

Kanavas and Hooverspeed's '06 25-Hour

Willows, CA (12.03.06): The 2006 25-Hours of Thunderhill, held Dec. 1-3, was a true test of endurance for the #19 Hoover Motorsports/Mazda MX-5 team. The team, owned by Jason Hoover, consisted of drivers, Johnny Kanavas, Matt Cross, Sammy Valafar, Mark Powell, and Andrew Caddell managed by Team Manager, Tony Silva.

After a full day of practice, rotating each driver through the car, Matt Cross took the car out for the Friday evening qualifying session and put the car in the 2nd starting position, just behind the #22 MX-5 Cup car entered by the MER/Mazdaspeed team. At the end of the day the team was confident and ready for the 25-hour endurance test.



Saturday morning brought the best weather to date for the start of the 25. Driver schedule was Andrew Caddell, Sammy Valafar, Mark Powell, Johnny Kanavas, Matt Cross. As the team did the obligatory team photos, with the car lined up on the front straight, everyone was treated to an aerobatic flying demonstration, along with a fly-over by a trio of U.S. Air Force F-15 Eagles. Caddell was now belted in and ready to take the green flag. Andrew ran a stellar first stint, staying out of trouble while running a conservative, yet quick pace and bringing the car back home in 3rd place, just behind two of the MER/Mazdaspeed MX-5's. Andrew handed the car over to Valafar, followed by Mark Powell for two clean and consistent stints. The Hoover Motorsports team was now leading the E1 class, sitting 8th overall. Two of the MER cars ran into differential problems forcing them to make extended pitstops for repairs.

Johnny Kanavas took over from Powell at about the 5-hour mark. "The tires were pretty much toast when I got into the car. There was plenty of rubber, but they felt very greasy. I just adapted and drove it at a comfortable pace.", reported Kanavas. There was one full-course-yellow during this period for some cars that had gone off track. Johnny, asked to back off a bit and run a conservative pace, dealt with the ill-handling car and brought it in with a 5-lap lead in the E1 class. Matt Cross was up next for the first round of single-stints and went out on a new set of Hoosier tires. Six laps into Matt's first stint, he comes over the radio to report the loss of the left rear wheel. The team immediately went to work once the car was towed in. A rear hub had failed, shearing at the end of the half shaft. The team gathered new parts and went to work replacing the left rear half shaft, upright, hub, and brake caliper. Bleeding the brakes and making a slight chassis adjustment, the car lost about 51 minutes with the tow and fixes, before it hit the track again, with Cross back behind the wheel.

The #19 was now about 16 laps down to the class E1 leaders and sat about 33rd overall. Matt radioed in to say that the car was very good now and it showed in his lap times as he ran a stellar stint, keeping the car clean and out of trouble. Caddell was now back up for his first of double-

stint. Andrew ran smooth again, keeping the car at the 2:06 mark, which was right on par with the team's strategy. Sammy Valafar took over from Caddell after a right side tire-rotation and ran a smooth single-stint. Andrew, Sammy and Mark moved the car up to as high as 3rd place, running on the same lap as the 2nd place E1 car, and only two laps down to the leaders. Before Mark returned to the track, the team did a front brake pad change. During Powell's stint, the brake pedal went to the floor and he regained just enough pedal to nurse it back into the pits for a brake bleed, while discovering a bad front right wheel bearing/hub. As the team went to work on the car, Kanavas prepared to step in for a double-stint. Jason Hoover, Brian Mezger and crew performed flawlessly, getting the car back out in 19 minutes, which included the hub fix, fuel stop and driver change. The #19 was now 7 laps down on 2nd place and 12 laps down on first.

