

Once lined up on the hotpits, we went out on track for two warmup laps, so we could all check out the track conditions, and get our engines and tires heated up. I start my racing slicks at very low pressures, and they'll build up close to 50 percent more pressure (8 to 10 pounds) during the first few laps of the race, and they have significantly less traction when they're cold and at low pressure. Two warmup laps might get them halfway there, so I'll still have to watch it on my first lap or two.

At the end of the second warmup lap, the pace car pulls in, I call to my crew chief Chris Brown that I'm in the last corner, and he holds his microphone button down so that he can call the green flag, as I often can't see it as I'm required to be directly behind the car in front of me. I'm on the throttle as Chris yells "Green, green, green!" and the race is on.

I have an OK start, not fabulous, as Joe gets away quicker, and I see Mike Muren slowly pulling up on my left. I slowly gain on Muren as we approach turn 1, to get him on my left, and I'm also able to pull up to Joe before turn 1. Since I have the inside line into that corner, I'm able to keep Muren behind me, so I get through in fifth place. I see that Goughary has gotten past Black at the start, as expected given his higher horsepower and torque, but Black is right behind him. Gerry Mason has also gotten past Joe under braking into turn 1, so he's now in third place. Those were the two lead changes in the top six. I can't see further back than the car behind me, and I know that Chris will let me know if there's anything too exciting back there to worry about.

I'm able to stay close to Joe, and as we straighten out from the back kink (turns 8 and 9), I see Mason, in third, pull to the left and start to slow, clearly he has a problem. I'm able to get past him, so now I'm in fourth place. I'm close behind Joe into the tight 12-13-14 complex, but Joe pulls away on the front straight, and gains a bit on the second lap. Again on the third lap, Joe pulls away a bit more, but then my tires come in, and I'm faster than him for the next four laps, pulling closer and closer.

This entire time, Jurczyk has been right behind me, less than half a second back. As long as I have a few car lengths between us, I can ignore him and concentrate on catching Joe. On lap 9, I make a slight error in turn 6, a very tight second-gear corner that starts the

back straight complex. A tiny error, just a couple of tenths, but it lets Jurczyk close on me up the hill and then up the back straight and into the kink, less than half a carlength back.

Now I can't just concentrate on catching Joe, I need to make sure that Jurczyk doesn't try a late braking move inside me. Coming out of 9 and into 10 on the back straight, he does just that — pulls left, and I have to also move left to protect the inside line. This continues for a number of laps, with Jurczyk trying to pull inside in turns 3, 5, 6 or 10, on most every lap. Since I can't take the optimum line in each corner, I need to enter from mid-track or the inside of the corner, which means I have less speed at the apex, and that means reduced exit speed, so each place I need to go defensive is costing me a few tenths to half a second, so my lap times are now down a second or more from when he was a few carlengths back. This reduced speed of course means that I can't pull away from Jurczyk, so he's staying right there, very anxious to get past.

I need Jurczyk to make a mistake and drop back a bit, so I can start to pull away. Unfortunately, my tires are starting to go away, the car is getting a little bit loose on me, and Jurczyk seems to be hooked up better than ever. Even when I get a good launch onto the straight, I can't pull away, so his engine might be a little stronger also. Not a surprise, I still have the original engine in my car from 2004, hasn't been touched, and it's definitely getting on time for a rebuild. Anyways, given my lap times, you'd think that Joe would be sailing off into the distance, but he's also not been able to keep up the same pace, so the gap hasn't widened as much as I'd think.

Jurczyk gets more and more desperate, but he's driving a good clean race, he's not tapping my bumper with the "chrome horn," and I'm not cutting across his nose to "chop" him. I'm making my "one move" — it's considered blocking if you make multiple moves from side to side to stay ahead of someone that's clearly faster, but I'm staying on the outside, only moving inside if I see Jurczyk make a move. It's only under braking and into corner entry that Jurczyk seems he might be a little faster than me; on corner exits I'm a little better, and he can't quite catch me on the straights. Heartland Park is also a difficult track to pass at, as the two long straights don't have sharp corners with long braking zones like many tracks do,

which are often the best passing spots.

With a couple of laps to go, Jurczyk dives inside of me inside turn 3 and gets alongside me. I stay along the outside of him, we're side by side, I might be a hair ahead. We accelerate out of 3 and into 4, he's been able to get on the gas a little quicker, and I see his nose pull in front of mine. Looks like we'll be side by side into turn 4 also. Now this is racing, side by side for position, both giving each other racing room. Woo hoo! Hey, what's this? Looks like he wants the line into 4, where my car is, and I get a whack into the left side of my car, which gets me a little loose as I'm both under braking and starting the corner entry for turn 4, and as I lift to correct and straighten the car, Jurczyk is past.

I try to keep up, and hopefully figure out a way past him, but he's hooked up, and is a few tenths quicker. At start-finish, there's one more lap to go. I have nothing left for Jurczyk, and it finishes Goughary, Black, Joe, Jurczyk and me in the top five.

After the cooldown lap, we pull down pit lane, and I have Chris take my tire pressures. A little higher than I'd have liked, no wonder I was a little loose at the end, but it was clearly my fault, I'd told Chris where to set them. A little less tire pressure, maybe 1 pound or even a half-pound less at the start, and maybe I'd have been able to stay ahead of Jurczyk, and potentially catch Joe, maybe even eventually get around. Ah, we can all dream.

I was certainly a lot closer to Joe than I was last year, and my fast lap was only 0.6 seconds off the fast lap of the race, so I think I did well. Even though I was the third-finishing Porsche, I was more competitive relative to the quickest one (Joe) than I was last year, both in qualifying and the race. I knew the tubeframe cars would be quicker this year because of the changes they were allowed, so I expected it to be an uphill battle to make the podium, but I did my best. At least the driving mistake I made that allowed Jurczyk to catch me and then eventually get by didn't cost me a medal, just fifth versus fourth.

After checking the pressures, the top six finishers were pulled to the side of pit lane, where the top three received their medals and were interviewed. Given that the race had gone so quickly, Justin Bell from Speed stopped by and told me they'd have time for a full interview, so he asked me about the race and how tough it was compared to last year.