

5TH

IFMAR WORLD GAS CHAMPIONSHIPS

BY GENE HUSTING

TOKYO, JAPAN

This 5th IFMAR World Championship for 1/8 scale gas cars, was Japan's first turn to stage such an event. As this was our first trip to Japan, everyone was wondering if we could survive two weeks on a Sushi diet and exactly how hard is a bed of bamboo mat on a floor. And we were also told it would be impossible to drive the Japanese streets.

After a nine-hour flight we were greeted at the airport by Butch Kroells, the first 1/8 Gas World Champion, who is now living in Japan, and Tomaki Yokobori, who makes the Yokomo motors and cars. They had both volunteered to drive our rental vans to the hotel for us. By the way, unless you live in Japan, it would be impossible to do any touring by driving in Japan. They drive on the left side of the street. The street signs are in Japanese lettering and the maps are in Japanese lettering. We owe Butch and Tomaki a great deal of thanks.

We arrived at the hotel, which was in the city of Funabashi. The hotel could best be described as a brandnew Hilton-type. A first class, plush American-type hotel with rooms that cost much less than a Holiday Inn room in the USA. But the best was yet to come. Directly across the street from the hotel, was a brandnew shopping mall, with over 200 stores. In the mall was a Colonel



Disneyland, in Japan, was the site of the IFMAR Gas Championships. The tall driver's stand gave a good view of the track for all participants. Entire facility was built just for the Championships.

Sanders', a Wendy's, a Bob's Big Boy, a Victoria Station steak house and a 31 Flavors! And the prices were about the same as the USA. Talk about a beautiful sight? For this we must thank Mr. Naomi Tomita, who was the man most responsible for this World Championships.

Time to go racing. The track was located at the Disneyland parking lot. Yes, this Disneyland is exactly like at home, except

everything is in Japanese. With no traffic, it was about a 20-minute drive from the hotel to the track, but with the traffic, it usually took us an hour to get there. Disneyland is located about 20 miles outside of Tokyo.

The track was big. About twice as big as we were first told. It was at least as big as the Geneva W.C. track. It was brandnew asphalt, very smooth with very good traction. Orange 2 x 4's were nailed to the ground to outline the track. The lanes were wide and we thought it was an excellent track, however Peter Bervoets, from Holland, could be heard asking: "Where's the grass?"

The day after we arrived, there was a local race on the track for the Japanese drivers who had not qualified for the W.C. The fastest time I clocked was 29 seconds, which will give you an idea of the size of the track. We didn't stay for the whole race, because it was hot. It was 95 degrees with 90-degree humidity the whole two weeks we were there.

The next day was our first practice day. From the beginning it was apparent it was going to be a race between the American team and Rody Roem from Holland. Rody was running the Serpent car from Holland, and he was easily the fastest of the foreign competition. Rody's a super driver and with



The 1985 World Champion, Rody Roem, from Holland. A very popular racer, and a very deserving winner. Rody was also the Top Qualifier in the A Gas category.

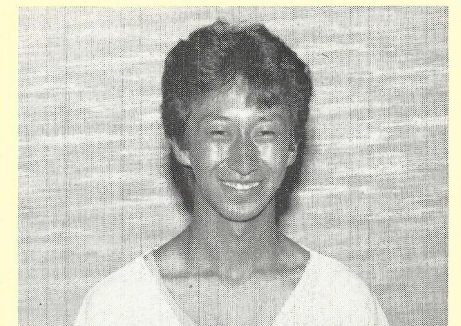
a season's racing experience with his 4WD car, he'll be tough competition. The USA team only had two drivers with any length racing time with their cars. That was Dana Smeltzer with his Associated RC500 4WD, and Arturo Carbonell with his Delta Eagle 4WD. Seven American drivers had raced their cars one time and for five other drivers this would be their first race. A tough way to go. But that's part of racing. It takes time to get used to a totally new car, but day by day, the cars were going faster and faster. It was quite surprising to see that the SG and PB cars were a step behind in lap times.

From the beginning of practice, it was clear to every stopwatch around the track, that Ralph Burch Jr., with his Associated RC500 4WD, was the fastest car at the track. Dana Smeltzer, Rody Roem and Curtis Husting were right behind Ralph, with the 3 of them turning almost identical times. But day by day other drivers were getting their cars tuned in as qualifying got closer.