With two of the MER cars out with what was reported as engine failures, Johnny ran lap times 7-10 seconds faster than the first and second place cars, trying to make up the lost time with 10+ hours left to go. Within the first 40 minutes of his stint, Johnny reported a slight vibration coming from the right rear corner when making left hand turns. The team stayed in constant communication with Kanavas, monitoring the status of the potential problem. The vibration became worse and at the very same spot that Cross lost the left rear (Turn 5A), Johnny lost the right rear corner. The car fell to the right, taking out the brakes forcing Johnny to nurse the car onto the access road just across from the pits. Because the car had no drive or brakes, the team had to wait for the tow truck to hook the car up and bring it back to the pits. Upon arrival to the paddock, the team found broken rear hub, with the rear wheel still attached, fortunately. Once again, the team found the parts and went to work, repairing the right rear corner. As Johnny again took to the track, he reported another vibration that got progressively worse. Calling the car back to the pits, the team found a broken left rear shock. The crew also had to replace a missing right rear wheel speed ring in order to make the ABS and traction control work. Kanavas was back on track just after the 4:00am mark. Kanavas finished up the busy first half of his stints and brought the car in for fuel for the second half of his double stint.

Just after the stop, the #19 was forced to make a 5-minute penalty stop for a fuel spill in the pits. The team finally returned to the track and Johnny ran a solid, clean stint, up until the final few laps. Exiting Turn-6, Kanavas faced, what felt like, a flat right rear tire and immediately reported to the pits. Nursing the car again back in, the team was surprised to not see a flat tire, but a broken suspension. The car had a right rear shock broken. The team went to work again, tracking down the necessary parts and fixing it, while Cross prepared to get back in. Once Matt was fueled and ready to go, he hit the track and ran some flying 2:03 laps in his incident-free stint. "The car was the best it had been all weekend, which is pretty amazing considering all the changes we've had to make. It was easy to run a fast pace.", explained Cross.

Caddell was back on deck to take over driving duties. The car was handling great and Andrew caught the tail of the #91 MX-5, piloted by Charles Espenlaub. Clicking off the team's fastest lap in lap 444 (2:03.2), Caddell chased and passed Espenlaub and the two continued to play around for several laps with Andrew radioing in at one point to say (with a chuckle), "He bumped me!"... Espenlaub was several laps ahead of Caddell, so the battle was not for position, but for fun.

Kanavas, taking over the communications from Brian Mezger in the pits, called Caddell in to put Sammy and Mark in for their final stints. Sammy ran a single stint, keeping the car in 7th place, with Mark taking over with just under two hours left in the race. Towards the final 45 minutes of the race, Mark reported a slight vibration from the front end. As the problem seemed to become more pronounced, Kanavas called the #19 back to the pits to do a quick check of the car. The team discovered that everything was ok, with just some heavy rubber pickup on the right front tire. Powell returned to the track and made up another spot while bringing the car home in 6th place.

After being challenged with so many unfortunate issues through the 25-hour long endurance test, the Hoover Motorsports team was very proud to have finished the race. Johnny Kanavas wishes

to thank Hoover Motorsports, Mazdaspeed, Marshall Pruett Motorsports Engineering, PIAA, eprodius.com, Victory Lane Data, Baillie Motorsports, and all the crew and family for the opportunity and support needed to make this event a success. Special thanks to the MER/Mazdaspeed team for providing so many spare parts needed to keep the #19 car on track. "This is a very tough race and it takes a very professional/hard working crew and driver lineup to make it to the end. Both the drivers and crew of this team gave everything they had and it showed. Thanks to my teammates and Team Manager, Tony Silva for putting together a great team of crew and drivers" ...Johnny Kanavas

The 25-Hours of Thunderhill is a Severe Endurance Race that the team plans to return to, with a vengeance, in 2007.

"I would just like to say thanks to the five drivers that allowed me to challenge myself at such a great event, Andrew, Sammy, Mark, Jonny and Matt. It takes a great driver lineup and crew to make this race happen. Thank you."... Jason Hoover, Hoover Motorsports

Team photos can be viewed at:

http://www.trackfreak.com/media/25_Hours_of_Thunderhill/25_Hours_of_Thunderhill.html

/ Official event page (w/results, lap times, video, etc.) at: <http://www.nasa25hour.com/>

/ The team's official live 25-hour blog site is here: www.eprodius.com/25

/ More info about Johnny Kanavas at: www.JohnnyKanavas.com