

PARDO WINS, HO SPEED RACING SWEEPS 1-2-3 IN THE THIRD TOYOTA 120 NASCAR MÉXICO TOYOTA SERIES RACE AT PHOENIX INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY • MARCH 13 2015

PARDO GANA, HO SPEED RACING BARRE 1-2-3 EN LA TERCERA CARRERA TOYOTA 120 DE NASCAR MÉXICO SERIES EN LA PHOENIX INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY • 13 DE MARZO DE 2015

PHOTOS BY RANDALL BOHL

Last year's NASCAR México Series saw tough battles among its top drivers, from the start of the season to its finale. In February 2014, Phoenix International Raceway had hosted the first race of the NASCAR México season for the second time, and Daniel Suárez had emerged victorious here. But as the 2014 season continued, Rubén Pardo and Abraham Calderón had become big threats to Suárez. (Calderón had been the winner at the first-ever NASCAR Mexico Series in the US, at PIR in March 2013.) By fall, all eyes were on Pardo, but by December the crown had gone to Calderón.

Competitive spirit was running high as the 2015 NASCAR México season had its opener at PIR for the third time. The México race runs on Friday night, as part of a race weekend also including NASCAR Sprint Cup 500 and XFINITY 200 series races.

A beautiful evening started with a few words from dignitaries representing both nations, local communities, NASCAR and PIR;

driver introductions and greetings from Avondale Mayor Marie Lopez Rogers, Arizona Diamondback legend Luis Gonzalez and others. Honor guards presented the colors for both nations, with the Agua Fria High School Junior ROTC doing duties for the US, as both countries' national anthems were performed and the sky lit up with the first fireworks of the weekend. And then it was race time.

By the end of the night, Rubén Pardo had his first NASCAR México Series win at PIR.

After starting on the pole, Pardo fell as low as 12th, but fought back to the front in the late stages. He averaged 81.807 mph for the 120-lap contest and finished .357 of a second ahead of teammate Luis Felipe Montañó, with Hugo Oliveras in third. The top three finishers are all teammates at HO Speed Racing, a team owned by Oliveras.

"I can tell everybody that I am very happy for me, my team," said Pardo, who notched his fourth career series win. "We did an awesome job. We placed 1 through 3 for the HO Speed

Racing. I want to say thanks to all my crew, the crew chief, all the guys, all the people who came to see this race, my girlfriend, and all the people that have supported me throughout my career. All my sponsors. I am very excited to start the first race with a victory."

The winning owner was also pleased.

"I think it was a lot of hard work went into all these cars," Oliveras said, "a lot of hard work over the winter months, not a lot of people see. I think it is a great way to start the season. I have two of the best drivers here in the series. Great way to start the season."

Rounding out the top six, all of whom battled for the lead late in the race, were #4 Rogelio López, #5 José Luis Ramírez and #6 Abraham Calderón, who had won the inaugural event at PIR in 2013.

Pardo led the first 57 laps before giving up the lead to López. Pardo and López battled back and forth for the lead most of the race.

There were six cautions, including a multi-car wreck on Lap 1. Two early challengers,



Rubén Rovelo and Rodrigo Peralta, had problems and did not finish the race. Rovelo hit the wall in Turn 4 on Lap 34, and Peralta's engine started to fail at Lap 75. Thirteen cars finished on the lead lap.

Calderón fell off the pace and had to pit on lap 34, but fought back and took the lead from Pardo on lap 87. Calderón then led for five circuits, until Pardo reclaimed the top spot on Lap 92. Pardo built a lead of nearly a second and led for the final 28 laps, though Montañó closed the gap in the final few miles. Manuel Gutierrez, who started 28th and last, gambled on pit strategy and finished a solid ninth.

Race fans headed next to the fan midway, where recording superstar Luis Coronel—who had earlier driven the pace car—performed to an enthralled audience.

The NASCAR México Series at PIR was televised on NBC Universo.

Luis Gonzalez and flag honor guards (3) Joe Sage