

# Greg Fordahl drives on winning team for Thunderhill enduro

## SPECIAL TO NORTHWEST SPORTS CAR NEWS

WILLOWS, Calif. — O'Connell Racing, a leading Southern California-based team in the Grand Am Rolex Series and in NASCAR road racing, won the West Coast's most prestigious endurance auto race, NASA's 25 Hours of Thunderhill in Northern California.

The team ran a total of 2,115 miles and 705 laps during the elapsed time of the event, finishing the race more than 30 laps ahead of the second place finisher, a 1974 Porsche 911.

Former 2005 Rolex Series GT champion Craig Stanton qualified the car and began the race from the pole after setting the fastest lap time. From the beginning of the race, Stanton battled with the No. 88 open cockpit Mazda-powered spec racer, setting some distance between the two before handing the car off to the Northwest Region's Greg Fordahl who created a two-lap lead. Drivers Kevin O'Connell and Michael Speakman took over the car into nightfall with dropping temperatures, followed by Betim Berisha and Jason Bowles taking the first complete darkness stints.

The team set the overall pace for the race and had executed several mistake-free pit stops until a stop around 9 p.m.

"Mike came in hot and overshot the pit box at the end of his stint after picking up debris on the tires leading onto pit lane," Team technical director Roy Montgomery said. "After pushing the car back into the pit space the car's air jacks came down on the air hose, rendering one of the air guns ineffective. I called for the battery-powered backup

gun and only lost a short time during the stop."

The team extended its lead throughout the night and decided to initiate a driver change with fuel, tires and brake pads before midnight, with Fordahl taking over for Stanton.

"The brake pad change Saturday night went extremely smooth," crew chief Barry O'Brien said. "The team changed four tires, fuel and four corners of pad changes with a driver change in less than two minutes."

In the early morning hours, temperatures reached the low 30s and visibility became an issue for Speakman.

"Some of the other class race cars had lights installed that were extremely bright like something you would see in the Baja 1000 and would light up the mirrors in the car to a point where it was difficult to locate the apex at certain points on the track," he said.

Speakman completed his stint and maintained the team's pace and handed the car off to team principal O'Connell just before daybreak. The team executed a complete pit stop with tires and fuel as Speakman exited.

"My daybreak stint at was pretty amazing as the sun rose from the east above the hills you had to adjust to what you were seeing from near tunnel vision in the darkness to the broad twilight of daybreak and warming temperatures," O'Connell said. "With sunlight you could see the endless debris off line on the track that was thrown on the course from cars going off throughout the night. You almost had to pass in the straights to avoid cutting down or flat spotting a tire."

Around 11 a.m. with an hour to go, the team had established a 30-lap cushion over the second-place Porsche and the third-place Mazda spec racer. Around noon on Sunday, the team took the checkered flag completing the 25-hour race.

"I want to thank our partner in this race, Yokohama for supplying us with a great tire," O'Connell said. "We called on performance from the tires in the beginning of the race to get out of front of the Mazda and the other Porsche and again under nightfall needing to double stint the tires and cut down the times in the pits and the Yokohama's delivered the grip and durability to help our drivers push ahead. Additionally, the professionalism and preparation of the Porsche GT-3 car by Betim Berisha and his firm BBI is the finest I've seen."

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Principally this means being willing to allow us to give new drivers your contact information so that they can have someone to talk to about questions, problems, etc.

If you would be interested in helping in this way or have ideas about this, please contact Tom Masterson, assistant regional executive for race, at kd7cyu@yahoo.com.



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