

with a major storm passing us only a few miles to the west shortly before the race. Meyers called my crew chief as I was in pregrid, and again at the start of the race, with fresh updates. I also need to thank my No. 1 fan, my wife Penny, my crew Greg Fordahl and Dave Welch, Sebastian Gard and the Live Search marketing team for giving me the best-looking car of the 700-plus competing at the Runoffs, Yokohama Tire for awesome Advan tires and great support and advice throughout the entire year, and all my supporters who've helped in innumerable ways.

The race itself seemed to go by in a blur. On pole was last year's winner Wayland Joe, in another Porsche GT3 Cup, with Jim Goughary in a Nissan tubeframe to his left. The second row was Tom Patton, many folk's choice for this year's championship, in a tubeframe V8 Sunbeam Tiger that's a monster on the straights, and has surprisingly good brakes and handling, and to his left Tony Rivera in a Panoz Esperante GTS. I started in fifth place, on the right side of the third row, with Mark Plummer in another Panoz Esperante beside me. Behind me was Jeffrey Moore in a Porsche GT3 Cup, and beside him was Gerald Mason in a Nissan tubeframe car.

We had two pace laps, I worked hard

to get heat into my tires and brakes — the Yokohama slicks have great grip and will last through the race if I don't overheat them, but they can feel pretty squirrely on the first lap or two before they're up to temperature.

The pace car turned into the pits, and we went around the last two corners onto the front straight, with crew chief Fordahl on the radio carefully watching the starter, who he knew had a tendency to throw the green early. "GREEN GREEN GREEN" on the radio and I got a good start, pulling away from Mark Plummer on my left and gaining on Rivera, but with the V8 in the Panoz he was beside me entering "Alpha," the kink before turn 1. I saw Patton lift early, so I thought I might get a run down the inside, but when we crested the hill, Patton was only a few feet from the right edge of the track, no room to squeeze in, so I had to tuck in behind him. Rivera and Plummer in two Panozes kept in it, with Plummer trying to get between Patton on the right and Rivera on the left, but carrying more speed than both of them. I'm not sure if he locked up his brakes or not, but I think he tagged Rivera in the back right and definitely got Patton in the back left. I saw Patton spinning to the left, and Rivera spinning

to the right in front of Patton's car. I tucked to the far right edge of the track, with Rivera coming across sideways right in front of me. I tapped the brakes to avoid him, and the outward momentum in the right-hander pulled Rivera back to the left, and I was by without a scratch, in third place!

Joe and Goughary had gotten through cleanly in front of the melee, so I was 4 or 5 seconds back with a bad run out of turn 2, but I hunkered down and worked on chasing down Goughary in his Nissan. Those tubeframe cars are awful fast, but I was thinking that with pressure on him, he might overdrive his tires.

I didn't know how banged up the three cars were, or whether they were back on course, as turn 1 is over the hill so my crew couldn't see from pit lane. When it was announced over the P.A. that the three cars were off and heavily damaged, my crew was expecting a full-course yellow, which was finally thrown near the end of the second lap. We then had four very long laps behind the pace car. I was working constantly to keep the heat in my tires to get a good restart. Every time the pace car would come around the back part of the track, I'd be sure that the cars must have been pulled away by now, but it was turn down the

