

Kirby Victorious at Fontana as Pacific Formula F1600 Opens 5th Season - January 17, 2015

Buttonwillow, Calif. . – The Pacific Formula F1600/F2000 Championship opened its twelfth season, fifth for the F1600 class, on the 2.88 mile infield road course at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, California with Alex Kirby taking an impressive win in his Piper/Honda. The series is beginning with a non-points two-race weekend run with Cal Club as part of the SCCA U.S. Majors Tour.

This weekend the series drivers competed within run groups made up of several different classes due to a revised series format designed to allow drivers to compete in the series and SCCA sanctioned events simultaneously. The run groups will be determined by the sanctioning club and therefore vary from region to region. This weekend using the 2.88 mile infield road circuit, the Formula 1600 group ran in FF and was grouped with F500 and FV.

Friday morning produced a twenty-five minute practice session to be followed the first of two qualifying sessions. The first session was twenty-five minutes in duration as twenty two cars took to the track, twelve of which were FF with seven competing in the F1600 series, the largest field thus far. Alex Kirby; #81, LA Prep Inc., Fast Forward Components, Piper Race Cars, Piper DL7/Honda took eleven laps to set the fastest time of the session and was the only driver in the 1 minute 46 second bracket with a 1:46.836. Second fastest in the #8, Artwork by Eli, Porter Racing, 1993 Swift DB6/Honda was Ed Erlandson a veteran of the F1600 series. Ed was followed by Denny Renfrow; #11, Wheely Open Racing, Piper DL7/Honda, Chuck Horn in his second season in the series; #54, Hotel California, Porter Racing, Swift DB6/Honda, newcomer Daniel Swanbeck; #27, BigWheels.net, Piper DF5/Honda, Rick Payne; #75, Payton Pools, Van Diemen/Honda and another series veteran Dave Zurlinden, #31, Pro Pack Systems, Fast Forward, Piper DF5/Honda. Dave's practice and qualifying times were off from the rest of the field as he was the only driver using the proposed Series Spec Tire and with no points at stake took the opportunity to do some testing since the final race of the season will be held at Auto Club Speedway in October.



Saturday was warm, clear and sunny as the second round of qualifying began and again it was Alex Kirby with the fastest time of the F1600 group improving on Friday's time to a 1:46.015. Kirby was followed into the 1 minute 46 second bracket by Canadian Rick Payne whose Van Diemen clicked off a 1:46.821. These two were followed by Ed Erlandson improving his time, Daniel Swanbeck, Denny Renfrow, Chuck Horn and Dave Zurlinden.

Though the series is open to any FF competitor, Honda powered cars now dominate the field and even Ed Erlandson switched from Ford (Kent) to Honda engines. Of the twelve FF cars entered, only three were powered by Ford engines, a Piper DF5, a Swift DB1 and a Lola T540.

The late afternoon start meant that drivers were driving into the sun as they approached turns 3, 5 and 12 the most critical being turn 3 coming off the banking.

As the race went green, the field streaked off around the banking through NASCAR turns 1 and 2 and headed for turn 3 and Alex Kirby made it through cleanly, Payne while in second place was clipped into a spin by Chuck Horn, who had come down the inside braking late. Horn went straight through clipping Payne and off drivers left and when he re-entered the track collided with non-series competitor Mike Lewis who in turn spun and hit car owner Bill Kephart. Kephart's car was too damaged to continue as was Horn's DB6 while Payne and Lewis continued. This left Kirby with a clear lead over the ensuing pack. The first lap completed and it was Kirby with a clear lead followed by Swanbeck, Erlandson, Renfrow, Zurlinden and Payne.

Kirby had a stranglehold on the race as the other competitors now battled for the runner-up positions which became a three car duel with positions changing on every lap between Swanbeck, Erlandson and Renfrow. Erlandson held the runner-up spot until lap 5 when he dropped to fourth. Then it was Renfrow's turn to hold second, which he did until lap 11 when finally it was Swanbeck who swept past to finally claim the second step on the podium.

The final quarter of the race saw the positions stabilize somewhat with Kirby leading, Swanbeck, Renfrow, Erlandson, Payne and Zurlinden until the final lap when Erlandson passed Renfrow to claim the final podium step.

Kirby was fortunate to not be involved in the first lap mayhem was able to cruise to victory and to set the fastest lap of the race which should stand him in good stead for tomorrow's event.

F1600 Qualifying: 1. Alex Kirby, (Piper DL7/Honda-H), 1m46.015s; 2. Rick Payne, (Van Diemen/Honda-H), 1m46.821s; 3. Ed Erlandson, (Swift DB6/Honda-A), 1m47.101s; 4. Daniel Swanbeck, (Piper DF5/Honda-H), 1m47.505s; 5. Denny Renfrow, (Piper DL9/Honda-H), 1m47.518s; 6. Chuck Horn, (Swift DB6/Honda-H), 1m48.004s; 7. Dave Zurlinden, (Piper DF5/Honda-T), 1m50.590s. Tires: A-Avon, C-Cooper, G-Goodyear, H-Hoosier, T-Toyo.

F1600 Round 1 (15 laps): 1. Kirby; 2. Swanbeck; 3. Erlandson; 4. Renfrow; 5. Payne; 6. Zurlinden; Horn DQ.

Fastest race lap: Kirby, 1m46.552s.

Expert class winner (over 35): Erlandson.

Points: No points awarded, non-championship event.