

Bakchis increases 2019 Formula DRIFT lead with second win at Road Atlanta

Coming into the second round of the 2019 Formula DRIFT season in Orlando, FL for the AutoZone Scorched presented by Black Magic, many teams and drivers had a lot to prove. In the Formula DRIFT Black Magic Pro Championship, Aurimas "Odi" Bakchis had taken the win at the opening round in Long Beach, CA while the top three drivers from 2018 were not able to make the podium. As a result, the capacity crowd were assured fireworks on the banked Orlando course as the top teams tried to get their season back on track.

Orlando would also see the first round of the Formula DRIFT Link ECU Pro 2 Championship. The field has a very different look from last season with the top three drivers (Travis Reeder, Dylan Hughes and Sebastien Gauthier) promoted to the Pro category. Additionally, there are 17 rookies joining the series. Not only would they face an uphill challenge, trying to rise to the occasion, but the 40 drivers enrolled in Pro 2 would be competing for 16 places in the competition heats, so nobody could afford to make a mistake.

PRO 2 QUALIFYING

With the top three drivers from 2018 moving up to the Pro Category, the field was wide open for those who remained to stamp their mark on the first round of the 2019 Formula DRIFT Link ECU Pro 2 Championship. First out of the blocks was Trenton Beechum (USA) in the Roush Performance / Clonex Racing / Nexen Tire Ford Mustang. He scored 92 points on his first qualifying run – staying on the throttle and on the perfect line throughout the run, prompting an enthusiastic reception from the crowd. Beechum backed it up with an 84-point second run and earned himself the extra championship points as top qualifier.

Interestingly, his score was matched

by Rob Carlsen (USA) driving the Nexen Tire / Millennium Motorsports Nissan S14 but the judges awarded the decision to Beechum based on superior style points.

Third place was occupied by Garrett Denton (USA) in the Koruworks / Nexen Nissan S14 courtesy of a 91-point run. He was judged incomplete after failing to initiate on his first run but did enough to claim the position.

Top rookie was Branden Sorensen in the Driftline.com / Achilles Tire E46 BMW who scored 90 points on his first run and backed it up with 88 points to qualify fourth.

Despite a larger field in the 2019 Formula DRIFT Link ECU Pro 2 Championship and almost 30% of the drivers being rookies, the qualifying session went remarkably smoothly. Relatively few cars were damaged or broken and all drivers acquitted themselves well. However, only the top 16 would move on to the competition heats, which took place the following day on Friday afternoon.

PRO 2 COMPETITION HEATS

With a full grid, the competition was fierce from the start. First up in the Sweet 16 was Beechum, who was pitted against rookie Aaron J Muss (USA) driving the YipTV / Achilles Tire E46 BMW. Despite a good effort by Muss, Beechum proceeded to the Great 8 to meet Dustin Miles (USA) in the Dustin Miles Garage / Moon Power / Rays / Achilles Tire Nissan 240SX S13. Continuing to drive with skill and precision, Beechum progressed to the Final 4 where he beat Jonathan Hurst (USA) in the Dynosty / Mike Lough Racing Engine Infiniti G37.

In the Final, Beechum would be matched against rookie Jorn "Rome" Charpentier (USA) in the Imaginegarage / Feal Suspension / Achilles Tire BMW M3. Charpentier's route to the final saw



him qualify in tenth position and face Josh Robinson (Australia). Despite his rookie status, Charpentier made quick work of Robinson, as well as Troy Manners (USA) in the PRL Motorsports / Nexen Tire Nissan 240SX S14.5 in the Great 8. His next victim was Geoff Donati (USA) in the Tuner Tools / Achilles Tire Nissan S14.

In the Final, Beechum had a strong lead run while Charpentier struggled to initiate on the banking. However, he closed the gap and had good proximity during the remainder of the run. On his lead run, the BMW driver put himself back in contention as Beechum was smooth but didn't drift as deep.

In the end, the judges gave the decision to Beechum by virtue of a better chase run in view of the small mistakes made

by Charpentier. They were joined on the podium by third placed Jonathan Hurst.

"My car was in pieces a few weeks before this event as we scrambled to get the new angle kit we designed working properly," Beechum explained after the podium celebrations. "It actually wasn't working properly when we got here but we dialed it in on the track and things worked out well. We had to send it hard in the heats because the highline on the banking is the sweet spot and we pulled it off in every battle, giving the judges what they were looking for. I want to thank my team for the hard work getting us here but we're looking forward to the next round to see if we can maintain this momentum."

Story/Photo courtesy of Formula Drift

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