

PDQ Motorsports' Assault on the 2006 NASA 25 Hours of Thunderhill



December 3rd - We have just been released from technical impound when I spot J.G. Pasterjak from *Grassroots Motorsports* across the paddock. "Hey, J.G." I yell, "You gotta mention us this year. This makes three years in a row we have won E2". "I know." J.G. responded. "I will treat you guys more favorably this year. But you guys don't do anything exciting. There isn't any drama." "Well, what do you expect?" I said laughing, "It's a Honda." Little does he know how hard we had to work to ready the car for the race.

August 1st - I had just picked up our 2006 Civic EX coupe. The team was going to race it this year in the 25 Hour. The *NASA 25 Hours of Thunderhill presented by the United States Air Force*, is one of the big events of the year for the National Auto Sports Association (NASA). The race is 25 grueling hours with most if taking place in the dark. Since the race is run in December, rain & freezing temperatures are often part of the race. This is the 4th running of the event. Since our team won in both 2004 and 2005, people will expect us to do well. There is nothing like a little pressure to perform!

We had four months to get it ready. Surely, we could finish in time. We had built a few race cars. It would just be one more under our belt. We would have to completely strip the interior of the car. Once that was done, we could start work on the cage. While the cage was being done, we planed to send the motor out to our engine builder, James Chin. When the cage was finished, we would take the car to Cook's Collision in Tracy, California for a custom paint job. Then it will be time to reassemble the car and it would be ready to race, right? Yeah, right!

Factory service manuals were on national back order until the middle of September. Although James is a very experienced engine builder the car came with a brand new engine, the R18. There was no way we could start the engine build without a service manual. Just to be clear, this pushes our engine build schedule back six weeks!

October 1st - When the first week of October came I was already out of vacation time at work. My kids were sick and I was behind schedule.

November 12th - In an effort to get the car on track, our team entered the car in the NASA 3-hour Enduro at Thunderhill. Our team, PDQ Motorsports, had been running a 1995 Honda Civic Si in NASA's Western Endurance Racing Championship series. We had already won the series with 2 races left on the schedule so we used the last race of the series to test the new car and scrub in tires. Thankfully, we received technical support from Honda R&D America in Ohio. Using the experience they gained running the 2005 25 Hours of Thunderhill E1 class winning 2006 Civic Si, we were able to get valuable information regarding suspension set up and tuning.

With less than two weeks before we planned to head to the track for the 25-hour, we still didn't have a header. What we had is an OEM catalytic converter coming right out of the head. We had contracted a well known custom exhaust shop to produce a header for us months ago. Apparently "months" is not enough time for a professional to produce a header. You know the old saying: "If you want it done right, do it yourself." Team driver, Roger Foo, came through for us and manufactured a header for the car.

November 27th - I took the car down to Auto Innovations for corner weighing and an alignment. Time was running out. It was just two days before the car had to be on the trailer and headed for the track.

November 28th - The next day I thought to myself: "It isn't supposed to be like this. This is not how PDQ Motorsports prepares for a race." Tomorrow, we are supposed to be on our way to Thunderhill Raceway Park for the *2006 NASA 25 Hours of Thunderhill*. Nothing is packed yet. If this were 2005, the car would have been ready weeks ago. Everything would have been packed. I would be feeling great – inside the house, resting with my family. Instead, I am lying under the race car on my garage floor. The driving lights are still being installed.

November 29th - Finally, we are all loaded up. We head out to the track with some of the crew. We wanted to get to the track early so that we could get prime real estate for paddock space. Our pit space was already assigned. Our crew set up camp on Thursday and did many final details to the car. Crew and drivers from California and across the country started to arrive, ready for testing the next day.

Friday, test day 12/1 - We were still trying to nail down the car set up. We played with suspension adjustments and experimented with our aero aids. We had been just so busy building that we didn't actually have the time to test as we normally would. Drivers Jason and Tom had not even set foot in the car until now. Finally, we decided we had achieved the set up that was just right our H&R Special Springs suspension. The spring rates, sway bar size and shock adjustments were recorded. The APR Performance wing was adjusted to perfection.

