli and Scott Smith. The second BMW class winner was the E1-class Grip Racing 2002 330Ci driven by Mark Drennan, Mason Filippi, Addison Lee, Brian Ghidinelli, and Kevin York. It finished seventh overall.