

**SEBRING**  
**January 8 – 9, 2005:**

Practice had been rough. With over eighty cars, the track, despite its size, was very busy and not without its problems.

The car was pushing oil out of the pvc valve into the air filter. During the hard right hand turns, this caused the car to miss at just about the same time I was looking to accelerate.

At least the weather was good. It was 80 – 85 degrees, true Florida weather.

Qualifying was at best a mixed bag. During the first qualifying session, one of my competitors had gone off the track in turn three. He reentered the track and attempted to reinsert himself back into traffic. Unfortunately, we were moving at about 100 miles per hour and we met. The crash compressed my radiator, creating an overheating problem that plagued me throughout the second qualifying session.

This, of course, is the reason I qualified 53 out of 81.

We were race group 1, which put us on the grid at 8:30AM. We gridded up deep in the field and headed out.

The front of the field got the green as I headed under the turn 17 bridge. I drifted to the outside as we headed up the straight and passed four or five cars heading into turn 1. Two wide through turn 2, we headed for turn 3, a 90 degree left that leads into the chicane. I was able to pick up a couple more places. Manipulating the esses in traffic is all about not losing ground, a feat which I accomplished onto the long straight to the hairpin. Sebring is all about long straights and going fast.

Cars stretched the whole distance and the rising sun glared in your eyes. I go inside at the hairpin to protect my position then up through the gears for the second hairpin. Turning is a great time to make an inside pass and my setup works as I gain another position. In half a lap, I believe I am up maybe ten spots.

Turns 10, 11, and 12 are clean but then the problems start. Turn 15 is a fast right-hander, the breaking zone a ruler straight line to the left where you have to downshift from 4<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>. As I am approaching a train of cars from turn 14, through the sun's glare, I see the back of an SRF in the braking zone on the line. The car is stalled, so we move to the right to miss it. We are by in a flash, but I am already concerned with the possibility of someone ramming into the car.

The run through 16 and 17 is fun with the normal drafting down the long straight. But as we pass the finish line, the yellow is out. The radio crackles with a warning of a yellow and I begin to look for the problem. Turn 14 is a mess. The stalled car I had



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observed earlier is now only half a car, and four other racecars are in various forms of destruction. I can see the MedEvac Helicopter overhead. That is never a good sign.

After multiple laps of yellow, Race Control brings us into the pits under a black flag.

I don't mind the heat under race conditions. I don't really notice it. In the pits, however, I suddenly realize that the helmet, suit, gloves, and fireproof underwear are not really ideal for Florida weather.

It is confusing. We are told that we will be there for twenty minutes, but as soon as we unbuckle, we are told that we are going back out. A ten minute regrid process ensues. As we prepare to go back out, I am informed by my spotter that Steve Lewis is behind me.

All racers wish to win. Even more than that, we all live to beat someone. I have two nemeses, Jim Ellinjer, a San Diego based driver whose claim to fame is a crazy pass at Watkins Glen and Steve Lewis. Steve Lewis likes to bet on the race's outcome and is currently up \$10 by out-qualifying me. I must have passed him in the gaggle going into turn 3. The fact that he is behind me is both good and bad. It is great to be in front, but it is best if it is on the last lap.

We head back onto the track. The only thing left of the original accident is a few pieces of fiberglass. The field is single file so the leaders are quite a distance from those of us in the middle of the pack.

I am heading into turn 17 when the radio informs me of the green. I out fox myself. I should have gone into 17 in 3<sup>rd</sup> and pulled through, but I tried 4<sup>th</sup> and was hoping I would have a clear path to use it. I didn't. To save the car, I slide it, which keeps it running, but scrubs off a lot of momentum.

Steve and several others go by on the front straight. I gather it back up and chase the four through turn two and into three. I late brake to the inside and pick off all of them except Steve, whose tail I chase through the esses. For a lap, I hang in with Steve slowly gapping me. I feel confident that I can get it back, but it isn't to be.

As we enter lap 3 of the restart, a series of accidents occur. Turn 3, turn 8, it seems like them all.

We receive a black flag, a yellow flag, and the checker and the race is over.

By surviving, I moved from 33 to 32, but the race was a disaster.

The driver in the first accident broke his back, but thankfully will be OK.