

AIM Autosport: Once again at the front... Once again denied

No. 61 Ford Riley suffers cruel luck and the team is robbed of victory

Woodbridge, Ontario (07.21.2008) With fifty minutes to go in the race, Brian Frisselle took the NO.61 Exchange Traded Gold Ford Riley past the 01 car to take second place. Some thirty seconds down the road he passed the 99 car to move into the lead of the Porsche 250 at Barber Motorsport Park. There were none more elated - and surprised, than the AIM Autosport crew considering how the weekend had been until the drop of the green flag Sunday afternoon. Twenty-five minutes later, with just a dozen or so laps to go, the elation turned to disbelief as the No. 61 rolled to a stop coming up the back straight with an engine that just would not go any more. "That's racing", some would say, but this would be the second successive race the team has been denied a podium result and some might just call it "plain bad luck."

Running at the front on Sunday however, was an amazing bonus for a team that struggled through practice.

The Barber Motorsport Park circuit was proving to be a challenge for most teams through practice but the AIM Autosport crew and drivers seemed to struggle with finding the right balance for the car. Would handling or traction be the key, and how to balance both. Brian and Mark (Wilkins) along with engineers Ian Willis and Jim Malicki spent considerable time huddled around computers looking at data and all manner of solutions were thrown at the Ford Riley with the assistance of everyone from Riley, Ford and associated suppliers. With a qualifying setup chosen, Mark would take the No.61 out and put it on the fourth row for Sunday's starting grid. This would be the first time the Exchange Traded Gold Ford Riley would qualify outside the top five on the starting grid this season.

Taking zero as a starting point, the crew worked into the night to go over all the fine details and set the car to neutral and wait to see what AIM Autosport's brain trust had in mind come Sunday morning. After a few hours sleep, the crew attacked the car with notes from Ian and Jim and rolled the car to the starting grid with the collective hope that "we got it right." From the drop of the green, it looked like they did.

With temperatures soaring (97°F / 36°C), Mark would start the race and immediately gain a position in the opening lap. The pace was considerably slower than qualifying as everyone took the heat into consideration along with the fact there was additional traffic to deal with as the GT class joined the race this year. Mark was on pace with the leaders and everything looked good for the team's strategy to run old tires in the opening stint. Mark would slip back one spot but make up positions as the leaders came in for their mandatory stop. He would make the mandatory stop from fourth position to take on fuel and a fresh set of Pirelli tires and re-enter the track in tenth. Mark was back up to sixth within a few laps and would be sitting fifth when the first full course caution came out. Moving to fourth and closing the gap to the car ahead, Mark would pit from third under the green on lap fifty-seven to take on sticker tires, fuel and hand the controls over to Brian. A fantastic job by the AIM Autosport crew put Brian back on track in fifth. Another full course caution two laps later and Brian would move to third as the cars out front came in for their final stop. Good to go to the end of the race, the chance for AIM Autosport's first podium looked good. Brian was in touch with the leaders and the Exchange Traded Gold Ford Riley was setting

faster lap times. Then Brian got a run on both the 01 and 99 cars through the high speed esses on the back straight as they were baulked slightly by GT traffic. He trapped the 01 behind the 99 and almost took both cars going into the roller coaster turns at the end of the back straight. Brian then passed the 99 before the end of the next lap going into turn seven to take the lead just as another full course caution brought out the safety car.

Throughout the caution, Brian worked to keep the tires clean as there was considerable rubber buildup on the track. Timing the restart just perfectly, Brian immediately pulled away and built a strong lead. It looked good for the No. 61 Ford Riley and AIM Autosport's first win seemed to be in hand. Brian had just lead his fifteenth lap when coming up the back straight the car suddenly lost all power. Brian tried everything short of getting out and pushing, to get the car underway but it was terminal and the car coasted to a halt just ahead of pit entrance. Thirteen laps later the race was done with the No. 61 sitting under the team tent.

The disappointment under the tent was obvious, but so were some determined smiles from everyone on the crew who understood what the team had accomplished. The entire team took a well-deserved night off to celebrate their near-victory with crew members and drivers spending a good deal of time congratulating each other for such a strong effort. They all know the next race in Montreal is just a week away.

Drivers and team management had this to say:

Mark Wilkins: "With the way the weekend started, it was just amazing to climb into a very strong car Sunday morning and be on pace right away. If you had asked me Friday whether I'd be handing the car over to Brian from third place, I might have thought it crazy. But there we were. Ian and Jim got the choice for setup right and the crew made it work. Everyone on the team is invested in this and they all feel the disappointment. It won't be long before we have something to seriously celebrate." He continued, "Brian did an absolutely fantastic job. It was awesome to see him move into first and take control of the race but today it was just not meant to be."

Brian Frisselle: "What can I say. The strategy was perfect and Mark had us in from the beginning. The car felt so good - a completely different car from Friday and Saturday. It was strong and it was settled under some very intense conditions. The track was greasy and the temperatures incredibly hot but the car just worked. It was heartbreaking when we lost power and I could only imagine the atmosphere in the pit box. I was on the radio with Ian and he seemed so calm as we went through some procedures to try and restart the car." Brian continued, "We're almost there. Everyone on the AIM Autosport crew works so hard and we really want to make it to the podium soon to reward them for all those late nights and early mornings. Montreal can't come soon enough."

Ian Willis (Team Principal/Race Engineer): "Every member of the team worked so hard this weekend and while there is no one more disappointed than myself, everyone feels it. Brian and Mark took an unknown quantity on track Sunday afternoon and made it work. They did everything we asked and it nearly paid off. The crew put in the extra hours because they also want to win as much as the drivers." Willis commented, "Someone asked me if we were saving the big win for the race in Montreal. Honestly, we'd have loved to come home to Canada with the podium out of

the way so we could relax and enjoy the moment and go for a repeat. Now we'll be working even harder to put on a good show and close the deal."

Andrew Bordin (Team Principal): "Our desire showed in a lot of areas this weekend at Barber. The crew put in a terrific effort. Ian and Jim worked all the possibilities and brought the right setup and race strategy to the table. Brian and Mark both worked on fitness going into the event as we knew this was going to be a hot one and they were in great shape for the race. It looked like the total package and we almost got the prize. As long as there is another race to contend, everyone on the AIM Autosport team will be working toward that ultimate goal. Hopefully we won't have long to wait."

The AIM Autosport Exchange Traded Gold No. 61 Ford Riley will be on track for the next round in the Rolex Sports Car Series presented by Crown Royal Cask No. 16 at Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in Montreal, Quebec, August 1. The race is scheduled at 4:15 p.m. ET and will be broadcast on SPEED TV, Friday August 1 at 8:00 p.m. ET (tape delay).

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 fields the Exchange Traded Gold #61 Ford-Riley Daytona Prototype in the Rolex Grand Am series with drivers Mark Wilkins and Brian Frisselle. The team also competes in the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear with John Edwards at the wheel of the #7 Formula Mazda.

Photo credit: Caitlin Fell

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