

RACING LINES

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Spec E36 and C-Modified drivers star at VIR

The annual April Cluh race at Virginia International Raceway (VIR) has a reputation for attracting some of the biggest crowds of BMW racers on the East Coast, and the 3.27-mile, seventeen-turn circuit makes for some fast speeds up front, as well as close competition within classes. This year's event was no different; in fact, it outdid previous years in some respects.

Although the actual BMW turnout of 40-plus cars was somewhat less than the original entry list predicted, the reduced car count was not all that apparent. With the Tarheel Chapter and the VDCA co-hosting the three-day event, the paddock looked about as packed as ever. And a damp Thursday gave way to three days of glorious, sunny 70° weather, which made for a fast track—and lots of opportunities for drivers to post new track and personal records.

One new element was the Spec E36 class; not only was it the biggest, with eleven cars entered, but it also saw some of the hottest competition of the weekend, proof of how quickly this relatively new class has grown and matured. Another new addition to the VIR scene was the presence of four M3T cars—E30 M3s built to specs that some refer to as “J-P Lite”—which aroused a lot of interest among other BMW drivers.

Up front, however, it was the C-Modified cars that provided the drama.

The first race, an eleven-lap fun sprint on Friday afternoon, was a portent of things to come. Starting from the pole, Steve Bassen (C-M E30 M3) jumped ahead and led Peter Carroll (C-M E36 M3) through the first couple of turns—only to coast to a dead stop in the middle of Turn Three when a balky control unit quit. In the resulting melee, all the drivers behind Bassen miraculously managed to avoid this unexpected obstacle, raising thick clouds of dust as some maneuvered their cars off the pavement. The mess allowed Mark Marquis (C-M E36 M3) to squeeze by Carroll and take the lead; but within two laps, with Bassen's ear safely out of the way, Carroll put pedal to the metal and retook the lead for good to win the race and class. Chris Lewis (C-M E46 M3) came in second overall, having passed Marquis in mid-race.

Behind the front-running C-Mod cars, two I-Prepared drivers—Craig Lippe and Denis Budniewski, both driving E36 M3s—resumed a rivalry they had begun at Road Atlanta in February, where Lippe had bested Budniewski twice. This time the two drivers started side-

by-side, with Lippe on the pole. But two laps into the race, Budniewski scooted by Lippe, and he never looked back; despite repeated challenges, he beat his rival to the checker by eight seconds to win the class.

Another close battle ensued among three Spec E36 drivers: Michael Gilbert, Jason Briedis, and Tim Smith. Gilbert was on the pole, with Briedis and Smith directly behind him, but as the green flag flew, Smith forged ahead of Briedis and tucked in behind Gilbert for a couple of laps. However, some setup issues forced him to drop back, allowing Briedis to get by and challenge Gilbert for the class lead. Those two drivers fought tooth and nail for position until Briedis got around Gilbert in mid-race, but the outcome of this battle was not decided until Briedis beat Gilbert to the checker by a mere 0.15 seconds. As Gilbert later said, “The fact that our best laps were about 0.08 seconds apart shows how even the cars are.”

Saturday's one-hour endurance race witnessed some fierce dogfights in mid-pack, but out in front, the show belonged to Bassen and co-driver Randy Mueller. Having replaced his control unit, Bassen qualified for the pole with a 1.327-second margin over Allan Lewis (C-M E36 325i). But just seconds after the start, Lewis lost his spot to Carroll, who proceeded to chase Bassen's car throughout the race. However, with the speed the Bassen/Mueller team put out, the issue was never in doubt—especially after Mueller took over the wheel. He later commented that he had topped 150 mph on several occasions, so it was no surprise that he posted the fastest time of the weekend—a blazing 1:58.872—on the last lap of the race! Mueller's victory margin was a bit over 47 seconds, a feat that Bassen attributes to “Fast Randy's” driving and the meticulous attention he gives to his car's aerodynamics.

