



Grand-Am Rolex Series Emco Gears Classic At Mid-Ohio

Team Race Report Compilation

Farnbacher Loles Racing

Farnbacher Loles Racing earned its first victory of the 2008 season, topping the GT class in the Grand-Am Rolex Sports Car Series race at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington, Ohio, on Saturday. Leh Keen of Charleston, S.C., and Eric Lux of Jacksonville, Fla., kept the No. 86 Porsche 911 GT3 Cup car on track through treacherous conditions to take the win.

Lux started fourth on the 22-car GT grid and gained one position in the first 10 minutes of the two-hour 45-minute race. Heavy rain then turned the 2.258-mile road course into an obstacle course as multiple cars slid off-track. Lux pitted for rain tires and returned to the track sixth. He took the class lead just before the halfway mark, then turned the car over to Keen. Back on track ninth, Keen regained the class lead and held it to the checkered flag.

Steve Johnson of Bristol, Va., and Dave Lacey of Toronto, Ont., also had a strong race. Lacey started the No. 88 Porsche from eighth in class, but quickly moved to the GT lead as the rain started. He pitted for rain tires, then stopped again to clear the car's windshield, dropping back to 10th. He regained eight positions to second in class, fifth overall, before handing off to Johnson. Johnson returned to the track 11th and moved up to eighth, then was hit on the second-last lap, pushing him back to finish 10th.

Their teammates in the No. 87 Porsche weren't as lucky. Bryce Miller of Summit, N.J., started from fifth on the GT grid, but was caught in the m el e as the rain started and had contact with another car. After a long pitstop to replace the car's right-front suspension and shock absorber, he returned to the track 19th in class. He stopped for a driver change to Dirk Werner of Kissenbr uck, Germany, but officials judged the pitstop to be one lap early, so Werner was assessed a penalty stop. He was unable to overcome a 10-lap deficit and finished 19th.

Gregory Loles, team owner: "Our team today achieved a long-overdue result. Any time you win is special, but today we witnessed something beyond just the first win for Porsche and our team this year, we saw two young promising drivers deliver the goods in the most spectacular fashion. Eric and Leh displayed composure seen in few drivers, while under the most extreme conditions imaginable. I am grateful our team had the opportunity to give them the tools for such a performance. Congratulations, gentlemen!"

Dino Loles, team owner: "It was a very trying race that really tested the drivers' ability to adapt between wet and dry conditions. Obviously, when you test the driver, you also test the car and the car really came through for us. The team, in hectic conditions, was able to communicate well, get the job done and deliver what the drivers needed. Ultimately, this is the reward for putting all that together."

Leh Keen, No. 86: "This was incredible, the crew awesome, Eric incredible. When I first went out, the conditions were so bad. At the beginning of the race, everybody struggled so much, so Eric did an awesome, awesome job. He's awesome in the rain. I got in and just tried to keep everything together. At the end, it started to dry up and I was fighting with the 69 car and 57 car, but their tires started to fall off. Mine started to fall off a little bit, but the car just held together for me. I've got to thank the Farnbacher Loles team. I'm just so happy!"

Eric Lux, No. 86: "The car was excellent. Farnbacher Loles gave us a great car again. It rained and Leh and I both love the rain, so we were able to stay out of trouble. This track is really difficult because they just resealed some corners and it's tough to find a lot of grip. But the crew worked their butts off and the car was great."

Dirk Werner, No. 87: "When I came to Mid-Ohio, I really had a good feeling because Bryce was coming back, so I thought he would bring the luck back to the 87. The fact that we were able to lower the car made me feel comfortable because the car felt great during the practice sessions. We were fast every day. I thought this would be the changing point for us, but it was very difficult today on the track with the heavy rain. Another

bad result for us, but I'm feeling optimistic because today was the first Porsche win [this season] and the first win for Farnbacher Loles this year."

Steve Johnson, No. 88: "Dave did an awesome job – he's a fish! It was a good time. Another top-10, that's our goal. I hate that we banged the car up at the end, but it was unavoidable. But we had a good time and we look forward to our next race at Barber [Motorsports Park]."

