



2009/10 Battery Town Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge - Round five: Manfeild 12-14 February 2010.

Courtney Letica's weekend diary: After winning my first race at Timaru, this past weekend's penultimate round of the Battery Town Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge at Manfeild was one I was really looking forward to. Well that's now done and time to reflect and appreciate what you've got when you've got it. The 3.03 kilometre Manfeild circuit is one I enjoy driving. Its banked turns mean you can push a lot harder and you can have a different driving style and still be fast.

Friday testing.

Arriving in Palmerston North late on Thursday, the Friday two session test was held in squally conditions, which I think kept me in a more conservative mode. Fifth in the first test was okay, but I was 1.6 seconds a lap off the pace, improving to 1.3 seconds in the afternoon. This is about a second away from where I should be on a bad day. So I had myself on the back-foot wondering where I was losing so much time. Watching in-car footage of my Triple X Motorsport team-mates yielded some ideas, but the main issue was getting my car to handle the same as theirs.

Saturday qualifying and race one.

And that's where you'd think the weekend would improve. Still 1.5 seconds away in the morning qualifying session put me fifth on the grid, which is okay – I was just hoping the setup changes would make a difference. The afternoon 12-lap race started well. It was very wet and getting traction from a standing start is even more difficult and crucial to your final placing. A game of cat-and-mouse ensued out front with my team-mates, where Matt Halliday got himself in the middle of a Porsche sandwich, allowing me to cruise past. Despite the weather my lap times were hugely improved and although I finished fourth, I was 0.3 second a lap off the fastest time.

Sunday racing.

The weather on Sunday was much improved and almost summer. The light wind kept the temperature down which really helped the in-car conditions. For the morning 12-lap race I was starting from fourth – right in the thick of it. Getting a fairly good start, there was a lot of jostling in front of me, particularly with a hot Matt Halliday who was trying to muscle back to his Saturday starting position. There were some defensive moves going on ahead of me and heading toward the hair-pin, when Halliday rear-ended Baird, causing me to rear-end him.. The contact was significant but not sudden, which often punctures the radiator and ends your race. I could see my front bumper was pushed up, but the car still turned okay so I just stayed with the group. Although I finished wounded in seventh place, I was later penalised for not stopping in time to avoid the collision. That put me well down the grid for the final race and while I'm out of championship podium contention, getting good results is my season goal toward becoming more championship proficient.

I had a lot of work ahead of me and getting close to the leaders was always going to be difficult. Although with 16-laps I had a chance of being somewhere in there. Suffering from a total lack of pace, two seconds a lap slower than the leaders, I finished sixth – a long way behind. It was great to finish all three races (fourth, seventh and sixth) – and that's something to reflect on. There is plenty to research from the weekend to help me past such hurdles in the future – particularly for the season finale in five weeks time. The Taupo circuit is quite tricky but I have done plenty of testing there – in preparation for 19-21 March. I look forward to either seeing you there or bringing you great news afterward.



NEXT RACE: season finale
Taupo
19 - 21 March 2010
Round six of six.

