

24 April 2016

Rounds 3 & 4 – Estoril, Portugal – 22 / 24 April 2016

SUNDAY REPORT

Morbidelli takes series lead by one point over Nash

TCR drivers treated the Portuguese fans to a pair of exciting races that saw Gianni Morbidelli (WestCoast Racing) and James Nash (Craft-Bamboo Lukoil) claim one victory apiece and jump to the top of the Drivers' Championship, with the Italian leading the Briton by only one point.

The close fights in both races – but also in Saturday's qualifying session – that involved Honda, SEAT and Volkswagen cars, proved that the latest revision of the Balance of Performance had hit its target in equalizing the three fastest models in the field.

That factor also enabled a number of other drivers to shine. Some of them were able to capitalize in terms of results like the Leopard Racing duo of Jean-Karl Vernay and Stefano Comini who drove their Golf Gti cars to podium finishes. Others were only capable of coming close to those exploits, like Mat'ò Homola who lost a possible win and even a podium position in the final laps of the first race.

Pepe Oriola, who had dominated the season opener in Bahrain, had a very disappointing weekend. Only seventh in qualifying, he was betting everything on the reverse grid of the second race, but a clash with Loris Hezemans unbalanced his car and jeopardized his hopes. He is now third in classification, 14 points off the lead.

The TCR International Series will resume on May 6 and 7 at Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium, for rounds 5 and 6.

Race 1 – Gianni Morbidelli steals victory from Mat'ò Homola

Gianni Morbidelli and his WestCoast Racing Honda Civic took their first win of the season in a lively Race 1 at Estoril, which heated up in the second half. Despite having had less practice mileage than his direct rivals, the Italian put in a great performance, trailing Mat'ò Homola, who led most of the race.

The Slovak defended his position hard, but from mid-race onwards he struggled with the deterioration of the front tires and eventually had to surrender 3 laps from the end. Later he lost two more positions to Leopard Racing's Volkswagen Golf cars of Jean-Karl Vernay and Stefano Comini, who clinched their first podium finishes of the year.

The Craft-Bamboo Lukoil duo of Sergey Afanasyev and James Nash took 5th and 6th, followed by Aku Pellinen and Pepe Oriola.

On his comeback to the series, Loris Hezemans was a good 9th, while the other Baporo Motorsport SEAT of local hero Francisco Mora took the last available point. Oriola and Morbidelli are now on top of the standings on equal points. The second race will kick off at 17:05 local time.

Key facts

Start – Morbidelli takes the best start ahead of Homola, Vernay, Pellinen, Comini, Afanasyev, Nash and Oriola

Lap 1 – Borković recovers to 10th after starting from the back of the grid

Lap 2 – Homola attacks Morbidelli at the beginning of the second lap and takes the lead; Gleason pits with engine problems

Lap 3 – Pellinen is passed by both, Comini and Afanasyev; Cerruti pits with transmission problems; Kajaia goes very wide on the grass but rejoins

Lap 4 – Nash takes 6th from Pellinen; Mora passes Rangoni for 13th.

Lap 6 – Rangoni stops at Turn 10 with an open wheel (front left); Cerruti rejoins the race

Lap 7 – Grachev passes Borkovic for 10th, while Mora fights with Kajaia for 12th

Lap 8 – Hezemans chases Oriola, who is eighth and hits the tyre pack at Turn 9

Lap 9 – Morbidelli is closing in on Homola and tries a first attack at the “esses”

Lap 11 – The fight between Homola and Morbidelli heats up, with the two making contact and driving abreast in the “esses”

Lap 12 – Morbidelli eventually manages to pass Homola in Turn 3; the latter is unable to resist also to Vernay

Lap 13 – Comini passes Homola for third

Lap 14 – Grachev passes Hezemans for 9th and they make contact

Lap 15 – Morbidelli wins from Vernay, Comini and Homola; the last thrill is a contact between Borković and Grachev who were fighting for ninth with Hezemans and Mora