In the continuing I-Prepared rivalry, Lippe and co-driver Evan Darling won the class, but not without a fight, as Mueller qualified in Budniewski's car and led Darling during much of the first half of the race. But things changed after Mueller pitted and handed over to Budniewski; rejoining the race, Budniewski had to contend with heavy traffic, while Darling kept going. Then, when Lippe took the wheel, he managed to squeak in ahead of Budniewski, and that's the way it stayed to the finish—but Budniewski didn't give up, as he took the checker just a half-second behind Lippe. Sixteen seconds later,

TIRE RACK CCA Club Race at Virginia International Raceway 4/10 Distance: 27 Laps

Pos.	Class	Driver	Car	Best Lap
1	1 CM	S Bassen/R Mueller	E30 M3	01:58.9
2	2 CM	Peter Carroll	E36 M3	02:02.1
3	3 CM	Allan Lewis	E36 325i	02:03.6
4	4 CM	Jean-Luc Bergeron	E36 M3	02:04.4
5	5 CM	Chris Lewis	E46 M3	02:03.9
6	6 CM	Robert Chang	E46 M3	02:05.9
7	1 IP	E Darling/C Lippe	E36 M3	02:08.4
8	2 IP	R Mueller/D Budniewski	E36 M3	02:05.8
9	1 JP	Sean Garrity	E36 M3	02:09.9
10	2 JP	Jesse Clark	E36 M3	02:09.5
11	3 JP	J Crist/M Skeen	E36 M3	02:08.7
12	4 JP	Dick Hunter	E36 325i	02:11.2
13	1 DM	Louis Payant	E30 M3	02:07.4
14	3 IP	R Lisbon/E Wong	E36 M3	02:11.1
15	4 IP	Tom Melton	E36 M3	02:12.2
16	5 IP	Dan Parker	E36 328is	02:12.4
17	2 DM	Chad Lackey	E30 M3	02:12.2
18	1 Sp E36	Michael Gilbert	E36 325is	02:13.8
19	2 Sp E36	Timothy Smith	E36 325is	02:15.1
20	3 Sp E36	Jason Briedis	E36 325is	02:14.9
21	6 JP	Jason Neef	E36 325is	02:15.0
22	7 JP	Chuck Smith	E36 325is	02:15.0
23	1 M3T	Dennis Poppy	E30 M3	02:14.9
24	5 IP	Bob Wright	E36 M3	02:15.0
25	1 ITR	S Haputanti/C Stone	E36 325i	02:16.0
26	4 Sp E36	J Danskin/A Pivoleto	E36 325is	02:14.7
27	2 ITR	J Counts/M Hinkey	E30 M3	02:16.6
28	6 IP	Alan Davis	E36 M3	02:17.8
29	5 Sp E36	Marty Fraser	E36 325is	02:17.5
30	6 Sp E36	Mark Fishera	E36 325is	02:19.2
31	8 JP	Jason Mizere	E36 M3	02:15.2
32	7 Sp E36	M Hinkey / L Davis	E36 325is	02:21.0
33	3 DM	April Curtis	E30 325e	02:22.8
34	1 JS	Robert Blood	E30 M3	02:24.3
35	2 M3T	Ken Denton	E30 M3	02:19.0
36	1 KP	Sandra / Eric Nilsson	E30 325is	02:21.3
37	8 Sp E36	Gary Clark	E36 325is	02:27.6
DNF	DM	Mark Marquis	E36 M3	
DNF	Sp E36	Thomas Tice	E36 325is	02:19.0
DQ	Sp E36	Chris Wade	E36 325i	02:15.3