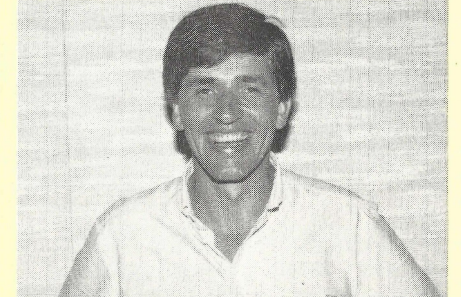
For the last practice round, the AMB automatic lap counting system would be used, so everybody would get official timed

laps. A transponder is placed in each car which electronically triggers the electronic lap counter each time the car crosses the finish line. The system worked flawlessly the whole week. I guess the stopwatches weren't lying. Ralph Burch Jr. set a new track lap record at 21.6. Rody followed with 22.1, then Arturo with 22.2 and Dana at 22.3.

The next day was the first day of qualifying. Every driver would get six qualifying rounds of 10 minutes each. The drivers were also divided into two groups, A and B. The first day the A group would run in the morning and the B group in the afternoon. Ralph Burch Jr. started things off in a big way. Even though there were six cars in his qualifying heat, Ralph made a picture perfect run and turned 27 laps in 10 min. 21.5 secs. I might add here that no one else was able to turn 27 laps during qualifying. There was only one small problem. He was penalized a lap for the start! It seems that when Ralph Sr. was setting the car down in the starting box, Ralph Jr. was looking at his transmitter adjusting the



Junichi Koma, Japan's answer to Ralph Burch Jr. The seventeen-year-old driver lead for a while, but ran out of fuel and finished second.

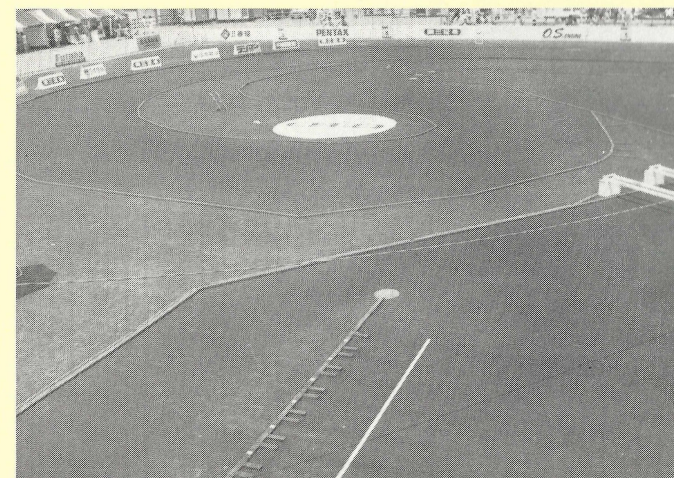
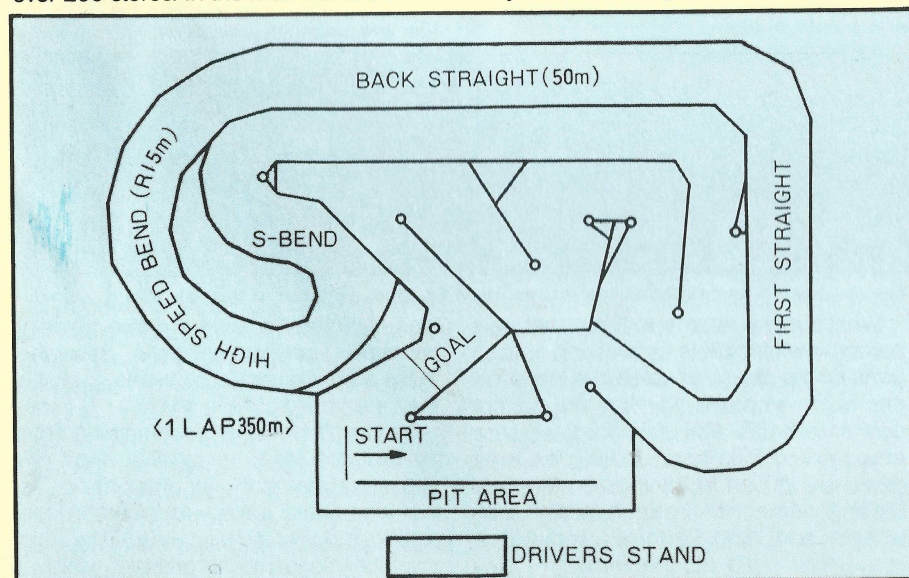


Peter Bervoets, from Holland, surprised quite a lot of people by first qualifying in twelfth and finishing third in the A main race.



England's Debbie Preston, who amazed the Japanese, who thought it unusual for a pretty woman to be such a fast driver.

