

Spec E30 and Round 6 at Buttonwillow Raceway Park!

The weather in October at Buttonwillow is always difficult to predict. It can either provide the blazing heat of summer, or it can be full-on winter cold. For the Spec E30 races the weather would be nice and cool with sun filled skies and a light breeze all weekend. A new record number of drivers showed up for this event – 14! Yes 14 drivers showed up to battle it out on the track.

Two cars and three drivers from NASA's NorCal region couldn't stay away so joined us for the weekend of racing. All but one regular SoCal driver was able to return and we saw 19 drivers in 14 cars including the "Enduro". We were also joined by two new drivers for their first ever races, Mitch Pepper and Erik Strong. The new guys would put the rubber to the asphalt for their first green flag starts and are both a great addition to the SPEC E30 group!

Buttonwillow has many different configurations and for this event the track configuration would be Clockwise number 13 a familiar configuration for Spec E30!

Buttonwillow and NASA hosted a Friday test and tune session. These aren't usually an eventful occasion and mechanical issues are pretty rare and when they do pop up, they are normally uncomplicated such as "teething problems". This would not be a normal Friday test and tune.

As they happened...

- a. Vogel Boys racing would blow a head gasket in the afternoon.
The guys in the Spec E30 community helped with some needed parts and the car was repaired in the pits before the sun set on the track.
- b. Steven Stepanian took delivery of his freshly built Spec E30 dubbed "The Great Pumpkin" and Friday's afternoon session was the only shakedown session the Midnight Oil team had.
A strange electrical gremlin would keep the car from running correctly so the crew worked into the night and into Saturday diagnosing the problem.
- c. Dave Reed lost 4th gear just before the test session ended.
A spare transmission was sent up from the Midnight Oil Shop in Miramar, four hours away. Dave's car was put in the trailer and the transmission was swapped out because space was running out in the garage!
- d. Meanwhile, the Midnight Oil crew was helping another BMW team change the transmission in an E36 BMW race car.

Everyone made it to the morning warm-up. There was so much work going on the night before the racing even started, the Spec E30 series director Shawn Meze was nervously hoping that Friday was not a preview of things to come.

Saturday Qualifying:

After two months off from racing, the racers were itching to get back on the track and the morning warm-up looked more like the Great Land Rush of 1893. Once the guys got that out of their system, everyone began to focus on the qualifying session.

Steven Ferrario made a profound statement in qualifying with a dominating 2:08.128 to take the pole position and only missed the track record by a half of a second! Alan Hauser and David Reed battled the

clock and qualified within a tenth of one another but Alan would claim the outside pole position putting David back to the third spot almost a second and a half behind Ferrario.

Results from Saturday Qualifying

1)	93	Steven Ferrario	2:08.128
2)	320	Allan Hauser	2:09.534
3)	343	David Reed	2:09.685
4)	21	Matthew Thiemann	2:10.684
5)	67	Steffen Thompson	2:10.704
6)	15	Team Road Runner	2:11.195
7)	25	Chris Donnelly	2:11.627
8)	59	Mike Vogel	2:11.834
9)	11	Frank Reed	2:13.571
10)	3	Shawn Meze	2:14.016
11)	111	Erick Strong	2:14.322
12)	28	Steven Stepanian	2:15.980
13)	99	Mitchell Pepper	2:16.022
14)	75	Jeremy Sykes	2:17.073

The Spec E30 series director Shawn was not able to watch this race from the tower to see the events as they happened. Instead he was driving the Number 3 Midnight Oil car! And his perspective was from the back of the pack.

The start was great, almost everyone got off the line well. There were at least two rows of cars that went three-wide through Turn-1. Despite the aggressive start everyone made it to away without contact or damage. Shawn Meze had a great start right behind Mike Vogel who struggled off the line. Mike moved to the outside leaving Shawn the middle and he moved up next to Frank Reed and all three went through Turn-1 door handle to door handle.

