

Barber Indy/Rolux/Continental 2010 Races

The racers at Barber Motorsports Park on the weekend of April 9th to 11th had race cars from Miatas to Indy cars. Friday's runs were for practice and qualifying of the Rolex races. Saturday saw the Indy qualifying and the actual Rolex/Continental races. Sunday was for Indy Lights and the big Indy cars. There are 4 classes of cars running in the Rolex (DP & GT) / Continental Tire (GS & ST) races on Saturday. DP (Daytona Prototype) consists of pure race cars with experimental combinations of chassis and engines, GT (Grand Touring) consists of production based souped up RX-8's, Mustangs and Corvettes, GS (Grand Sport) consists of big engine muscle cars by Porsche, BMW and American iron like Mustang & Camaro and Street Tuner which includes Miatas, Mini-Coopers, BMW's and Hondas (even saw a Kia racing!).

Friday:

We had time to scope out the facilities and track layout. Good vendor selection. Our Car Corral passes got us close to the action between turns 11 & 12 just down from the vendor Fan Zone. The smaller crowd Friday let us get closer to the action and the activity in the paddock area watching the cars being set up to race. Several cars tested out the gravel traps for practice. We got to see all of the car groups on the track. Rolex/Continental qualifying was done by group class. It was all done by lap time with the whole group running together for the best times.

Saturday:

Indy Qualifying was done in the morning. They qualify in a group run as well, not individually like NASCAR. All the cars run together and the best lap time ranks the starting order. Dan Weldon in the No. 4 National Guard car got into the gravel during qualifying. After lunch, the Grand-Am Rolex race, called the Porsche 250, ran first. This race has two drivers per car swapping out during pit stops. The groups started separately but are on the track at the same time. During the race everything gets mixed up with higher powered cars trying to pass lower powered cars of the next class. Cars get resorted during the cautions to get the classes back together helping congestion. In DP class No. 01 driven by Pruett/Rojas came in first followed by No. 60 driven by Negri and Pew. These two cars battled back and forth the whole race. However, for Mazda fans in GT class, the RX-8's took the day finishing 1, 2 and 3! Numbers 69 (Assentato & Segal), 30 (Lamb & Taylor) and 70 (Bomarito & Tremblay). There were eight RX-8's in the GT group all finished in the top 10. Mazda's rotary engine is taking over. MazdaSpeed support is also great according to the drivers!

In the Grand-Am Continental Tire race, too many cars were on the track. 63 cars started the race! Many cautions made for a slow race. However, it was fun to see the street cars mixing it up. In GS class Ford Mustangs dominated the field. No. 52 driven by Martin & Michaelian beat out No. 61 driven by Roush Jr & Johnson. In ST class the Miatas (3 of them) held there own along with additional MX-3's and some RX-8's. The No. 25 Miata driven by Long & Holtom won this ST class!

Sunday:

This is the big day of the first Indy Grand Prix of Alabama! We had a around of a dozen or more CAMS members sitting in a group. There were 12 Miatas in the Car Corral Sunday. I staked out a good viewing area where we could see the hairpin turn, the long straight-aways and the Jumbotron screen. Unfortunately the late comers sat in front of us and blocked some of the view. Some fans watched the Jumbotron and ignored the actual race! The Indy cars did final practice with the No. 14 car of Vitor Meira getting into the gravel. He wanted to be sure he would do it right in the main race! There was a long gap between the practice and the racing giving the group time to visit the paddock where several members got autographs from the drivers.

The Indy Lights ran first as a warm up race for the fans. They moved the Lights to the same day as the big Indy cars to give them (and their sponsors) more fan exposure. It was a good race. The race was so short, there were no pit stops! The No. 7 car driven by JK Vernay led the race and won it all. He was chased by the No. 26 of Charlie Kimbal who finished second. No. 26 had passed the No. 7 at the race start but was ruled to have jumped the start. He never could get by!

The Inaugural Barber Indy Grand Prix of Alabama started off with a bunch of celebrity appearances. Randy Owen (of the group Alabama) and Taylor Hicks (American Idol) sang, Mayor Bell (Birmingham) spoke, and Charles Barkley waved the green flag. After the usual driver introductions facing the high priced seats, we got to see the drivers parade around the track in engine sponsor Honda 2000's. The race was tight from the start. Marco Andretti No. 26 passed Helio Castroneves No. 2 and pole sitter Will Power No. 12 early and led for most of the race. However, pit strategy got the No. 2 car to the win. Scott Dixon No. 9 finished second but could not pass the No. 2. Marco ended a disappointing 5th. Helio did his traditional fence climb to the cheers of the fans. Fan favorites like the No. 7 of Danica Patrick finished toward the rear. There were several tense moments with cars off the track in the gravel or spins on the track but no major incidents. Newcomer Simona De Silvestro was running 7th well ahead of Danica when she went sideways across the track in the hairpin turn of Charlotte's Web. All cars got around her without contact but caused the final caution. This rookie lady is giving Danica a run for top female driver. She has out run Danica in several races but has had a few incidents. CAMS members split after the race trying to get ahead of the race traffic.

The picture highlights are divided into 3 directories. One for each day. The winning cars are pictured as well as the paddock and race incidents.

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