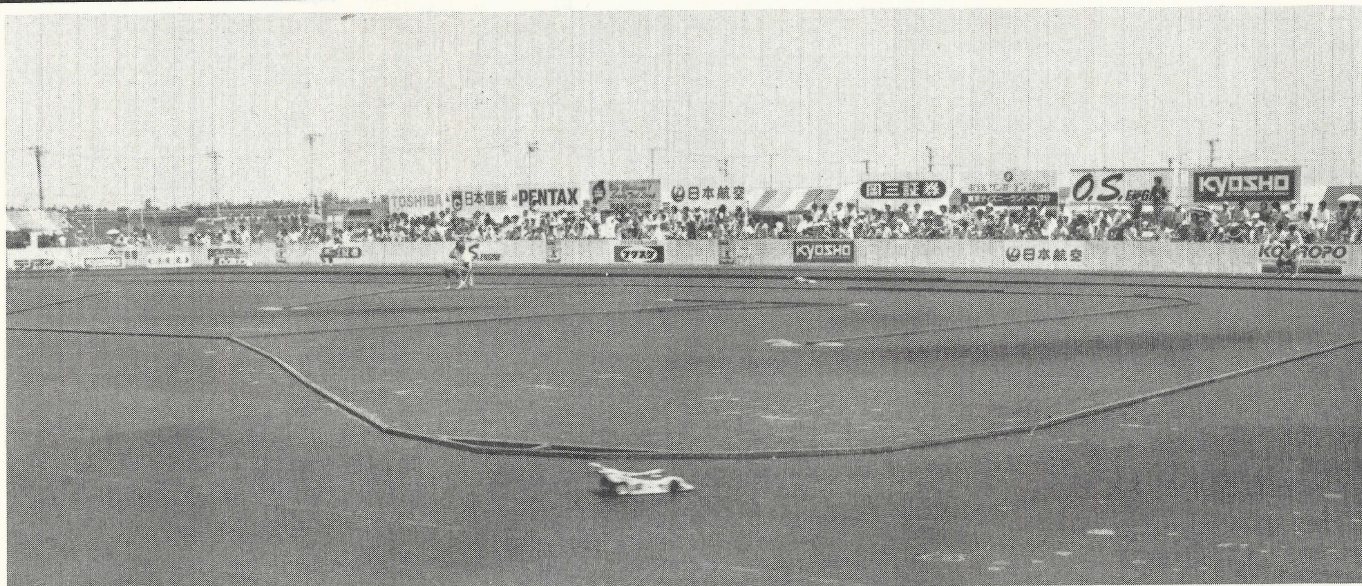
brakes. Meanwhile the car crept onto the starting line a split second before the horn went off. This was an automatic one lap penalty. It was a shame, but we weren't that much concerned, because usually we end up going faster in the later rounds of qualifying. This was also our first indication that



The left-hand side of the track, as seen from the driver's stand, with starting boxes in the foreground. A smooth, fast layout.



The right-hand side. The track surface was new, high-traction smooth asphalt. The barrier boards were bright orange to aid visibility.



The light-colored spots on the track were caused by the tide seeping up through the bottom of the track, forming wet spots which, when dried, left salt deposits. The track was built on land reclaimed from the sea.

this wasn't meant to be our week.

At the end of the first day of two rounds of qualifying, Jacob Buehler from Switzerland, was holding down TQ spot with 26-10.19.1. Jacob won the European Championships with his Serpent car. 2nd place was Gil Losi Jr. with his Associated RC500 4WD. Gil had just won the 4WD offroad World Championship 2 weeks earlier, and now here he was at the top in another World Championship two weeks earlier, and now Burch Jr., after his one lap penalty, with a 26-10.21.5. Can you remember the last time you were penalized a full lap at a W.C. event, and were still sitting in third place? He was going fast! Fourth place was Tomonori Hesegawa from Japan, with a 25-10.03. It was nice to see some of the Japanese starting to go fast.

The next morning Roddy Roem turned 26-10.2.5 on a beautiful run which gave him the Top Qualifier spot. Roddy was fortunate, through the luck of the draw, to be in a three car qualifying heat, whereas some heats had as many as eight cars. When the A group ran in the afternoon, a funny thing started happening to the track. Water was seeping up through the bottom of the track

creating about 30 wet spots on the track, with about six inch diameters! And it was a bright sunny day. It seems this was refill land, only a few feet away from the ocean and only a couple feet above the ocean. Every time the tide rises, water would come up through the track!