At the start of the race, David Reed passed Allan Hauser to take over the 2nd spot and pursue Steven Ferrario for the lead. On the second lap, David Reed was able to pass Ferrario for the lead in the sweeper. A couple laps later Ferrario repaid the favor by passing Reed in the same turn to retake the lead.

On lap four Stepanian's race was over with reoccurrence of Friday's electrical issues and retired from the race. The Midnight Oil team would find and fix the problem before the 3-hour Enduro scheduled to start only a few hours later. Fellow Spec E30 driver Kieran Gobey teamed with Steve for the Enduro and "The Great Pumpkin" ran flawlessly for the entire Enduro.

Meanwhile, Dave Reed would misjudge Ferrario's speed going into the sweeper, and collected Ferrario to spin him to the inside. Reed would control his car and continue into the lead. Ferrario would drop back to 6th place. Mike Vogel was 5th in front of Ferrario and while coming out of the Buttonhook turn Vogel missed a shift and Ferrario was unable to avoid Vogel and would tap him just enough to force him off the track to the inside.

As Shawn Meze went by the parked Vogel, as he did he thought for certain he would remain there for the remainder of the race. Meze figured that the front left suspension was broken because it was sitting so low and his right rear tire was freely spinning in reverse. On Meze's next lap, Vogel wasn't there anymore! Vogel somehow got the car out of the dirt and was again circling the track.

Mid-race Chris Donnelly overcooked a corner that him off track providing the other racers with a thick dusting of the track surface. Donnelly would lose a couple positions and fell back to the 12th spot but would battle back up to 10th. While he was catching and in turn intimidating Meze with his pace, Donnelly lost it again at the bus stop and Mitch Pepper would inherit the 10th spot from the unfortunate Donnelly.

On the last lap Vogel dropped a wheel off track causing the car to spin and hit the tire wall. Initially the car was thought to have suffered cosmetic damages to the passenger door and mirror and Vogel was able to continue and take the checkered flag.

Saturday Race Results & Fastest Lap Times

1)	93	Steven Ferrario	2:08.689
2)	320	Allan Hauser	2:10.932
3)	343	David Reed	2:10.250
4)	67	Steffen Thompson	2:11.325
5)	15	Team Road Runner	2:12.047
6)	21	Matthew Thiemann	2:11.267
7)	11	Frank Reed	2:13.306
8)	75	Team Sykes	2:13.655
9)	3	Shawn Meze	2:13.057
10)	99	Mitchell Pepper	2:13.712
11)	25	Chris Donnelly	2:11.628
12)	111	Erick Strong	2:15.199
13)	59	Mike Vogel	2:12.455
14)	28	Steven Stepanian	2:22.919

Sunday:

One thing about a great racing community is that if you have problems with your car, there are a ton of people willing to help you get your car fixed. Making it back out to compete again the next day is nearly always possible.

Upon further inspection of the Vogel Boys Spec E30 it was noticed that all the motor mounts, transmission mounts and the drive shaft support "carrier" bearing were smashed! The team was able to borrow all the parts they would need except for the carrier bearing. After a search of the local parts stores, they found a bearing from, of all things, a John Deer supplier. Tractor parts in a race car! The team had to modify it to make it work but they did make it work and would only miss the morning warm-up & qualifying sessions. The Vogel Boys team was ready in time to make the race. This is the

never say die attitude that makes amateur racing so great! While Patrick Vogel would have to start the car in the back of the field, he would be able to start!

Sunday Qualifying:

As everyone was getting up to speed, a BMW Club race car sharing the track with Spec E30 blew a motor going into the very fast Bus-Stop turn. Moments later cars started careening off track everywhere at the Bus-Stop turn. Luckily everyone avoided contact, and there were just a lot of dirty cars scattered across the track. The session was canceled to clean the track. The SE30 field was left with whatever time each of them had run in the abridged qualifying session.

Steven Ferrario again claimed the pole position but the surprise second place qualifier was Steffen Thompson squeaking out David Reed in 3rd by a tenth of a second!