Race 1 – Quotes from the podium finishers

Gianni Morbidelli (winner): *“Winning is always the best thing, so I am quite happy! I knew that it was key to preserve the tyres in the first part of the race and that is what I did. I also saw that Homola was a little bit harder on his tyres and figured that he would be in trouble. It was a nice and fair fight, because he was faster on the straights and defended very well his position, but eventually he started to feel the pressure and I could pass. It was about time, because Vernay and Comini were getting very close and I was in the uncomfortable position of having to attack and defend at the same time. The car felt good and I thank the team for the good work done to solve the power steering problem we had in practice and qualifying.”*

Jean-Karl Vernay (second): *“It’s a good result, the best possible in this race, and it’s good to score my first points. I had a good start but like Morbidelli, tried not to stress the tyres. The duel between him and Homola allowed me to get closer to them. Unfortunately, at some point, they had a contact and debris broke my windscreen, so I had to close my helmet visor to continue. Towards the end I was well-placed to use any opportunity that may come from the fight between the first two and eventually, I could pass Homola, even if I didn’t want to take any risk.”*

Stefano Comini (third): *“After free practice we completely changed the set-up of the car, and it proved the right thing to do. The car felt much better. My start wasn’t great as I wanted to avoid any problems and lost one position. The first half of the race was a little bit boring, but then things got livelier. I managed to overtake Pellinen and then Vernay and I joined the two leaders. Third is a good result, but we still have a lot of work to do.”*

Race 2 – James Nash claims dominant victory

It did not take much time to James Nash to find his way to victory in his return to Touring Car racing. After an excellent weekend in Bahrain, the Brit of Team Craft Bamboo Lukoil took his maiden win in the TCR International Series in Estoril.

The SEAT driver dominated Race 2 from lights to flag, beating Stefano Comini, who continued improving with the Leopard Racing Volkswagen Golf Gti and Gianni Morbidelli, with the WestCoast Racing Honda Civic.

The Italian brilliantly won a couple of duels, notably with Jean-Karl Vernay and Sergey Afanasyev, to take a second podium finish this weekend and grab the leadership in the points standings, albeit by a single point over Nash.

Afanasyev claimed an excellent 4th ahead of Vernay, Aku Pellinen, Davit Kajaia, Mat’o Homola and Francisco Mora, while Pepe Oriola finished only 10th, after struggling the entire race with a car damaged in a contact with Loris Hezemans at the start.

Key facts

Start – Nash takes the best start after fighting with Pellinen, Comini, Vernay and Oriola; Hezemans stops after few meters, following contact with Oriola

Lap 1 – Morbidelli passes Pellinen for 6th; Nash leads from Comini, Vernay, Oriola, Afanasyev and Morbidelli; Kajaia passes Grachev for 8th

Lap 2 – Nash pulls away and creates a 2-second lead

Lap 3 – Homola passes Grachev for 9th; Borković and Tassi make contact and the former retires with a pierced radiator

Lap 4 – Oriola’s car is out of balance after the contact with Hezemans at the start; the Spaniard loses positions to Afanasyev, Morbidelli, Pellinen and Kajaia, dropping from fourth to eighth

Lap 7 – Homola passes Oriola, taking 8th

Lap 8 – Mora overtakes Tassi for 11th

Lap 9 – Vernay in P3 is chased by Afanasyev and Morbidelli

Lap 10 – Morbidelli takes 4th from Afanasyev

Lap 11 – Mora passes Oriola for 9th

Lap 12 – Vernay and Morbidelli are in a close fight, eventually the Italian passes the Frenchman for third

Lap 13 – Afanasyev passes Vernay as well

Lap 15 – Nash starts to lift off a bit but has everything under control and wins ahead of Comini, Morbidelli, Afanasyev and Vernay

