

NHRA Summit Sport Compact Race Series

Season Off To A Record Setting Start



By **ROAN RARQUHARSON** and **LOUIS P. CORDOVA**

Contributing Writers

ENGLISHTOWN, NJ--On the third stop of the 2004 race series, the NHRA landed in Englishtown, NJ on the weekend of May 1-2. Despite a dismal forecast, Mother Nature came through with good race weather for both days. With records having been set at the previous two events of the season, fans and racers alike were anticipating that tempo to continue—they were not disappointed.

First-round qualifying kicked off a bit late on Saturday, which worked well for Abel Ibarra and the Flaco Racing Team. The team spent a good part of the afternoon swapping motors in his K&N sponsored pro class RX-8. All-Motor favorite Jesus Padilla, fresh off a win at his home track of Moroso, FL, came north to battle a predominantly front-wheel drive field in his '85 GSL-SE. As expected, Padilla took top spot in this round, running a record-setting 9.982



(with a slipping clutch), followed by Jeremy Lookofsky's Honda, and Scott Mollier's Neon. The first Modified pairing at the line found father and son Carlos Gonzalez, Sr. and Carlos Gonzalez, Jr. The elder Gonzalez hit the traps first in his '91 RX-7 with an ET of 8.099, which was good enough for the No. 1 spot in this round, while Jr. ran a distant 8.469 in his RX-3. Then the two 20B powered cars of the Pro RWD class—the Flaco Racing RX-8 and Carlos Montano's "Pepe Loco" MX-6—lined up. While Ibarra ran an off-pace 8.637 @ 110 mph, Montano crossed the traps in 13.8 @ 30 mph sliding on his roof. Montano walked away unharmed and the car sustained only minor body damage after hooking left, then right, before finally flipping over.

The Turbonetics Celicas of Matt Scranton and Tirso Sanjuan qualified in slots one and two ahead of Ibarra.

In the second round of All-Motor qualifying, Padilla lowered the ET record he set in the previous round with a 9.961 after changing clutches. Padilla was the only competitor in his class to run in the 9s on Saturday. Leslie Durst and

NHRA Summit Sport Compact Race Series



Photos by Roan Farquharson



Scott Mohler took second and third positions, respectively. Ken Scheepers ran a slower than normal 10.578 after swapping motors between rounds. New Jersey's own Carlos Perez, in the Curian RX-7, qualified third behind Carlos Gonzales' RX-7 and Paul Effants' Solara. With Montano unable to get his "Pepe Loco" car repaired in time, Ibarra was left to battle the piston-powered entries alone in the Pro Class and made the field with a disappointing 8.637 @ 110 mph. Team Titan came with a brand new 2JZ powered Celica and ran a 7.0 right off the trailer. Unfortunately, crowd favorites George Ioannou and Stephan Papadakis were unable to make the eight car field for Sunday.



Sunday Excitement

Sunday morning eliminations began with some excitement when Scheepers totaled his '85 RX-7 on a mid-10 second pass against Scott Kelly's Volkswagen. Scheepers has no plans to rebuild the RX-7; instead he's decided to focus on completing his All-Motor RX-8 for competition later in the season. Padilla

worked his way through the field of Hondas and Neons with ease by running nine-second passes all day and lowering the ET record three times in the process. Padilla's Kilo racing team defeated Mohler in the finals with a record 9.927 @ 131.97 MPH to Mohler's 10.4 @ 128.

Rotary racers did well in the first round of Modified Perez had an upset win over Vinny Ten's Supra, while the Gonzales' beat both of their opponents. Junior broke in the next round giving an easy win to Paul Efantis, who set ET and speed



records in round one. The final was a Toyota/Mazda showdown between Gonzales and Efantis. The Toyota edged out the win after Gonzales drifted his RX-7 toward the center line and was forced to lift. By the time the Pro RWD class took the stage, the cloud cover had lifted and the fans were ready for a show. Brad Personett gave the fans exactly what they wanted, taking the Team Titan Celica to the second six-second pass of the weekend, and eliminating Ara Arslanian in the process. Paisley, Ibarra, and Scranton also advanced to the semifinals. Ibarra was unable to get his RX-8 ready in time to face Team Titan, so they advanced to the finals where they met Scranton. Unfortunately for the Turbonetics Team, Scranton was unable to keep the car straight and Titan walked away with the victory in 7.133 seconds @ 197.51 MPH.

With impressive showings from so many brand new cars, the NHRA Sport Compact Series season is shaping up to be very interesting. This has been only the third event of the season and already records have been shattered in three classes. **RX**