Dave Lacey, No. 88: "It was a great run for us. We had a great car all weekend and in the wet, we were on fire. The guys put a great car together. We were P1; we led the race. I had to come in – the wets [tires] were done – and I handed off to Steve. He was doing a great job. Unfortunately, second-last lap, the 72 car put him in the wall and he got collected by a couple of other cars. But another top-10 finish for the gentlemen driver pack – we'll take that and look forward to Barber."

KROHN Racing

The EMCO Gears Classic at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course, round seven of 14 in Grand-Am Rolex Spots Car Series competition, was won by defending Grand-Am DP champions Alex Gurney and Jon Fogarty in the No. 99 Gainsco/Bob Stallings Pontiac Riley. Eight cautions for 37 laps were caused primarily by rain, which fell for the majority of the race.

Nic Jönsson, starting driver of the No. 76 Krohn Racing Pontiac Lola, led the Mid-Ohio race for three laps (lap 34-36), all under rainy conditions. It was the first time the new Proto-Auto Lolas have seen rain this season, so all the Krohn drivers had to learn how the car handled under wet conditions and with rain tires. In addition to leading the race, Jönsson also had the team's best qualifying position of the season, a fifth place start. He and teammate Ricardo Zonta finished ninth overall.

The No. 75 Krohn Racing Pontiac Lola of owner/driver Tracy Krohn and Eric van de Poele qualified 13th and got as high as third place early in the race before a penalty and brief off-road excursion relegated them to a 14th (DP class) finish. Everyone was challenged by the rain and the two and three-quarters hour Grand-Am race finished under yellow flag conditions following a multi-car wreck on the front straight.

Tracy W. Krohn, team owner/driver, No. 75 Krohn Racing Pontiac Lola:

"I got in for my stint with brand new wet tires. It was very slippery. What I thought was a bad call turned out to be a mistake on our part. We pitted under the wrong set of conditions. We thought we had pitted after the window but we didn't get that timing right and it cost us a drive-thru penalty plus 20 seconds. Eric did a great job the first part of the race. We tried a little different strategy with the car at first and we put some rain tires on just prior to the start of the race. We were hoping it was going to rain a little quicker than it did. It didn't rain quite quick enough. It took about four laps instead of two or three. As it was, the strategy worked out okay and we actually moved up a couple of position, but we had thought we would end up being first. Eric got hung up by some GT cars. He ran a really solid, solid race. He had one little mishap but no big deal. He came back and turned car over to me. I went out with that set up and pushed hard and ran the thing off the track. At that point in time I was just hanging on. It was very treacherous. I took the drive-through penalty. It was unfortunate for me because I was right up there with the pack and just trying to learn the track rain line. I started to push immediately and just made a mistake and went off track.

The bottom line is we learned a lot about the car. This is the first time we've run in the rain. We learned some of the strengths and weaknesses of the car and some things we need to work on. All in all, it was not a horrible day, but not the day we expected. Nic and Ricardo ran up front for a good while. They also had a little strategy issue but it wasn't because of what they were doing. They did a great job and car was good and it just continues to get better. It really does continue to get better but the performance doesn't show it yet. With the rain, Mid-Ohio is a different kind of track, very treacherous. It's really very technical anyway. You add a little rain and it just gets exciting. The fans got a show today!"

Eric van de Poele, driver, No. 75 Krohn Racing Pontiac Lola:

"It was interesting in the rain for the first time. We did not have the best set-up and it was really tough, quite difficult. However, I really like the rain conditions. I got the car up to third. Even if I spun a few times, like everybody, I had a lot of fun. But, unfortunately we did not have the finish position we wanted. It's a bit disappointing, but in another way, we are there. We were third at one point, so it means we can compete. We still need a better car for any conditions, but we closed the gap. We definitely closed the gap."

Nic Jönsson, driver, No. 76 Krohn Racing Pontiac Lola:

"Qualifying was the best qualifying so far this year, so we're very pleased with that. We had a threat of rain all day but it didn't start to rain until several laps into the race. But beforehand, we had to sort out what we were going to do with tires and all that. We knew the rain was coming, so basically we decided to go with high down force for the race. We started the race with a huge push in the car. It started raining pretty bad and this is the first time we had to drive it in the rain, so we didn't know what to expect. It was extremely difficult to drive in the rain. You had to be very careful with throttle application. I found out the hard way when I spun in Turn 1 a few laps in. Fortunately I was able to get those lost positions back. We were pretty much running second most of the stint. Unfortunately, we decided to pit too late. We went from second down to 16th.