Sunday Qualifying results:

1)	93	Steven Ferrario	2:09.071
2)	67	Steffen Thompson	2:10.056
3)	43	David Reed	2:10.185
4)	15	Team Road Runner	2:11.223
5)	320	Allan Hauser	2:11.536
6)	21	Matthew Thiemann	2:12.399
7)	25	Chris Donnelly	2:12.743
8)	11	Frank Reed	2:13.093
9)	3	Shawn Meze	2:15.389
10)	99	Mitchell Pepper	2:17.301
11)	111	Erick Strong	2:17.591
12)	75	Team Sykes	2:24.157
13)	28	Steven Stepanian	DNQ
14)	59	Vogel Boys Racing	DNQ

The chaotic qualifying session left the starting grid in a disorganized state. The Vogel Boys also had the last spot – not a place that Patrick Vogel was about to settle with for race number 2. Geoff Sykes took over for his father also on day two and was stuck with his “out lap” time. Steve Stepanian having encountered his last mechanical issue during the qualifying session was also sitting in what was to prove to be unworthy position on the grid.

The start was slow in coming together as Steve Ferrario brought the large field to a picture perfect starting format. The starter dropped the flag after giving the field a long and thoughtful pause, Stepanian and Frank Reed both got a tremendous start, each dispatching 2 cars ahead of them before Turn-1. Matt “the Gaffer” Thiemann had a terrific start, taking 2 positions into turn 1 and managed to keep ahead of J. Powers and Allan Hauser for the first few laps before dropping back into the clutches of Allan’s powerful drive back through the field.

Ferrario roared off into a convincing lead and Dave Reed followed Thompson for the first lap. The surprising back row of qualifying also started a relentless push forwards through the pack, slicing

aggressively yet safely through the field ahead of them. By lap 3 Patrick Vogel had caught Stepanian who was in turn on the heels of Frank Reed after having already overcome new guys Eric Strong and Mitch Pepper and had worked past Meze heading towards the front!

In a peerless drive through the pack Patrick Vogel managed to pass from 14th to 4th by the end of the race winning him the hard charger award for the race and on his heels having come from 13th up to 5th was the man in the "Great Pumpkin" Stepanian!

Meanwhile at the front of the pack, Ferrario lost the lead to a typically hair-raising late pass by Dave Reed in Turn-1 and they continued to battle this way until Dave fell victim to the ever increasing pressure from Ferrario as he dropped 2 wheels off at the exit of the Bus Stop and rode the dirt on both sides of the following turn "Riverside" before safely re-entering the track behind Stepanian and Frank Reed – his brother.

The dogged hard charging Dave Reed never gave up though and over took Frank and Stepanian to get as far forwards as 4th before again falling victim to his now overheated tires at the exit of the Bus Stop and managed a wild ride back across the track and all the way around the outside of Riverside before being able to re-enter the track. This was the end of Dave's charge towards the front and he managed a stalwart, though dirty 7th place behind Theimann.

Through all this wild and crazy race, in the face of drivers slicing their way through the field and dust and dirt covering the track and hanging in the air like clouds of brown fog, Allan Hauser quietly and carefully picked his way forwards to a brilliant 3rd place and Steffen "old school" Thompson managed a very fast 2nd place. Donnelly managed a clean race and finished on Frank Reed's tail and Mitch Pepper was one of only 3 drivers to manage to finish where they started!

Great job by everyone involved.

Race Results:

1)	93	Steven Ferrario	2:09.124
2)	67	Steffen Thompson	2:10.723
3)	320	Allan Hauser	2:09.329
4)	59	Patrick Vogel	2:10.148
5)	28	Steven Stepanian	2:10.723
6)	21	Matthew Thiemann	2:12.266
7)	343	David Reed	2:10.107
8)	11	Frank Reed	2:12.151
9)	25	Chris Donnelly	2:12.553
10)	99	Mitchell Pepper	2:15.366
11)	3	Shawn Meze	2:15.656
12)	15	Team Road Runner	2:11.695
13)	111	Erick Strong	2:16.717
14)	75	Team Sykes	2:10.364

Our last race of the season will be again at Buttonwillow where we will decide the Spec E30 Championship!