

Speed wins

Story and photos by Jan Wagner / AutoMatters & More

Another thrilling season of Red Bull Global Rallycross has come to a close. Despite the departure of perennial series regular and crowd favorite Ken Block last year, as well as the absence of Las Vegas from the event calendar, but with the season opening at the series' inaugural event at Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park in Phoenix (see our July/August 2016 issue), the competition was as exciting as ever.

A double-header event at the Port of Los Angeles in October determined the season champions for both Supercars and GRC Lites. Multiple heats in two complete events—one Saturday and another on Sunday—produced numerous race starts, plenty of on-track battles and close finishes.

SUPERCAR

Brian Deegan had not won a Supercar race in five long years, but that changed in what some said was “the move of the race,” if not the move of the year. Here’s how it went down.

In the early stages of Sunday’s feature race, Patrick Sandell, Scott Speed and Tanner Foust all took the Joker Lap and were ahead of Deegan, who described it this way (according to *Red Bull GRC News*):

“It came down to patience in the final. There was a lot of carnage in that first turn, and I knew there was going to be—it was the last race of the year. I survived it and I was fourth. The guys (in front) took the Joker, I went around, and no one took the Joker in between us.”

While the three of them battled each other, putting lots of wear and tear on their equipment, Deegan worked his way toward them, lap after lap, biding his time for one big move near the end of the race: “My spotter Troy (Adams) was like, just take a breath and relax. I always get way too aggravated. He was like, you don’t say! I started laughing. I hung in there and I was right with Tanner. (Adams) kept telling me just wait and I kept wanting to take the Joker. He was like, ‘just wait.’

“It came down to the last laps in the final and I

saw Scott (Speed) making a move for the lead and I thought I had to go before he gaps. I went (to take the Joker) and cleared three cars—I couldn’t believe it. I came across and I was thinking they’ll have to blow me out of the way for this one. I was just taking the line and went as wide as I can get. I just held the main line and brought it home.”

Deegan could not contain his euphoric joy on the podium.

The battle for the series championship in Supercars was a real nail biter. Going into Sunday’s races, Tanner Foust led his Volkswagen Andretti Rallycross teammate **Scott Speed** (last year’s champion and former Formula One racer), but in dramatic fashion Speed overtook Foust to win his second consecutive series championship for Andretti Motorsports by a slim six points, with 571 for the season—eleven starts, four wins, seven podiums, 18 heat wins and four poles. Tanner Foust, himself a multiple-time Red Bull Global Rallycross champion, accepted defeat graciously.

GRC LITES

In another tight, close-fought battle—this time in GRC Lites—**Cabot Bingham** advanced in a chaotic final feature race from a last place start to pass and beat 2015 series champion Oliver Ericksson by only five points for the year.

(Below) GRC is a contact sport. (Right) The big jump.

This gave Bingham 452 points for the season and the series title for Dreyer & Reinbold Racing. Bingham had eleven starts, two wins (Washington DC and LA), five podiums and five heat wins for the season.

In past years the series finale has been held in Las Vegas, at the same time as the huge SEMA automotive aftermarket trade show. Last year’s Red Bull GRC finale was particularly spectacular. Hail and lightning in the afternoon—which was so bad that it forced the temporary, complete evacuation of the event venue—and then more driving rain during the feature races on a bone-chillingly cold November evening, transformed the racetrack into a sea of mud, causing the racecars to go in every direction, on and off the track. While it made for great television, the weather was brutal for spectators, race crews, racers and members of the press alike.

In stark contrast, this year’s season finale was held under beautiful, sunny skies, in balmy weather next to the Pacific Ocean at the Port of Los Angeles. This made it easier and much more comfortable for the spectators who were there in person to see and enjoy the close racing, complete with cars, dirt and car parts flying through the air.

For more information and the 2017 schedule, visit redbullglobalrallycross.com. ■

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GRC 101

Red Bull GRC events offer an unparalleled viewing experience for fans at the track and watching broadcasts alike. Events are designed for fast and exciting racing, without lengthy breaks in the action.

- One of the core principles of Red Bull GRC is that fans can rub elbows with some of the biggest names in the sport. With a completely open paddock, fans are free to walk through, interacting with drivers and watching mechanics at work.

THE CARS

Red Bull GRC cars roll out of the factory as production models, but receive significant improvements to chassis, engine and safety features to bring them up to racing spec. GRC vehicles are incredibly versatile. They produce 600 hp and can hit 0-60 mph in 1.9 seconds, but are also built to withstand 70-foot jumps and contact with other cars. Unlike many other racing series, they do not have electronic traction aids.

- Ford, Volkswagen, Subaru and Honda serve as Official Manufacturer Partners of the series.

THE TEAMS

Red Bull GRC teams are sophisticated and technically advanced, with experience competing in the FIA World Rally Championship, IndyCar and NASCAR Sprint Cup. A Red Bull GRC team is typically led by an engineer, who decides how to set up the car and plans race strategy. A small team of mechanics perform maintenance work on the car, and an engine technician keeps the 2.0-liter engine performing at its maximum potential.

- Red Bull GRC drivers are some of the most talented and versatile in the world. Many have switched to rallycross after enjoying success in other racing series, from Formula 1 to NASCAR. Others have had legendary careers in other action sports, from motocross to BMX to skateboarding. It’s not uncommon to see athletes transition from another sport to rallycross with great success.

THE TRACKS

Red Bull GRC tracks are some of the most diverse and technically challenging in the world of motorsport. They can be built almost anywhere, leading to incredibly varied layouts. Half a mile to a mile in length, they have a mixture of dirt and tarmac and a 70-foot jump.

- Each course has a main route and a joker lap route, which each driver must take only once per race. The GRC joker lap route typically shortens the length of the track significantly (unlike World Rallycross, which is longer), forcing a driver to make strategic decisions about when to take it. Taking it on an early lap allows a driver to get it over with, while waiting can allow a driver to gain positions before the finish. Depending on venue, the joker lap may have additional obstacles which significantly slow the cars. Since 2015, drivers are not allowed to take the joker lap on the first lap.
- The Penalty Box deals with on-track infractions without having to red flag or restart the race. In the event of a jump start, rough driving or joker lap infraction, offenders pull off-track into a 50-meter lane and are held until a track official releases them. If an infraction takes place too late in the race for the Penalty Box, a time penalty is assessed.

THE HEATS

Race weekend begins with two rounds of heat races, usually with four cars and six laps each, running for up to five points.

- The field is then combined into two groups of equal size for semifinals, also six laps each.
- The top three finishers from each semifinal head to the main event, giving their teams time to work on their cars while others continue to compete.
- Drivers who do not make it into the main event via heat races compete in a four-lap last chance qualifier for the final remaining spots.
- Ten cars then compete in the 10-lap main event.

CHAMPIONSHIP POINTS

Championship points are awarded to drivers as follows:

- There are Position Points for finishing as follows: 1st 50, 2nd 45, 3rd 40, 4th 35, 5th 30, 6th 25, 7th 20, 8th 15, 9th 10 and 10th 5.
- In addition, points are awarded in rounds of heats and semifinals. First place earns five points, second place earns four points, and so on through fifth place and below, which earn one point. ■