The drivers running in the afternoon had to change their driving lines to miss the water spots and still try to go fast. Ralph Burch Jr. still managed to increase his time in the third round to 26-10.12.9. But Ralph was bumped to the third spot by Gary Kyes with a 26-10.7.2. I don't know if you can realize what an accomplishment this was. The first two days of practice, Gary was never on the track. He was still in the pits completing the assembly of his new Associated RC500 4WD car. To take a brandnew car, assemble it at the track and the first time you race it, to be sitting in second qualifying spot is unreal. Curtis Husting finally got a good run in, through the water, and moved to fourth spot with a 26-10.14.1.

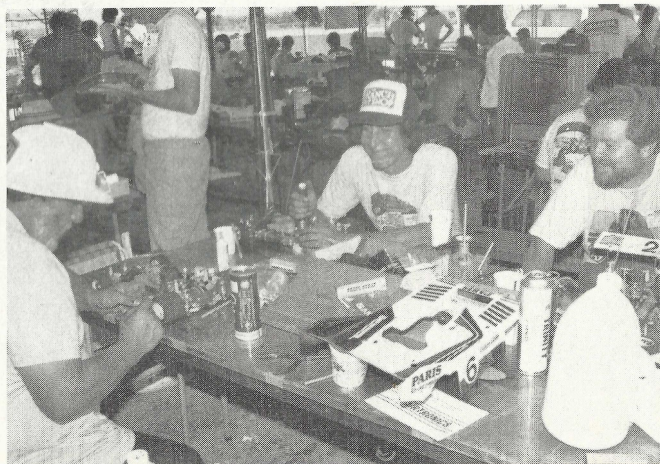
Because of the water on the track, the final day of qualifying was changed so that the A and B groups were together, resulting in everyone getting one qualifier in the

morning and another in the afternoon. Burch had been trying different motors and finally got one to his liking. Mike Toland was the race announcer, and he was announcing Ralph's lap times. He was on a TQ run that was even faster than his 27 lapper. At the four-minute mark they announced he was eight seconds ahead of Roddy's TQ time. At 4-1/2 minutes he ran out of fuel! The o-ring on the fuel tank cap split and was leaking fuel. Gil Losi Jr. liked the morning round, as he turned a 26-10.7.4 to take over fourth spot. Arturo Carbonell was having all kinds of problems with carburetors and motors so Ralph Burch lent Art one of his OPS carbs. Art got his only good run taking sixth spot with a 26-10.16.1. Dana Smeltzer followed in seventh spot with a 26-10.16.6. I had Dana figured for a sit-out, but he said he was just trying too hard in qualifying and making mistakes.

There was only one more round of qualifying left to take TQ and Burch almost did it again. Even though it was in the afternoon, when conditions were the worst, Ralph was doing a super job, missing the puddles and still going fast. The announcer said he was on his last lap and was



The Japanese team prepare their cars in the covered pit area. All competitors were provided with tables and chairs in the pit area.



A rare shot: Gil Losi Sr. actually working on his own car! Gil Jr. and Gary Kyes seem to enjoy the rare spectacle.



Ernest Tadiello and the other Italian team members at work. The SG team didn't seem as strong as in other years.



Paul Pagdin, from the English PB team, and the 1983 World Champ David Lecat from France, making a motor change.

three seconds ahead of the TQ time. Then he hit a puddle in the sweeper, spun out, lost five seconds turning the car around, turned 26-10.4.1, which was 1-1/2 seconds behind TQ. We stayed after qualifying to practice. I finally got Rich Lee to change his muffler and take the brakes out of the car, and he was going fast. Dana went back to his original set-up and he was going faster than ever. Bill Jianas was running his fastest in the last qualifying round when a bracket loosened up and his belt came off. He still nursed it to the end with a 2WD turning 26-10.22.4. Curtis was happy with his car. Everyone else seemed good. The main events were run in two days. The first day, the lower mains ran and the last day the faster mains were run.

The top four qualifiers went directly to the Final "A" Main. Everyone else had a chance to race up to the Main.

MAIN EVENT DAY

Rich Lee had just missed making the semi-main, but he was running away with the quarter final, which meant a move-up to the semi, when his steering servo went out.