4/11 Distance: 12 Laps

Pos.	Class	Driver	Car	Best Lap
1	1 CM	Randy Mueller	E30 M3	01:58.9
2	2 CM	Peter Carroll	E36 M3	02:02.2
3	3 CM	Mark Marquis	E36 M3	02:02.5
4	4 CM	Jean-Luc Bergeron	E36 M3	02:03.4
5	5 CM	Chris Lewis	E46 M3	02:03.2
6	6 CM	Roberts Chang	E46 M3	02:04.8
7	1 IP	Denis Budniewski	E36 M3	02:09.4
8	1 DM	Louis Payant	E30 M3	02:08.5
9	7 CM	Chip Steuber	E36 M3	02:10.3
10	2 IP	Craig Lippe	E36 M3	02:10.3
11	1 JP	Jesse Clark	E36 M3	02:09.9
12	2 DM	Nicholas Large	Z3 3.0 coupe	02:09.6
13	2 JP	Jason Crist	E36 M3	02:11.2
14	3 JP	Dick Hunter	E36 325is	02:12.2
15	3 IP	Tom Melton	E36 M3	02:13.1
16	4 IP	Roman Lisbon	E36 M3	02:13.6
17	1 Sp E36	Michael Gilbert	E36 325is	02:14.4
18	2 Sp E36	Jason Briedis	E36 325i	02:14.1
19	5 IP	David Bacon	E36 M3	02:15.5
20	4 JP	Dan Parker	E36 328is	02:12.2
21	1 M3T	Dennis Poppy	E30 M3	02:15.4
22	6 IP	Bob Wright	E36 M3	02:14.8
23	5 JP	Chuck Smith	E36 325is	02:17.4
24	3 Sp E36	Thomas Tice	E36 325is	02:18.8
25	4 Sp E36	John Danskin	E36 325is	02:19.3
26	7 IP	Alan Davis	E30 M3	02:18.9
27	5 Sp E36	Mike Hinkey	E36 325is	02:19.3
28	6 Sp E36	Mark Fishera	E36 325is	02:20.3
29	1 ITR	Sripathi Haputanti	E36 325i	02:21.3
30	1 KP	Eric Nilsson	E30 325is	02:20.8
31	3 DM	April Curtis	E30 325e	02:23.2
32	1 JS	Robert Blood	E30 M3	02:24.0
33	7 Sp E36	Gary Clark	E36 325is	02:24.4
34	2 ITR	John Counts	E36 325is	02:20.1
DNF	JP	Jason Neef	E36 325is	02:19.4

Sean Garrity (J-PE36 M3) crossed the finish to win his class mere seconds ahead of Clark, with whom he had swapped positional several times late in the contest.

The Spec E36 crowd also put on a great show, although most of that happened behind pole-sitter Gilbert, who set a personal lap record and led the class from flag to flag for his “first win in quite a while.” Behind him, Smith ran an easy second until after his and Briedis' pit stops, when the latter mounted a determined challenge for the Number Two

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spot. Briedis actually passed Smith with two laps to go, but had to give back the position when he ran low on fuel. And back in the pack, several more Spec E36ers—Mark Fishero, Marty Frasier and Les Davis among them—waged several lively battles, one of which resulted in a new lap record for the class (2:12.4) racked up by Aaron Povoledo co-driving John Danskin's 325is.

Due to mishaps in the enduro and in qualifying for the feature race on Sunday, the field for the twelve-lap sprint was reduced to just 35 cars. Perhaps hardest hit was the Spec E36 group, which by then was down to seven. But the less-crowded track meant more running room, especially for the C-Mods; once again, it was Bassen's car on the pole, but with Mueller in the cockpit. He was off and running as soon as the green flag flew, almost matching his previous best-lap time on lap four, and leading flag-to-flag to win the race—with nary a challenge—by a solid 32-second margin.

Marquis, who had started next to Mueller, lost out to Carroll in Turn Three. Carroll held onto the number-two spot to the finish, despite Marquis' repeated passing attempts. In I-Prepared, Budniewski had qualified

several positions behind Lippe, but managed to reel in several cars and get his revenge, beating his rival to the checker by some eight seconds to take the class crown. And Payant trailed Budniewski to the finish by just five seconds to collect the win in D-Mod.

Despite the loss of one of their best competitors—Smith, who'd nudged a tire wall in qualifying that morning—the Spec E36ers had a great time battling each other. Gilbert qualified up front, with Briedis one second behind him. This set the stage for another dicing contest, as Briedis tried time and again to get around Gilbert. He even set the fastest time for the class in the process, but to no avail, as Gilbert hung on to take the win by barely half a second. Tom Tice, who had exited the enduro with a flat tire, cruised to a comfortable third-place finish. And Clark, Pippy, Haputantri, Nissen, and Blood all posted repeat wins in their respective classes.

One interesting sidelight of this event was the buzz the Spec E36 and M3T cars generated around the paddock. With several racers stating they would probably convert their cars to one or the other class' specifications, it looks like these additions to the Club Racing spectrum have a promising future.—*Paul Hoecke*

Club Racers run Motorsport Ranch

On the same weekend as the VIR event, a smaller band of Club racers converged on Motorsport Ranch in Cresson, Texas, to run three sprints, including a fun race and two points races. The Lone Star Chapter invited a pack of PCA Spec Boxsters along to round out the field for the weekend.