Qualifying was at night. I sent Roger out to get us the best lap time. We qualified on the 16th row in 31st position. It seems a very long way to the front.

Saturday, race day 12/2 - Morning came early on race day. The race didn't start until 11:00 AM, but we had to have the car on grid at 10:15. There were still a lot of little details to attend to. The crew chief pulled our drivers aside for a last minute team meeting. The driving order had been decided and Roger would start the race. Everyone was a bit nervous. There were some very good teams signed up this year. Several of the competition had faster cars. But, our team had something they did not have: Team Unity.

All cars were called to grid and then we were all treated to a private air show. First a stunt plane took control of the skies above and the eyes below. Loops and stalls and barrel rolls were preformed with precision. When the stunt plane was done and the National Anthem was sung by Leanne Ryhmes, the U. S. Air Force made a low fly by in three of their fighter planes. Very impressive!

Drivers were called to their cars and sent out behind the pace car. The green flag flew and Roger drove smart. He kept the car out of trouble knowing that you can't win the race in the first corner or the first lap, but you sure can loose it!

Ok, I admit it, our team can be boring. It was 10 PM, or hour 11 of the race when we took the lead in E2. We were sticking to our plan. Everything was going smoothly. The pit stops and driver changes were quick and faultless. The Toyo RA-1 tires mounted on Rota Slipstreams were working great. The Cobalt Friction brake pads were performing perfectly. The DC Sports exhaust was purring. No excitement, just the way we planed it.

December 3rd - It is the middle of Sunday night. I think I might have gotten about 20 minutes of sleep. I am not sure. I had asked to be woken up for this pit stop. We would be doing brake pads and tires this time. That would be the only sleep I got until after the race. Did I mention that I have been up since 5 AM on Saturday? Well, the crew should have let me sleep as the pit stop went without a hitch. This crew is awesome!



Photo by Terry Griffin

Just after dawn on Sunday we still had the lead. Eight laps up on the nearest competitor! The team has performed perfectly. Pit stops have been fast and efficient. The drivers have been flawless. We were getting the lap times we wanted. The Honda came in for a driver's change and gas. The driver was told to start the car and...nothing! The car would not start. In a dash, the crew push started the car and the crew planned what to do next. Ten minutes later the car limped in, the battery was dead. The crew had quickly stolen a battery from a street car in the paddock. (OK, it belonged to one of the crew.) The battery was replaced and the driver was gone.

What had gone wrong? Did the battery die? The alternator? The battery master switch? How long would the new battery last? I discussed this with my crew chief and assembled a plan. We readied a spare alternator and another battery. We put the dead battery on a charger. If the replacement battery would last a full session, we could replace it during the next pit stop. Replacing the alternator would take much more time. When our driver brought in the car for the next scheduled pit stop, the battery was changed in under 1-1/2 minutes...less than one lap! Again, I can't say enough about our crew!

The race was scheduled to end at noon on Sunday. At 11:00 I suited up and readied myself to bring the car home for the checkered flag. "I better not blow it!" I thought to myself. We had a substantial lead at this point. I got in the car for the last time this race. James told me to head out. I brought it home without incident and I reported to impound as directed. We had just won again. Same class (E2), three different cars (1993 Civic EX Coupe, 1995 Civic Si Hatchback, 2006 Civic EX Coupe) three years in a row!

PDQ Motorsports has been fortunate to bring back almost the complete crew roster from our 2004 and 2005 wins. For endurance racing, especially long endurance races, the crew makes the difference between winning and just showing up. Our crew is second to none! Sharing the driving duties with team principle, Mike Quan, was: Roger Foo, Tracy, CA; Jason Hart, Flower Mound, TX; Andrie Hartanto, San Francisco, CA; Tom Lepper, Martinez, CA; and Ken Myers, Lafayette, CA. Every member of the team did their job incredibly well. Every member was important to our success.

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