In the first semi-main, Bill Jianas had the 4WD belt bracket come loose again, so he had to run the semi with 2WD, and he still came close to moving up. Arturo Carbonell was flying, with a sure move-up when he

lost his steering servo. In the other semi, Curtis Husting started on pole position, but got hammererd at the start and stuck on the boards. Dana Smeltzer had the lead and he was flying. Curtis made his way, all the way back up to second and then his throttle servo quit working. His car was idling around the track. Four cars passed

QUALIFYING LIST

1 RODY ROEM	HOLLAND	26-10.25
2 RALPH BURCH JR.	USA	26-10.41
3 GARY KYES	USA	26-10.64
4 GIL LOSI JR.	USA	26-10.74
5 CURTIS HUSTING	USA	26-10.141
6 ARTURO CARBONELL	USA	26-10.161
7 DANA SMELTZER	USA	26-10.166
8 CALCE DOMENICO	ITALY	26-10.167
9 KATHUNORI KONDOH	JAPAN	26-10.174
10 CALPISTA STEFANO	ITALY	26-10.185
12 PETER BERVOETS	HOLLAND	26-10.191
14 BILL JIANAS	USA	26-10.22.4
15 DAVID LECAT	FRANCE	25-10.00
17 JUNICHI KOMA	JAPAN	25-10.2.6
19 RICH LEE	USA	25-10.43
20 RON TON	HOLLAND	25-10.61
22 TADIELLO ERMES	ITALY	25-10.109
28 BARRY GROSSENACHER	USA	25-10.184
31 DEBBIE PRESTON	ENGLAND	25-10.22.3
32 PAUL DIONNE	CANADA	25-10.235
35 GARY CULVER	ENGLAND	24-10.17
37 GIL LOSI SR.	USA	24-10.31

him, then he got hit from behind and the servo started working again! He moved back into third which was good enough to move up to the main. Meanwhile, at the 20-minute mark, Dana was 1-1/2 laps ahead of Junichi Koma, who eventually finished second in the Final "A" Main. It was Dana's best run of the week. Then one of his front

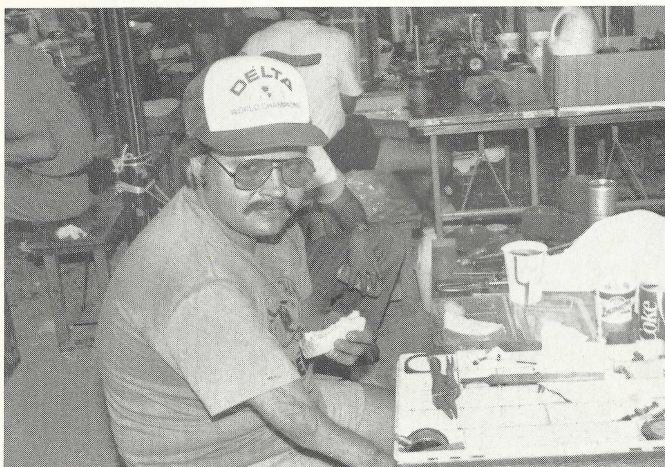
tires, that a friend had glued, came off. He was out! It just wasn't meant to be.

The grandstands were packed for main event day. The drivers, with their cars, were lined in front of the driving stand for picture taking ceremonies. But one driver was missing. Curtis Husting was still in the pits changing his throttle servo, but he finished in time for the start of the race.

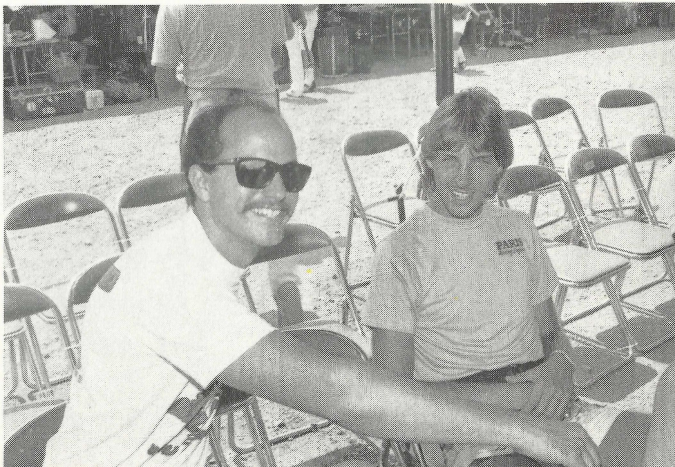
The cars were lined up, the horn sounded, and the "A" Main Final race was underway. Rody got a clean line to the first corner, while Burch and Kyes were bumping each other, allowing Bervoets to go by and take second spot. Curtis went from ninth starting spot to fifth in the first corner.