Race 2 – Quotes from the podium finishers

James Nash (winner): *“It was probably the best start of the season for me and that helped much. I skipped free practice to save tyres and that allowed me to push quite hard in the first part of the race and build some advantage. It was a stressful gap though, because at the end of the race I struggled with the tyres. Still, everything went well and now I am enjoying a good position in the championship, only one point behind Gianni. Too early to say anything, the championship is still very long and it will be about consistency.”*

Stefano Comini (second): *“I am second, so climbing another step after third in Race 1, which is good. My start was not very good and I missed the first braking point. After that I was behind my teammate and could pass him when he did a little mistake in turn 4. There was not much I could do to reduce the gap with Nash, so I did not push too hard, not to kill the tyres, and I went for some heavy points.”*

Gianni Morbidelli (third): *“It was again a good race, I am happy with the result. I lost some time behind Oriola and I think I was a little bit too hard on my front tyres to try to pass him. After that, I had some understeer and mostly tried to preserve the tyres. Being first in the championship doesn’t mean much, it’s way too early.”*

All drivers were able to start in the second race

All the TCR drivers managed to take part in the Estoril second race today.

The Top Run Motorsport crew managed to repair the front left suspension of Luca Rangoni’s Subaru WRX STi that broke during the first race.

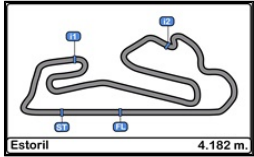
The technical failures that stopped Kevin Gleason’s Honda Civic for good and forced Michela Cerruti’s Alfa Romeo Giulietta to pit were both solved.

press release



The mechanic of Mulsanne Racing discovered a false contact in the gear linkage and sent Cerruti back on track after a brief stop. As for WestCoast Racing, Gleason's Civic suffered from an engine wiring problem that was also solved.

Both, Gleason and Rangoni took the start from the back of the grid as their teams asked for neutralization of the parc fermé rules.



Autodromo do Estoril

1st RACE

FINAL CLASSIFICATION

24/04/2016

Clas.	Nº	Driver	Nat.	Entrant	Car	Laps	Total Time	Km/h.	Gap	Best	Time	Km/h.
1	10	Gianni Morbidelli	ITA	West Coast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	15	27'53.287	134.961		3	1'49.372	137.652
2	2	Jean-Karl Vernay	FRA	Leopard Racing	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	15	27'54.313	134.879	1"026	3	1'49.464	137.536
3	1	Stefano Comini	SUI	Leopard Racing	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	15	27'57.400	134.630	4"113	3	1'49.300	137.742
4	70	Mat'O Homola	SVK	B3 Racing Team Hungary	SEAT León TCR	15	27'58.750	134.522	5"463	4	1'49.276	137.773
5	77	Sergey Afanasyev	RUS	Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT León TCR	15	27'59.128	134.492	5"841	3	1'49.477	137.520
6	54	James Nash	GBR	Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT León TCR	15	28'00.800	134.358	7"513	4	1'49.489	137.505
7	14	Aku Pellinen	FIN	West Coast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	15	28'07.938	133.790	14"651	5	1'50.716	135.981
8	74	Pepe Oriola	ESP	Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT León TCR	15	28'13.802	133.327	20"515	4	1'50.764	135.922
9	50	Loris Hezemans	NED	Baporo Motorsport	SEAT León TCR	15	28'14.003	133.311	20"716	3	1'50.802	135.875
10	26	Francisco Mora	POR	Baporo Motorsport	SEAT León Cup Racer	15	28'14.365	133.282	21"078	6	1'50.175	136.649
11	8	Mikhail Grachev	RUS	Liqui Moly Team Engstler	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	15	28'16.398	133.123	23"111	3	1'50.240	136.568
12	62	Dušan Borkovic	SRB	B3 Racing Team Hungary	SEAT León TCR	15	28'16.560	133.110	23"273	4	1'50.538	136.200
13	7	Davit Kajaia	GEO	Liqui Moly Team Engstler	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	15	28'17.842	133.009	24"555	4	1'50.656	136.055
14	9	Attila Tassi	HUN	B3 Racing Team Hungary	SEAT León TCR	15	28'23.045	132.603	29"758	3	1'50.290	136.506
15	88	Michela Cerruti	ITA	Mulsanne Racing	Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR	12	28'40.334	105.016	3 Lap.	11	1'52.656	133.639