The racers ran the track's 1.7-mile circuit clockwise, the opposite of the usual direction. K-Prepared racer Xavier McClure, back in Club Racing after four years, said, "The track run in this direction at the dropping of the green disadvantages anyone more than a few rows back, as only the front of the field can be on the main straight, while the rest of the pack is still negotiating the very tight and slowest set of curves on the track, called Rattlesnake."

Nerces Mavelian, the reigning B-Modified national champion, took the overall win in all three races in his quick E36 M3 with its supercharged S52 Engine. In Saturday's

points sprint, C-Mod winner Lone Star Chapter race chairman Bruce Heersink finished second overall, ahead of the J-Prepared-winning E46 330Ci of Greg Smith.

Smith, who finished second overall in the other two races, did a little gardening along the way. I-Prepared racer Lisa Vaughn said, "The track had lots of wildflowers growing in the grass, and at one point Greg Smith went off, and his splitter neatly sliced off what looked like hundreds of flowers that would have made a great bouquet for his mother. Wish now I'd taken a picture—the front of his black car was covered with blue-and-yellow flowers. He had to brush them off, and they littered the paddock the rest of the weekend."

E36 M3 racer Vaughn spent her weekend doing battle with Luis Marques in his I-Prepared E30 M3. She won the class on Saturday, but he won on Sunday in both the points sprint and the fun sprint.

RACING BRIEFS

BMW wins Nürburgring 24 hour race: Jörg Müller, Uwe Alzen, Pedro Lamy, and Augusto Farfus scored BMW's nineteenth victory in the 24-hour race at the Nürburgring in their BMW Motorsport Team Schnitzer M3 GT2. The car, which had run near the front for much of the race, assumed the lead with just under an hour left when the leading Porsche, a 911 GT3 hybrid, lost its engine. A second M3—driven by Dirk Werner, Dirk Müller, Andy Priaulx, and Dirk Adorf—recovered to finish seventh after it was forced to make a one-hour stop to repair crash damage early in the race.

BMW scores two Lime Rock wins: The Continental Challenge Series ran separate races for the Grand Sport and Street Tuner classes at Lime Rock. Joey Hand and Michael Marsal won the GS race in a Turner Motorsport M3 after their teammate, Bill Auberlen, left the race with broken rear-suspension bolts, with fifteen laps remaining. Auberlen had enjoyed a sixteen-second lead until that point. Seth Thomas and Bill Heumann won BimmerWorld's first ST race in an E90 328i; they remained a close second in ST drivers' points going into Watkins Glen. A full report on the Lime Rock event will appear next month.

Starworks finishes second at Lime Rock: Ryan Dalziel and Mike Forest drove the Starworks Motorsport Riley-BMW to a second-place finish in the Lime Rock Rolex Series race. Won by a Dallara Ford driven by Max Angelelli and Ricky Taylor, the race marked the first-ever appearance of the Daytona Prototypes at Lime Rock. The Ganassi Riley-BMW of Scott Pruett and Memo Rojas, coming into Lime Rock on a three-race winning streak, was taken out of contention by a crash during the first lap. The Turner Motorsport M6 finished eighth in GT; the class was dominated by Mazda RX-8s, with the win going to the RX-8 of John Edwards and Adam Christodoulou.

BMW nabs ALMS podium at Laguna Seca: Joey Hand and Dirk Müller drove the #90 BMW-Rahal Letterman Racing M3 to second place in the GT class at the May American Le Mans Series Race at Laguna Seca. Hand was leading the six-hour race during the last of ten full-course yellow flag periods, but when the track went back to green—with just twelve minutes left in the race—Patrick Long passed Hand to put the Flying Lizard Porsche in the lead, and held on for the win. Bill Auberlen and Tommy Milner drove the #92 M3 to eighth in class. They had led at one point, but were set back when their M3 was hit by another car.

Priaulx, Farfus finish one-two in Monza WTCC: Andy Priaulx and Augusto Farfus finished first and second in the first of two World Touring Car Championship races run at Monza in May. The two were running third and fourth on the final lap when the cars ahead of them were set back by tire punctures. It was the second straight win for Priaulx in the BMW Team RBM 320s; he had won the second race in Morocco earlier in the month. In Race Two, Priaulx and Farfus finished fourth and fifth in a race won by Yvan Muller in a Chevrolet Cruze.