Down the straightaway, it was Rody, Bervoets, with Burch and Kyes side by side, and Curtis following. There was a full-punch sweeper at the end of the straightaway, with Burch and Kyes side by side going into the sweeper. Kyes was actually on the outside line and came down into Burch's line, hit Burch's car and knocked it clear off the track. It broke half the wing off, and by the time Burch got back on the track with a new wing, he was four laps down.

At the end of the first lap it was Rody, Bervoets, Kyes and Curtis. Half way through the second lap, Rody's car simply rolled over in a corner and Peter Bervoets took over the lead, with Kyes now second, Cur-



This is as happy as Arturo Carbonell got all week... at lunch! Carb problems kept him busy, but Arturo never uttered a complaint.



Two fast Americanos, Curtis Husting and Ralph Burch Jr. Husting was fast in the A main, and Ralph posted some very hot lap times.

World Champion "A" Main Final

Place	Racer	Country	Laps	Car	Motor
1	Rody Roem	Holland	147	Serpent	OPS
2	Junichi Koma	Japan	146	Kyosho	OS
3	Peter Bervoets	Holland	145	Serpent	OPS
4	Gil Losi Jr.	USA	144	Associated	OPS
5	Curtis Husting	USA	138	Associated	OPS
6	Ralph Burch Jr.	USA	136	Associated	OPS
7	Gary Kyes	USA	135	Associated	OPS
8	Naoki Ishihara	Japan	132	PB	OPS
9	Ron Ton	Holland	126	Serpent	OPS
10	Kiyokathu Kishi	Japan	121	Kyosho	OS

tis third, and Rody fourth.

On the fourth lap, Curtis cut inside Kyes, to take over second place. Curtis was not chasing Bervoets, while Rody was chasing Kyes. At the three-minute mark Rody passed Kyes to take over third. Meanwhile, Curtis was gaining about five feet a lap on Bervoets, and at the five-minute mark, he was just 1-1/2 seconds behind, when he pulled in for fuel. On the next lap, at the same corner that Rody had rolled over earlier, Bervoets now rolled over, giving the lead back to Rody.

After the first pit stops, Rody now had a 1-1/2-second lead over Curtis, Bervoets was losing ground, as 17-year-old, Junichi Koma from Japan, with a 4WD Kyosho car, took over third place, with Gil Losi Jr. now in fourth.

The positions remained the same through 15 minutes, Rody, Curtis, Koma, Losi and Bervoets. Then when Curtis pitted at 15 minutes, Koma took over second. Koma was slowly closing on Rody, and Rody wasn't able to do anything about it. Rody and Koma pulled into the pits together, but Koma was out first to take over the lead! The Japanese crowd was really getting excited now, to see one of their own drivers in the lead. The Kyosho cars jump around a lot on the track, as all flat pan cars do, so it takes an incredible driver to be doing as well as Koma was. And on top of this, Koma had totally bent up three chassis.

At about the 30-minute mark, Koma had built up a 10-second lead, when all of a sudden he ran out of fuel on the track, and Rody went back into the lead, with Bervoets in second and Losi in third. Curtis, who was running in third, had to make a long pit stop to fix a shock which was damaged from that hit in the semi-main.

The fastest man on the track, seemed to be getting farther and farther behind. Ralph Burch Jr. was flying while he was on the track. He had a 22.1-second lap, five 22.6 laps, nine 22.7 laps and a total of thirty-one 22-second laps. As a comparison, Rody had five 22-second laps with a best of 22.8. After losing the wing at the beginning of the race, Burch was hit a little later in the race which turned his radio off costing him more laps.

Meanwhile, Rody was turning consistent 23-second laps, which was all he needed to hold down first place. Koma was back on the track, flying again. He passed Losi, then Bervoets and then he passed Rody to put him back in second place. So the race ended with Rody Roem winning, Junichi Koma second, and Peter Bervoets third. Gil Losi Jr. followed in fourth. Gil's plan was to run the whole one hour race without changing tires. This meant he had to run a little slower to conserve the tires, but he did it. Curtis moved back up to fifth, with Burch following in sixth and Kyes 7th.

Our congratulations to Rody Roem. Rody was fast all week, and drove a great race while keeping out of trouble. Rody is a very well-liked racer by everyone and will wear the World Champion title with honor.



Rich Lee, Dana Smeltzer, and Bill Jianas comparing notes, trying to learn why Dana's car has more steering than theirs. All three were in the top twenty list of the fastest qualifiers.



The Serpent team from Holland not only did well on the track, they also won the award for the best lunches, which were gourmet meals prepared by their Japanese distributor.