NOT CLASSIFIED

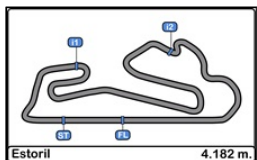
16	31	Luca Rangoni	ITA	Top Run Motorsport	Subaru STi TCR	4	07'41.382	130.523	11 Lap.	3	1'51.558	134.955
17	24	Kevin Gleason	USA	West Coast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	1	02'31.463	99.399	14 Lap.	1	2'31.463	99.399

Fastest lap Mat'O Homola 1'49.276 137.773 Km/h.

Published at:.....

Track Status **DRY**

Stewards:	Race Director:	Timekeeper: 
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Autodromo do Estoril

2nd RACE

FINAL CLASSIFICATION

24/04/2016

Clas.	Nº	Driver	Nat.	Entrant	Car	Laps	Total Time	Km/h.	Gap	Best	Time	Km/h.
1	54	James Nash	GBR	Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT León TCR	15	27'46.901	135.478		2	1'49.576	137.396
2	1	Stefano Comini	SUI	Leopard Racing	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	15	27'49.153	135.295	2"252	4	1'49.520	137.466
3	10	Gianni Morbidelli	ITA	West Coast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	15	27'54.142	134.892	7"241	5	1'49.095	138.001
4	77	Sergey Afanasyev	RUS	Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT León TCR	15	27'56.493	134.703	9"592	5	1'49.930	136.953
5	2	Jean-Karl Vernay	FRA	Leopard Racing	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	15	27'58.523	134.540	11"622	4	1'49.814	137.098
6	14	Aku Pellinen	FIN	West Coast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	15	28'03.660	134.130	16"759	5	1'50.344	136.439
7	7	Davit Kajaia	GEO	Liqui Moly Team Engstler	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	15	28'06.091	133.936	19"190	4	1'50.563	136.169
8	70	Mat'O Homola	SVK	B3 Racing Team Hungary	SEAT León TCR	15	28'07.828	133.798	20"927	3	1'49.851	137.052
9	26	Francisco Mora	POR	Baporo Motorsport	SEAT León Cup Racer	15	28'08.160	133.772	21"259	10	1'50.722	135.973
10	74	Pepe Oriola	ESP	Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT León TCR	15	28'19.436	132.885	32"535	2	1'50.863	135.801
11	8	Mikhail Grachev	RUS	Liqui Moly Team Engstler	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	15	28'20.083	132.834	33"182	5	1'51.668	134.822
12	24	Kevin Gleason	USA	West Coast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	15	28'20.712	132.785	33"811	3	1'51.068	135.550
13	9	Attila Tassi	HUN	B3 Racing Team Hungary	SEAT León TCR	15	28'23.702	132.552	36"801	5	1'51.665	134.825
14	88	Michela Cerruti	ITA	Mulsanne Racing	Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR	15	28'26.010	132.373	39"109	5	1'51.915	134.524
15	31	Luca Rangoni	ITA	Top Run Motorsport	Subaru STi TCR	11	21'04.779	130.938	4 Lap.	4	1'51.463	135.070

NOT CLASSIFIED

16	62	Dušan Borkovic	SRB	B3 Racing Team Hungary	SEAT León TCR	2	04'11.136	119.897	13 Lap.	1	2'04.773	120.661
17	50	Loris Hezemans	NED	Baporo Motorsport	SEAT León TCR				15 Lap.			

Fastest lap Gianni Morbidelli 1'49.095 138.001 Km/h.

Published at:.....

Track Status **DRY**

Stewards:	Race Director:	Timekeeper: 
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