



## Podlesni and Westphal Share Opening Honors at Auto Club Speedway



Fontana, Calif. (March 9, 2008) - The Pacific F2000 Championship Presented by Hankook 2008 campaign opened this past weekend at the newly renamed Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif., and the results indicate that this may be one of the most competitive seasons yet.

On Saturday morning, 2006 series champion Robert Podlesni, who has returned after a one-year hiatus to drive Dave Freitas Racing's #84 Terminal Velocity/Alpinestars Van Diemen DP08, immediately made his presence known by taking the first pole of the season.

"It is difficult at Fontana because you get such a tow on the banking that you just have to be in the right position at the right time to get a good lap," noted Podlesni.

PR1 Motorsports driver Jeff Westphal, in his #39 TNT Demolition/Cacci Construction Van Diemen, was just 0.015 seconds adrift among a closely packed field which saw the top nine drivers separated by a mere 1.043 seconds.

The start was confused when Westphal's car refused to fire on the grid, leaving open the outside front row position, and the first three rows started single file. This had all changed by the time the field reached Turn Three and began to string out with Podlesni leading from PR1 Motorsports' Max Hyatt (#22 Performance Drink Van Diemen), PR1 Motorsports teammate Shaun Modisette (#26 Carson Trailer Van Diemen) and Scott Rarick in his #34 Piper/Fast Forward/Red Line Oil Piper.

Podlesni and Hyatt briefly exchanged positions before Podlesni retook the advantage and the lead pack of four cars slowly began to draft away from the rest of the field. Podlesni, however, was never able to eke out much of a lead.

"At Fontana you need to have a gap of 1.1 seconds to be able to keep a driver behind, but Max was only 0.7 back so I had work hard to keep him behind," declared Podlesni. "I also think that the four of us were a little faster when I was leading, and that enabled us to break away from the rest of the field."

Hyatt continued to hound Podlesni, with Rarick and Modisette also running in nose-to-tail formation until lap 13, when Rarick found a way past to secure the final step on the podium. When the checkered flag fell, the top four finished within 2.035 seconds.

Hyatt said, "I had several opportunities to try to pass Robert, then three laps from the end I got loose in Turn Eight and Robert got a big enough advantage to hold me off."

Rarick was satisfied with his third place after the jumbled start which caught him out a bit. "I mistook Max for the second-place qualifier and expected him to take his place next to Robert at the start and I stayed behind him, when I should have been next to him, which cost me some at the start," admitted Rarick.

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Chuck Hulse finished sixth and claimed the Master's class victory (for drivers 51 and older) in Dave Freitas Racing's #21 Silicon Salvage Van Diemen.

Peter Hansel, driving the #65 GS610 Maximum Performance Brake Fluid/Comar Performance Van Diemen, finished seventh and was the Expert Class winner (for drivers aged between 35 and 50).

The following morning, PR1 Motorsports locked out the front row of the grid for Race Two with Westphal taking the pole by 0.8 seconds ahead of drafting partner and teammate Modisette.

"Conditions were difficult today and it was important to have someone to draft with as there was a headwind down the straight," said Westphal.

After the heartbreak of Saturday, when his car refused to fire on the grid, resulting in a delayed start and an unrepresentative 15th-place finish, Westphal had a few more anxious moments when his engine again proved recalcitrant.

When asked how concerned he was watching his team frantically work on the car, Westphal replied: "I tried to stay calm by talking with my teammates and not watching the team." He nevertheless remained confident the problem would be resolved, and sure enough, it was. With moments left before roll-out, the Zetec motor fired into life and Westphal was able to assume his position at the head of the field.

At the green flag, the field took off as though it were a high-speed pace lap with the first six positions in two-by-two formation and nose to tail as they sped off toward the oval/road course banking. All but Chuck Hulse made it through Turn Three cleanly, with the Saturday Masters winner rejoining at the rear of the field after contact with another competitor.

As the field strung out, Westphal soon established a clear lead over Modisette and Hansel, who had qualified a magnificent third, then Podlesni, Nick Freytag (#9 G Phactory/Sodi Kart/ PR1 Motorsports Van Diemen), Hyatt, Rarick and the rest.

"Jeff was a little faster [than me] today and I could see the battle going on behind me, so I concentrated on doing two perfect laps to get a gap over the battle for third," said Modisette.

The battle for third was the best of the race with positions changing every lap. Hyatt worked his way impressively through the group, rising from ninth on the grid to third and claiming the Hard Charger Award. Hyatt also posted the race's fastest lap, worth an additional two championship points.

Freytag, Podlesni and Rarick enjoyed a tremendous tussle, with positions changing constantly, before they sped underneath the checkered flag to finish in that order. Sixteen-year-old Freytag's fine effort ensured a sensational 1-2-3-4 finish for the Fresno, Calif.-based PR1 Motorsports team.

Hansel, who had been shuffled back in the early stages, finished seventh to claim his second Expert class award, while Hulse recovered from his early spin to take eighth and another Masters' award.

With the fastest race laps of the top 11 cars within 1.3 seconds, it indicates how competitive this series and these drivers are. There are at least six or seven drivers capable of standing on the top step of the podium this year and it will be exciting to watch as the series unfolds.

**Next races: Rounds 3 & 4,  
Willow Springs International Raceway, Rosamond, Calif., April 5/6.**