Ricardo got in and, obviously, also had never driven the car in rain before. Once he got dialed in and got going, he started gaining on people. Then the track started to dry out. We then picked up a huge push and, unfortunately, could not keep the pace. The race ended three laps early when there was a big wreck on the front straightaway. I think if that had not happened we could have gotten a few more positions, maybe in the Top 7. We are still having a little struggle to get the car the way we want. We just have to keep our head down and keep plugging away and sooner or later things will turn around for us. We have all the ingredients – a good crew, good engineering experience, a very good package overall. We just need to put all those cards in the right place to make it work as one unit. We are all experienced enough and been there before so we have to keep working hard. We will keep working on trying to get it right and we will. We will."

Ricardo Zonta, driver, No. 76 Krohn Racing Pontiac Lola:

"I think the only race we could talk is about Nic's race because it was very good. He did a very good job. We lost the race in the pits. As soon as we pitted late, we lost the race. There's not much to say. I had to learn the car in the rain like everyone. This point doesn't matter because we were the same speed in the rain. After we got behind we could not do anything. We lost the race there."

Mike Shank Racing

Michael Shank Racing capped off a strong home track race weekend on Saturday as the Westfield Insurance Ford-Riley of Mark Patterson and Oswaldo Negri improved the teams best-ever race result at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course with a run to sixth place in a dramatic round seven of Rolex Sports Car Series competition.

The race went green as a significant rainstorm took over with heavy winds and the precipitation continued through most of the two hour and forty-five minute race. Patterson opened up the race during some of the most challenging conditions and moved up in the order before turning the car over to Negri, who returned to the field 19th .

Negri, who cut his teeth in the formula car world competing in Europe, was relishing the chance to make the most of the conditions as he sliced his way up to third. However, the forward progress came at a cost, as the Pirelli tires had given all they had and Negri soon found himself thinking championship as he fought to keep the Westfield Insurance machine close to the front without sacrificing a good points finish.

"That was one of the most difficult races I have ever run," said Negri. "The conditions so were tough that it was everything you could do every lap just to make sure you didn't go off. I've raced in the rain a lot, and I really love it, but this was really a huge challenge. At the end, the 58 and 59 were mega, and I didn't want to have any contact trying to defend against them and just kept pushing to get what I could get out of the car. It is a shame we weren't able to do a little bit better for all the Westfield Insurance guests, but I'm happy to come out of this race with another solid finish and a car without any damage."

The sister Michael Shank Racing Ford-Riley didn't fare as hoped, as early in the race, a spinning competitor forced Pew off the racing line and into the path of track debris, cutting a tire down and sending him into a spin. Before he was able to recover, another competitor spun into his path, hitting him and sending the 6 car behind the wall for repairs. The team put in a stout and speedy effort to return the car back to competition just as the green flag flew again, but the team had to fight from laps down before taking the finish with Ian James behind the wheel.

“It was a tough day, with both cars getting a beat up early on,” said team owner Mike Shank. “The conditions were challenging, but we had the right strategy and the guys did a fantastic job all weekend. We love coming up and racing here at Mid-Ohio, but we were hoping to bring the Westfield Insurance guests a little bit more today. But this was ok in terms of the championship, and we’ll just look forward to Daytona. Obviously we had a great car there in January, and hopefully we can go even better there in July.”

SunTrust Racing

What looked like a sure podium result for the second race in a row for the No. 10 SunTrust Pontiac Riley team of Wayne Taylor Racing evaporated into a disappointing 10th-place finish in the closing minutes of a wet and wild Grand-Am Rolex Sports Car Series EMCO Gears Classic Saturday at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington.

With 20 minutes to go in today’s 76-lap race over the 2.258-mile, 13-turn layout between Columbus and Cleveland, Max Angelelli was in third place with his sites set firmly on getting around the No. 99 Gainsco/Bob Stallings Racing Pontiac of Alex Gurney for second place on a lap-63 restart. But shortly after passing the start-finish line to take the green flag, Angelelli made a fateful radio call saying he was starting to struggle with his rear tires.

