

## Turner Torchers the Field at the "Damn it's Hot in Cali Grand Prix"



Thursday June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Story by Ed Sutcliff

Mazda Raceway, Laguna Seca was the location for this week's Red Sox Racing League race. Located just east of the scenic Monterey Peninsula, the track has been hosting races since 1957. With 180 feet of elevation changes, the 11 corner, 2.23 mile track design has a well deserved reputation for being one of the most challenging road courses in North America. Someone should have told Les Turner that the course was supposed to be tough. Not only did he lead the race wire to wire, but his complete mastery of the track left fans and competitors wondering if he wears a large "S" on his undershirt.

Turner entered the race with an incredible string of victories, but his dominance did not dampen the enthusiasm of the other RSR drivers eager to prove they could challenge him for the point championship. Weather conditions were perfect when 20 league members arrived at the track. Oblivious to his competitor's determination to dethrone him, Turner was the fastest driver in the pre-race practice and qualifying sessions. He earned the pole with a blistering qualifying lap of 1:20.978, the only sub-1:21 lap on the grid.

Darren Kersey earned the outside position of row one with a qualifying lap of 1:21.175. Rows two through five were filled by Scott Husted (1:21.466), Jeff Thomas (1:22.128), Chad Tracy (1:22.352), Jim Albertson (1:22.427), Robinson Shields (1:22.428), Michael Baley (1:22.490), Jeff Sharp (1:23.400), and Andrew Feldman (1:23.455). Kevin Kyle, Divina Galica, William Kabel, Bill Pawluckie, Robert Latuga, Dennis Heaney, J. Paul

Jones, David Pyner, Wilbur Gildersleeve Jr., and Kermit Gentry completed the 20 car grid.

In a stunning development, Ed Sutcliff was forced to surrender his second place position in the point race when league officials impounded his car before the practice session began. Sutcliff's team manager would not answer questions about the incident, but sources inside the garage hinted the move had something to do with Turner's recent allegations about his team's setups being stolen. Sutcliff vowed not to let the setback ruin his season. "Someone wants to keep us off the track, but I guarantee you I will be back next week!" In what could have been related actions, Pyner and Gildersleeve also failed to complete a lap during this week's race.

The first few laps of the race left fans on the edge of their seats as drivers jostled for position lap after lap. Heaney was the first victim of the hard battles when he was forced to retire due to heavy damage after just one lap. Kyle, Thomas, and Gentry were the next victims, with all three forced to park after only 5 laps. Jones managed to complete twelve laps before his night ended. Darren (No Luck) Kersey once again earned the RSR "Black Cat" award as he slipped from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> place in the first four laps en route to an unlucky 13<sup>th</sup> place finish.

Latuga avoided danger throughout the race to improve two positions and finish in 12<sup>th</sup> place. "The car was great tonight." said Latuga after the race. "I was hoping for a top-10 finish after some of the early incidents, but it just wasn't my night. I am looking forward to next week."

Pawluckie finished just outside the top-10 as he brought the # 14 car home two laps down in 11<sup>th</sup> place. "I was trying to be consistent and clean tonight. The setup we had was pretty good, and I had a good race going until our lap 31 incident."

10<sup>th</sup> place finisher Kabela proved once again why he is considered one of the cleanest drivers in the RSR league. The smooth driver completed all of his laps without a single incident. Galica led a group of four drivers who finished one lap down as she earned a 9<sup>th</sup> place finish. "This is a wonderful track. I had a few tense moments in the corkscrew tonight as Andy kept the pressure on me. I tried every trick in the book to prevent him from passing me late in the race, but he was patient and took advantage of my lap 39 mishap."

Feldman was happy with his 8<sup>th</sup> place finish. "We had some early issues tonight, but the team kept me focused. Divi drove the wheels off of her car during our late race battle, I was fortunate to make the pass for position."

"Gentleman Jim" Albertson's evening was full of excitement as he survived several incidents to finish in 7<sup>th</sup> place. "After the crew gave me a great qualifying setup, this old guy managed to line up on the grid in 6<sup>th</sup> place." Unfortunately for Jim, an early brush with another car, followed by a spin coming out of Andretti hairpin, saw the good starting position erased as the field went by. "Once the dust settled, I found a track clear of

traffic and the chase was back on. After battling with Andy Feldman for several laps, I made a less than polite pass. Andy deftly avoided the contact with his as always stellar driving.”

A few laps later it was Divi who saw Jim on her bumper. She put up a courageous and skilled show that had the fans on their feet in many corners for much of the race. Albertson’s post race interview ended while he was mumbling incoherently about front wing damage and a treacherous track. Asked if he thought the track should be eliminated from the schedule he stated "absolutely NOT!!!" “This field of drivers is some of the most courteous and friendly drivers both on and off the track. It is a pleasure to be part of RSR.”

Jeff Sharp climbed three positions to finish in 6<sup>th</sup> place. “We had a pretty good car tonight. The setup was fast, and the track was in perfect condition. I managed to avoid the early incidents, but the top-5 cars were just too strong to catch. Congrats to Les on a great win.”

Baley ended the race in 5<sup>th</sup> place after being passed by Husted on the last lap. “I had a comfortable lead over Scott, but gave up too much track position with an incident on lap 35. He took advantage of the mistake and pulled off a great pass to get the spot as the race wound down.” Husted wasn’t as happy with his finish. “I should have been able to give Les a run for his money tonight. Our car was perfect, but Shields passed me early, then I had a mishap on lap 34 which allowed Chad and Michael to get by. I drove the tires off the car to get back to 4<sup>th</sup> place.”



The podium celebration was delayed for some time as race organizers had to search for the missing third place finisher, Chad Tracy. Not being used to finishing in the top 5, let alone top 3, Tracy was not aware he was supposed to report to the podium for the official ceremony. He was eventually found, already dressed in street clothes and having his own celebration. Obviously inebriated, Tracy staggered onto the third place stand and instead of spraying the champagne with the other top finishers, stood there guzzling the bubbly. "You will have to forgive me for this" said Tracy. "I've had two top-10 finishes in the RSR league, but this was the first time I cracked the top-3. I will know where to go next time this happens!"

2<sup>nd</sup> place finisher Shields laughed about the podium incident. "We'll have to forgive Tracy, he isn't used to being up here! I was happy with the result tonight. I gave Les everything I had after getting by Scott, but he was just too strong. See you in Wisconsin next week."

Turner was once again humble in victory. "Every week so far, someone has been keeping me honest at the end of the day. One week it is Gildersleeve, the next week it's Sutcliff, McCuin or Albertson, but there is always someone there pushing me at the end. This week it was Robinson Shields. Even though I led every lap, I could never let up tonight. The interval was almost down to 2 seconds at one point with about 10 laps to go. I was seriously getting worried he was going to catch me before the end."

Statistics from the weekend documented Turner's outstanding effort. The fastest lap in practice was Turner's 1:20.546. The fastest lap in qualifying was Turner's 1:20.978. Turner led all 44 laps of the race without incurring a single incident point. Darren Kersey was the only driver in the field able to keep Turner from claiming every stat as he posted the fastest lap of the race (1:21.369).

RSR drivers travel to Road America in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin for the "Cut the Cheese Grand Prix" next week.