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DOWNES AND SHEARS GET PAST GREEN FLAG CRASH, DOWNES EARNS FIRST SERIES VICTORY

TOOELE, UTAH (JULY 11, 2010) -- A frightening crash at the start of the Cooper Tires Prototype Lites Championship may have put a damper on the outcome, but in the end, Antonio Downs will remember this as the day he joined his brother Matt on this list of first-time winners this season, as he earned the victory at the Larry H. Miller Dealerships Utah Grand Prix at Miller Motorsports Park.

Polesitter Gary Gibson's #13 Inspire Motorsports/Perfect Pedal DP02 was in mid-shift as the field came down to take the green flag, and was hit by Downs, starting third in the #4 Eurosport Racing/Lamex Foods DP02, which sent Gibson spinning. When #21 Charlie Shears (#21 Inspire Motorsports/US Builders) backed off to avoid Gibson, Round 7 winner Frankie Montecalvo (#66 Gunnar Racing/Bayshore Recycling) clocked his left rear, sending Montecalvo into the air. When Montecalvo came back down, he was launched again by the front of Gibson's spinning DP02, fully vaulting the car before coming to a hard landing. As the dust began to clear, #00 Owen Kratz (Ferrari of Houston/Helix Energy Solutions) ran out of room on the debris-littered front straight and collected the right rear of Gibson, bringing the grand total of the number of times Gibson had been hit to three. Thankfully, all three drivers walked away from the incident.

When the field restarted, it was clear the field was still ready to race, with multiple members of the Inspire Motorsports and Performance Tech teams chasing the lone Eurosport driver. On lap seven, Shears, apparently surviving the damage to his left rear, got around Downs for the lead. Five laps later, Downs returned the favor. Meanwhile, Anthony Nicolosi (#8 Performance Tech/Medical Connections) picked his way through the field to third, leaving a heated battle between Jonathan Bennett (#54 Inspire Motorsports/ Composite Resources), Johnny Meriggi (#11 Performance Tech/Great Expectations) and Patrick O'Neill (#64 Performance Tech/O'Neill construction) for fourth, which was won by Bennett.

In the end, it was a bittersweet first win for Downs.

"It was something I've been wanting for a long time!" exclaimed Downs. "But I feel bad about what happened at the start with Gary. He checked up and I tried to miss him but unfortunately, I tagged his back end. It was definitely not the way I wanted to get by him.

"But Charlie and I had a good battle – he's such a great driver. He's so aware and he's such a gentleman. I had a good run on him, I moved to the inside, he gave me the corner and the rest is history. I'm very happy to pick up some points against him today. And I can finally cut my hair! I had a little bet with myself that I wouldn't cut my hair til I won – it's costing me some dates!"

Shears enjoyed the fight with Downs.

Cont.



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“It was a lot of fun,” said Shears. “Antonio and I have a lot of respect for each other, so racing with him is a lot of fun. We give each other just enough room. He did that for me early and he took it away from me with two laps left – I got stuck in traffic and that was it. But it was great fun and I really enjoy racing against the Downs boys.”

Lee Alexander (#23 Factory 48 Motorsports) and Jim Garrett (West Racing/SpeedPromo) survived the day to come home 1-2 in Lites 2.

The Cooper Tires Prototype Lites Championship features racing between two sports racer prototype classes, Lites 1 and Lites 2, presenting a dimension of competition as drivers must be aware of classes with distinctly different speeds as they navigate the race track. This is the same challenge faced by the drivers of the American Le Mans Series presented by Tequila Patrón.

The Cooper Tires Prototype Lites Championship continues July 23 - 24, with Round 9 held in conjunction with the American Le Mans Northeast Grand Prix at Lime Rock Park in Lakeville, Connecticut. Please visit [www.prototypelites.com](http://www.prototypelites.com) for the latest schedule and updates and follow along on the race weekends on [www.litestiming.com](http://www.litestiming.com).

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