Angelelli and his fellow competitors had been racing on grooved rain tires from the time a driving rain storm first deluged the facility just seven laps into today’s affair – shortened from its originally scheduled 250-mile, 111-lap distance by the 2-hour, 45-minute time limit. Though the rains had finally subsided about 30 minutes before the lap-63 restart and the track was gradually drying at that point, no one risked switching to slick tires during the caution period immediately preceding it. The combination of rain tires at race pace on a gradually drying track ended up affecting Angelelli and the SunTrust Pontiac the most, as he was able to hold onto third place for just six tours of the circuit before fading quickly. Angelelli dropped to fourth on lap 70, eighth on lap 71, and to his final finishing position of 10th by lap 73.

“Obviously, I think everybody could see that my tires were finished,” said a disappointed Angelelli after the race. “I had no more tires left and I did what I could with what I had. I have no idea why they went away so quickly. It’s not the first time it has happened, so we have to keep looking at why this might be and think about what to do to fix the problem. Unfortunately, I could tell the tires were going to go away. I know the car. I know those tires. But that’s what happens, sometimes. Tenth place doesn’t feel good at all when you are 10 minutes away from finishing on the podium. It was a disappointing way to end the weekend.”

Co-driver Michael Valiante, who qualified the SunTrust car sixth on Friday and drove the opening 37 laps of today’s race, had a spectacular start in dry conditions – but under ever-threatening skies – and found himself in third by the end of the opening lap. He was up to second by the end of the second lap, having gotten by Memo Rojas in the series point-leading No. 01 Chip Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates entry. When the deluge began on lap 7, Valiante pitted for rain tires along with the rest of the field and resumed in fourth place after getting inadvertently stopped by Grand-Am officials while exiting the pit lane. By lap 16, Valiante was up to second, chasing race-leader Rojas, and then made a stellar pass of Rojas to take the lead on lap 21. It was the sixth time in seven events this season that the SunTrust team has led laps – albeit just two today.

“We had a great start. We picked up some positions and got up to second there in the beginning,” Valiante said. “When the rains came, I was on slicks and it got crazy for a while, there. After we put on rains, for the first 30-40 laps, we were fine. As the rain started coming down harder, I don’t know if it was tire pressures, or what, but I struggled so much against other cars. We made a major change to the car when I came in to hand the car over to Max and it seemed like it worked well for him. He was quite quick. All in all, it wasn’t a bad race, but the result just wasn’t there. It was just strange how quickly the tires went away for Max.”

Gurney, who took over the No. 99 Gainsco Pontiac from Jon Fogarty for the last half of the race, passed the No. 7 RumBum.com entry for the lead with 14 minutes to go and went on to win today’s EMCO Gears Classic. The polesitting No. 58 Brumos Porsche of Darren Law and David Donohue rallied to finish second, while the RumBum.com car, co-driven by Gene Sigal and Matt Plumb, finished third to reach the podium for the first time ever.

“I don’t know, I thought we had a really good, third-place car,” said team owner Wayne Taylor. “For some reason, the rear tires burnt off and Max went backwards. We were on the same tire strategy with all of the lead cars, but for some reason, we burnt ours off and I don’t know why. It’s really hard to accept 10th place

when you know you've got a car capable of finishing on the podium. We'll go back to the shop, regroup, finish building our new Dallara chassis that arrived on Monday, and get a fresh start on the second half of the season at Daytona."

The next stop on the 2008 Rolex Series schedule is the Brumos Porsche 250 on July 3 at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway, the annual Thursday-night race that kicks off the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series' Coke Zero 400 Powered by Coca-Cola weekend.

Banner Racing

Kelly Collins and Paul Edwards made the best of horrible track conditions and failing transponder to finish their No. 07 Banner Engineering Pontiac GXP.R in 11th position in Round 8 of the Rolex Grand-Am Championships Presented by Crown Royal Cask No. 16 the EMCO Gears Classic.

Marc Bunting got taken out of the race when the #67 Porsche of Tim George slammed into the No 06 Banner Pontiac GXP.R as heavy rains were sweeping the Mid-Ohio track. The car was retired only 8 laps into the race as Bunting's co-driver Jan Magnussen never turned a lap.

