

Apex Racing Tied for Points Lead After a Tough Weekend in Houston

May 16, 2006. Houston, Texas. With very limited track time in Houston every team in the paddock knew that it would be important to unload cars off the truck and be fast right away, as Ryan Justice made clear this weekend. Team drivers Mike Potekhen and Ken Losch were not sure what to expect going into the streets of Houston where both drivers would tackle their first street race. "After walking the track and taking notes on Wednesday the track looked like it would be very fun to race on. It was not until we got out there that we realized just how bumpy and narrow the track was at speed, but racing on the streets is much more fun than I thought it would be," stated Ken.

"The first practice session was good. I was not quite sure what to expect but once we got on the track it reminded me of driving my go cart, tight turns with hard braking zones," stated Mike. After the first session the team found themselves in a tough position. "I felt like we got the most out of the car at that point but I was not sure that we would be able to get another second out of the car and I knew we would need to find at least that much if not more."

The team felt that the initial setups were not right, considering the fact that the track was much more bumpy than it looked. They decided to completely change the cars over to new settings for the final practice session. Potekhen said, "I felt like the changes that we made between sessions definitely moved us in the right direction and the time showed we were a quick 4th. I was fighting a slight over steer but with a few changes we would be able to get the time out of the car that we needed."

The team was confident going into qualifying. With the 4th fastest time of the weekend and a car that they felt would be faster than the previous session, a front row starting position was not out of sight. "The car was good in the second practice session but needed a little more speed to catch the leaders," said Mike. "The changes made were definitely going to be a gamble; with a short qualifying session there would not be much time to change the car back. With three different setups in three sessions you are bound to hit a speed bump at some point and unfortunately that is exactly what happened in qualifying. The car was not at all the same and the settings we decided to go with were not right; therefore we were off the pace of the session and ran an embarrassing 19th in the session". After racing in the top ten in the two previous sessions, the team was forced to start the race with Mike in 14th and Ken in 21st.

The race however was a different story for Mike and teammate Ken. Mike's race got off to a great start with an amazing first lap where Mike was able to pass 8 cars on the very narrow streets of Houston. "Obviously I was very disappointed with my qualifying effort but I knew that I would be able to work my way back up to the front. We changed the car back to the settings that we ran in the second practice session and the car was much better. My car was great on the start and restarts but unfortunately as the temps came up we lost some speed. With a shortened race and three restarts, things definitely worked in our favor which enabled me to work my way up to a 4th place finish" says Mike.

Every weekend is a new challenge for Ken and this weekend at Houston was no different. Ken is very committed to racing this year and therefore knew that he could not miss this race. His 23-year-old son Sebastian was graduating from college on the Friday before the race. "I knew my schedule would be tight but I was able to fit everything in somehow. I had a flight back to Phoenix an hour after the final practice and I was able to see my son graduate. I could not be more proud! I then jumped back on a plane the following morning to be back in Houston an hour before qualifying," said Ken.

You would think that with all his travels Ken would be completely exhausted going into the race. "I was a little disappointed with my qualifying effort but I feel like every time I hit the track I learn

something new. I just tried to keep my nose clean and I knew that I would make up at least a few positions just out of attrition" stated Ken. That was exactly what Ken did moving up to a final 15th finishing position. Ken was able to pass a few cars on the restarts and earned the best finish of his short career in the Pro Mazda Championship.

Team manager Ryan Ruth extolled his drivers. "Ken is still a rookie in the series. We are very happy with the way he is developing as a driver and I do not see any reason why he will not be running in the top ten before the season is out. I hired Mike over a year ago to coach Ken and it was a natural progression to put him in our second car this season. I could not be happier with his professionalism and his talents are not unrecognized here. I feel that it is just a matter of time before he will be winning races with us this season." He continued, "The team is very new and in only our third pro event I am very proud of what we have accomplished. We have had a very busy winter. First, moving into a new shop, building two cars, and outfitting our truck with everything we need to make the program work. We also had a very busy test program both before the first race in Sebring, including testing in Ohio the week before Houston. I am very proud of my guys. They have all been working flat out and we are excited to be tied for the lead in the championship."

With a 5th place finish for Mike in Sebring in March, and a 21st for Ken, and now a 3rd and 15th for the team on the streets of Houston, the team is very confident going into next weekend's race at Mid Ohio. Mike summed up the team's enthusiasm..."We tested last week in Ohio where we had a very successful two days. This will be the first track that we have actually tested before an event this season, therefore I am very excited about the upcoming weekend."