

Weather, stewards confound NayKid's Road Atlanta round

BY TOM MOORE
NayKid Racing

BRASELTON, Ga. — Road Atlanta proved to be one of the brightest and worst moments of the 2007 SCCA SPEED World Challenge GT season for NayKid Racing.

The team of Cindi Lux (Aloha, Ore.) and Scotty B. White (Lake Tapps) quickly found their groove at the fast and technical Road Atlanta facility. From early in the weekend both Lux's No. 2 Dodge-Mintex Brakes-MOMO Dodge Viper Competition Coupe and the No. 3 Corsa Performance-Forgeline Dodge Viper Competition Coupe of White raced within the top-10 of the GT field and they found themselves there again in the one-hour SCCA SPEED GT at the Petit Le Mans.

After qualifying with a season-best of 10th for Lux and 11th for White, the pair of NayKid Dodge Viper Comp. Coupes looked set to capitalize on the momentum that has been growing in recent races. But, just like at the most recent event at Mosport International Raceway, the weather would play a major role. After an on-again, off-again race through torrential downpours, Lux took the checkered flag in 13th while White was awarded 16th after an accident resulting from the rain.

With the top qualifying positions the Northwest-based team looked expectantly towards the Oct. 5, hour-long afternoon race on the 2.54 mile, 12-turn facility. That anticipation turned to concern as storm clouds gathered. The traditional World Challenge standing start was the first sign that the race would be plagued by mayhem. On the first lap a multi-car accident placed the full field under caution for the next seven laps. Lux had gained one spot as the cars slowly passed under the yellow flag after one lap. While she sat in ninth, White had gone off track and fell to 22nd before returning to the pavement as the first lap came to a close. The early race slowdown would magnify problems for the remainder of the show.

Just as the remaining cars in the GT field took the green flag restarting the

race, the clouds opened up, dropping massive amounts of rain on the competitors, all of whom were on racing slicks. While the front straightaway remained dry, turns three through 10 were under a deluge. Race officials made no call to return to a yellow flag condition nor, as several drivers requested, a red flag halting the race as it stood. This left cars spinning in the heavy rain.

Among those suffering the most was White's No. 3 Dodge Viper. Turn three would be the final resting place for White's V10-powered machine for the weekend. White made heavy contact with the wall as he and three others struggled with their high-horsepower entries just past the fast right-hander that makes Road Atlanta's turn one.

As White approached the third corner, not even his multi-time championship winning skill could rescue the car from the inevitable. All four of the cars racing went off, though none made contact with the other three on track. Though one of the hardest impacts of his career, White walked away from his car sore, but unhurt.

His ride was not so lucky. The NayKid crew will need to work long hours to have the car ready for the season-finale at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca on Oct. 21.

Meanwhile, further up the track, Lux fought her hydroplaning machine as the rain intensified. A genius pit call by Fred Lux brought the No. 2 into the pits immediately. Lux and three other teams switched to rain tires while the remaining field gambled on waiting out the rain. While White was out of the race, the call to put Lux on grooved tires looked to give the team one secure top-spot in the final standings. Now running as high as sixth, this belief was strengthened by the eyewitness accounts of the carnage around the track.

Then came more controversy. SCCA Pro Racing officials called for a red flag stopping the race. While not controversial in and of itself, the red flag led to an unprecedented decision to allow teams to work on their cars, including changing to rain tires. Red flag rules typically prevent work from being performed on

the cars and the brilliant call to put Lux on rain tires was negated.

Further controversy erupted when officials then declared that, on the restart, the field would be placed back to the running order as it had been prior to the red flag. Lux, who had reached as high as sixth just before pitting for rain rubber, would be doubly punished for the smart race strategy call. With approximately 10 minutes of racing left in the timed event, Lux had little time to regain the positions lost. She would finish as the last of 13 cars still running from the original 26 that started the race. A good finish but not as good as it should have been had traditional racing rules been followed during the red-flag conditions.

"What an absolutely crazy race," said Lux. "It was more of a crash fest of very expensive race cars versus good old fashion World Challenge racing. When we got the first restart the skies just opened up on the backstraight and it was treacherous. Everybody was hydroplaning all over the place and cars were crashing everywhere. But when the SCCA finally decided to red flag the race they allowed competitors to work on cars. Not only is that never done in motorsports, it really hurt us as we already had pitted for rain tires and were in sixth. As a driver it is just frustrating. To see everything that had fallen into place from all hard work and smart calls by the team fall apart so quickly because of a sanctioning body decision is just hard to comprehend."

The 2007 SPEED World Challenge GT season will conclude on Oct. 21 at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in Monterey, Calif. A favorite track of both Lux and White, the team hopes to put the results on the board that their recent performances have suggested.

"We are really looking forward to getting to our home track in Laguna and seeing what we can show there," White said. "We're starting to figure these things out. These Dodge Vipers are really starting to run well for NayKid. Overall it was a pretty good weekend. Everyone is really confident and we are really pleased with the speed we are showing."