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SMITH WINS PATRÓN GT3 CHALLENGE BY YOKOHAMA ROUND 3 WIRE TO WIRE

MONTEREY, CA May 22– The first of two Patrón GT3 Challenge by Yokohama races at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca had more than its share of action, with multiple yellows, spinning cars and passes for position – but with a familiar outcome.

Ross Smith put his #5 Maxwell Paper Racing Porsche 911 GT3 Cup Car on the pole and won wire to wire, his third consecutive Patrón GT3 Challenge by Yokohama Platinum Cup class race victory. The story behind him, though, was not so simple.

With the first start waved off due to excessive distance within the field, the drivers responded by forming a very tight pack coming toward the start line - and making it through the first lap cleanly. But on the second lap, #14 Amadeo Quiros, driving the AASCO Motorsports/Purdymotor S.A. Porsche and Blair Chang, in the #17 Competition Motorsports entry, spun in turn two, bringing out the full course yellow in order to retrieve Chang's car, buried deep in the gravel. Quiros dropped through the field, but putting his karting background to good use, fought his way back through the pack to score a seventh place finish.

After the clean up, the green flag flew on lap seven – for all of about 30 seconds. On the restart, Wesley Hoaglund brought his #36 Gruppe Orange Porsche inside the #76 of Rich Walton (Mercer Motorsports), sending both cars into the gravel outside turn 11, both with significant damage.

The green flag flew on lap 10, but again, not for long.

On lap 11, Henrique Cisneros tried to tuck his #26 NGT Motorsports Porsche inside of John Baker, driving the #47 ORBIT Racing Porsche, coming through turn three. Side to side contact resulted in Cisneros checking up and collecting the #71 Kelly Moss Racing Porsche of Paul Barnhart Jr., sending Barnhart flying into several rollovers before coming to a stop on all four wheels on the outside of turn four. Despite contact that sent one of his car doors flying 50 feet into the air, Barnhart walked away.

After the race, Smith was anxious to give most the credit for his victory to his Maxwell Paper Racing team.

“You know, you come into any season with high hopes, and of course you want to win every race, but it's not exactly practical,” noted Smith. “Without my crew, Maxwell Paper, it wouldn't be possible. They've definitely established themselves as one of the top race teams in the series - they work on my cars hard, so I have to return the favor on the racetrack. And to pick up the checkered flag in this first race, you can't ask for anything better than that.”

The Yokohama Hard Charger award went to Peter LeSaffre, moving from a 21st starting spot to finish 8th.

Round 4 of the Patrón GT3 Challenge by Yokohama at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca takes place tomorrow, at 1:30pm. The races will be shown on SPEED TV on Sunday, June 20 at 1:00am EST (Saturday, June 19 at 10:00 PST). Check your local listings.

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