The race here at Mid-Ohio began under threat of rain but the field took the green flag at 5:06 PM on a dry track on dry tires. Unfortunately that didn't last long as the rains began in earnest 7 laps into the 2 and three-quarter hour event.

And with the rains came trouble for both Banner Pontiac GXP.Rs as the Grand-Am Series supplied transponder that tracks the car each time it passes the start finish line was failing and not recording laps for Kelly Collins' #07 Banner Pontiac.

During the caution period on lap 18 Edwards had to pit the #07 Banner Pontiac to have the transponder replaced as it had failed very early in the race. The repair even under caution put the #07 a lap down and still the transponder didn't work.

The day for the #06 Banner Engineering Pontiac GXP.R was worse as Marc Bunting had moved up into the 11th position when the threatening skies stopped, threatening that is, and started a deluge that would in effect end the day for the #06 Banner Pontiac GXP.R.

"We went down into turn 7 at the end of the straight and there were cars all over the place spinning off the track," said Marc Bunting of his abbreviated Mid-Ohio race. "I got it slowed down enough to avoid the spinning cars but one of the TRG Porsches couldn't get slowed down and t-boned me basically. We knew it was going to come but it basically came out of nowhere. Standing water and slicks aren't a good combination.

"He was really moving because he hit me really hard!"

"All of a sudden he (Bunting) came over the radio and said 'someone hit me hard' and I thought 'what is Marc doing on my radio'," said Kelly Collins.

The #06 Banner Pontiac GXP.R was classified in 21st position.

"The car was good and right at the start I got by a few people but after that it got tougher because the Porsches and Mazdas were able to drive by me on the straight," said Bunting. "I was just trying to play it smart and slow and just hand it over to Jan but unfortunately it just didn't happen today."

Kelly Collins also got off to a good start in the #07 Banner Engineering Pontiac GXP.R and moved up to 4th position but you couldn't tell by the scoring monitor as the Grand-Am supplied transponder that registers every time the car passes the start finish line was malfunctioning.

"We were holding our own at the start and it was OK for awhile and I even moved up a couple of spots," said Collins. "But once things settled down and the race started falling into place we started losing positions and I fell back to where we were destined to be.

"Then the deluge came and I slowed way down and made it through but during the caution the heat from the engine fogged up my windshield. On that restart (after the rain delay) I couldn't see anything. Fortunately we went back to yellow right away.

"The car was good and I was just setting a reasonable pace and biding my time. I wish we had a defroster though!"

From there Paul Edwards soldiered on just turning in laps and trying to finish the race as the wet conditions continued until there was less than a half hour left.

Edwards survived to record an 11th place finish which considering all that had transpired that day gave the Banner Racing team some solace on what could have been a disastrous weekend.

"Dude, you finished better than you think," said Kelly Collins to his co-driver when he got out of the #07 Banner Engineering Pontiac GXP.R they share.

"We just went roundy round and took the checker without hitting anybody or going off the track. It was one of those days but it could have been lot worse," said Edwards of the race. "The 70 car had a tough race too and we did gain points on both the 67 and 87 Porsches because they crashed.

"We lost some ground to the #57 Pontiac team of Liddell and Davis in the points but they finished second for Pontiac so we are happy about that.

"I was just cruising out there. I was a lap down and there was no sense in trying to be a hero and risk anything. I drove about 80 percent and just tried to stay out of trouble and keep that #40 car behind me. I was able to get on it a bit for those last few laps.

"We were pretty strong here in the dry but we were just giving away too much on the straights and I think that the car would have been ok so had we been in the race I would have pushed it harder but being a lap down I completely stayed out of everything. I just cruised today trying to stay out of trouble and score the best finish we could."

"It was a tough one," said Banner Racing team owner Leighton Reese. "But we stretched out a lot of points on the 67 car but we lost a few positions to the #70 Mazda. We lost our points lead a little bit but we are still in a strong position. It was ugly but it wasn't a DNF! We suffered through a broken transponder in Paul and Kelly's car and Marc Bunting had a big crash in the #06 Banner Pontiac.

"It was an expensive weekend but it probably could have been worse!"