

AIM Autosport records best Grand Am result

Exchange Traded Gold No. 61 Ford Riley is fourth at Mid-Ohio

(Lexington, Ohio) 22 June 2008--It's hard to call a race that ran almost half the time under caution exciting, but in the end, with some daring passes on a wet track, The AIM Autosport Exchange Traded Gold No. 61 Ford Riley would come across the finish line fourth, the best result so far this season for the team. It has moved the team up in the overall series championship to seventh.

Mark Wilkins would start the car from the inside of row two and as the cars came to the grid, dark clouds moved in. Mark would fall from third to fifth at the start when the pole sitter did not get a good start which allowed the outside line of cars to get ahead in the first two corners. Mark would make a charge and on lap five, set fastest lap of the race at 1:21.426 moving to fourth. Two laps later heavy rain started to fall and the first of eight full course cautions brought the field to a virtual standstill. Mark brought the car in for the mandatory stop to switch to rain tires and top up the fuel.

This caution would last thirteen laps with cars - including the race leader, continuing to spin off course behind the safety car delaying the restart. With heavy rain still falling and the field bunched up, Mark would have a brief off-course excursion while challenging the No. 10 Sun Trust car for second place off the difficult left-hand turn leading to The Carousel. Getting the car pointed in the right direction, Mark would fight back for position and turn some very fast race laps in the wet. After an hour and a half of some intense driving punctuated by a series of yellow flag periods caused by cars spinning off or crashing, Mark would pit the #61 Ford Riley from fourth to take on fuel and hand the wheel over to Brian Frisselle.

Brian would come back on track tenth in class with a few GT cars to get around. The rain and the cautions had mixed up the field and the #61 was actually seventeenth overall. It did not take Brian long to clear the GT traffic and he had good track position in DP. He would soon be sitting sixth in class and closing on the cars ahead. While there appeared to be a dry line forming in some areas, it was still pretty wet around most of the circuit. Choosing the right line worked to Brian's advantage and helped save the tires while picking up time on the leaders.

The last hour of the race saw a bit more rain, plenty of cautions and Brian moving forward setting a very quick pace. With eighteen minutes to go, Brian made an exciting pass up the inside of the 60 car at turn thirteen to take fourth place. He was closing in on the last podium spot at almost a second a lap and would soon pass the 10 car, powering past him down the front straight into turn one. By now though, the track had a discernible dry line and tire management was becoming an issue. He was closing on second place when he got caught out in a traffic jam of six GT cars. The Brumos cars with smaller displacement engines and less torque certainly had better tires at the end of the race and were closing fast. The 58 car would slide past Brian in the traffic and take away the spot. Almost immediately, the last caution of the day flew for an accident on the front straight. The race ended under the yellow at the two hour, forty-five minute time limit. The AIM Autosport Exchange Traded Gold No. 61 Ford Riley would record its best finish in two years of the Rolex Sports Car Series presented by Crown Royal Cask No. 16. The team would also be credited with the fastest race lap. Brian would also make the SPEED TV replay highlights with some of his exciting passes in some unlikely spots.

At the end of the day, everyone on the crew was happy with the result and are now convinced, more than ever, that the podium they desire is attainable. The drivers and managers had this to say after the race:

Mark Wilkins: "We proved again that the Ford Riley is fast off the trailer. We lead the practice sessions in the dry and certainly had the speed in the wet. It was a bit hairy being on slicks when the rains came and even on the wets. There were some spots that if you put the power down too quickly, you were going for a ride in the grass. Just don't ask me how I know that." He continued, "Brian did a great job to keep us in it and I felt pretty good about handing him the car in fourth place. This is a great result for the team and we are moving forward each race."

Brian Frisselle: "What a great result in a difficult race. The rain tires were becoming quite a handful at the end and it was a lot of work to keep the car from coming around on me. But we kept it on track and had some battles going on toward the end. Had a bit of a moment when my brother tried to pass me, but we were having none of that. The AIM Autosport crew did a great job and Ian (Willis) and Jim (Malicki) made the right calls on strategy. We'll be really pumped for the next race at Daytona after this weekend."

Ian Willis: "The boys did a terrific job staying out of trouble and dealing with the vastly changing conditions. At the same time they both showed maturity and speed by being one of the fastest cars in any conditions. They deserve a huge amount of credit for our best series finish to date."

The team remained at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course for a full day of practice on Monday in preparation for the next event at Daytona International Speedway next week. The race takes place on Thursday, July 3rd. It will be broadcast live starting at 8:00 p.m. (ET) on SPEED TV.

AIM Autosport Facts:

Established in 1995, AIM Autosport has a mandate to identify, train and manage emerging motorsport talent. AIM has provided many young drivers with a solid foundation on which to build a career in professional racing. The success of the AIM driver development programs has been achieved through the dedication of our employees and the ongoing support of our commercial and technical partners. Away from the track, AIM Autosport serves the needs of the racing community with a purpose-built preparation shop situated in the Toronto suburb of Woodbridge, Ontario. AIM also fields the Exchange Traded Gold #61 Ford-Riley Daytona Prototype in the Rolex Grand Am series with drivers Mark Wilkins and Brian Frisselle.

Photo credit: Caitlin Fell

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