

24 October 2015

Rounds 19 & 20 – Buriram Festival of Speed, Thailand – 24/25 October 2015

QUALIFYING REPORT

Morbidelli wins pole as Oriola closes the gap

On his first outing at the wheel of the JAS Motorsport-built Honda Civic TCR Step 2, Gianni Morbidelli managed to claim pole position at Buriram's Chang International Circuit. Three hours of track time – between yesterday's test and today's free practices – were enough for him and WestCoast Racing to make the most out of the new car. Which enabled him to top both qualifying legs.

Pepe Oriola had to settle with second on the grid for the first race, but this result meant that he closed the gap from Stefano Comini in the Drivers' standings from 11 to 7 points.

As for Comini, who is still struggling at the wheel after the surgical operation to his left knee, he qualified ninth, winning a front row position on the top-ten reverse grid for Race 2 alongside Hugo Valente's Opel Astra.

Local drivers Munkong Sathienthirakul impressed on his first appearance in the series, making it to Q2 and eventually getting close to squeeze among the top-ten.

The first race starts tomorrow at 12.35 (06.35 CET), followed by the second race at 14.05 (08.05 CET). They will be streamed on the internet back-to-back from 13.20 local time (07.20 in Central Europe).

Q1: WestCoast duo tops the timesheet

It took only one lap to Gianni Morbidelli for emerging as the fastest in the first part of the session. The Italian clocked a time of 1:43.855 that nobody was able to beat. His teammate Kevin Gleason qualified second fastest on his last lap (1:44.015), demoting Sergey Afanasyev (1:44.015) to third.

All title contenders managed to advance to Q2: Pepe Oriola fourth, Stefano Comini seventh and Jordi Gené eighth.

Mikhail Grachev placed the best of the Volkswagen Golf in ninth, ahead of Hugo Valente's Opel Astra. Local driver Munkong Sathienthirakul ranked twelfth, the first TCR Asia competitor to win a place for Q2.

Robb Holland and Alain Menu were still struggling with the issues plaguing their cars. The American was placed in an encouraging 15th place in the early stages, but had to pit for repairs and this prevented him to improve; eventually he was demoted to 21st. Menu, instead, sat in the pit for most of the session while the team was working on the car; finally he was able to join in time to clock only one flying lap that placed him in 15th.



The session was disrupted once by the red flag, but only for a few minutes, to recover Filipe de Souza's SEAT beached onto the gravel trap at Turn 3.

The following drivers advanced to Q2: Morbidelli, Gleason, Afanasyev, Oriola, Münnich, Hezemans, Comini, Gené, Grachev, Valente, Veglia and Sathienthirakul.

Q2: Morbidelli beats Oriola for the pole

Just like in Q1, Morbidelli did not waste time, nor tyres and claimed pole position with a single flying lap of 1:43.423.

Gleason clocked a 1:43.792 that provisionally placed him in second position, but the American was demoted to third by Oriola who completed a lap of 1:43.601 just before the ten-minute leg expired.

Valente qualified in tenth and won pole position on the reverse grid for Race 2 and will have Comini alongside him.

SEE RESULTS AT THE END OF THE RELEASE

What the drivers had to say

Gianni Morbidelli, pole position: *"I am very happy with this pole in the first outing of the 'step 2' car. We did a couple of tests in Italy and then came here, so evidently, the team did a good job. This is of course an evolution of the car we used so far, so we are not starting from zero, and there is still a lot of room for improvement, as proved by the excellent time of Kevin (Gleason) in the previous car, despite a 20kg success ballast. We did a long run in the free practice and everything went well, so we are confident for tomorrow. The only worry may be the high temperature."*

Pepe Oriola, second: *"I made an almost perfect lap and the car was performing very well. We have a good set-up and I hope I can have a good start tomorrow and avoid high temperatures. Championship-wise, it is essential to preserve the car for Race 2. For the time being, I am happy to have reduced the gap from Comini by 4 points."*

Kevin Gleason, third: *"First of all, congratulations to the team and Gianni for the very good debut of the step 2 car. I had quite a good session, considering also the success ballast I am carrying, but one is never entirely happy when he is not first of the group... We'll see what happens tomorrow, I think it will be a clean and good fight with Gianni, with no strategy prepared before-hand."*



Munnkong Sathienthirakul, pole position in TCR Asia: *"It's very nice to be here, it wasn't really expected. I have a lot to learn this weekend, as this is my first time with the car and in the TCR. Frankly, I had expected a little bit faster lap time, but at this stage to try to improve may be very tricky, as you have to be much harder with the car."*

De Souza's qualifying times disallowed by the Stewards

Filipe de Souza was penalised by Stewards of the Meeting at the end of today's Qualifying session.

After going off at Turn 3 in the opening minutes of Q1 and beaching his Roadstar Racing SEAT León onto the gravel trap, the Macanese driver was towed back on track and rejoined; he eventually posted the 19th fastest lap.

However, because he was not entitled to rejoin after receiving external aid, he had all his qualifying times disallowed and will be demoted to the back of the grids for both tomorrow's races.

When TCR meets GT Asia, it's a crowded picture!

The state-of-the-art Chang International Circuit in Buriram is making history this weekend, as this is the first time that Thailand hosts a round of a major international motor racing series.

Fans at Buriram are enjoying a great race programme this weekend, with the TCR International Series partnering with the highly-rated GT Asia series. To celebrate the landmark moment, the 24 drivers taking part in the TCR event and the 44 drivers (competing as 22 pairs) entered in the GT Asia race gathered for a crowded family photo on the start-finish line under the emblematic bridge of the new track.

With them posed Marcello Lotti, promoter of the TCR International Series, David Sonenscher, promoter of the GT Asia and the TCR Asia, and Tanaisiri Chanvitayaron, managing director of the track.



TCR International Series

Combined Qualifying - TCR Int. Series Official

23 - 25 October 2015
Buriram - 4554 mtr.

Pos	Nbr	Name / Entrant	Car	Qual-1	Qual-2	Gap
1	10	Gianni Morbidelli (ITA) WestCoast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	1:43.855	1:43.423	
2	74	Pepe Oriola (ESP) Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT León	1:44.301	1:43.601	0.178
3	24	Kevin Gleason (USA) WestCoast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	1:44.015	1:43.792	0.369
4	77	Sergey Afanasyev (RUS) Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT León	1:44.131	1:44.096	0.673
5	88	Jordi Gené (ESP) Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT León	1:44.599	1:44.192	0.769
6	8	Mikhail Grachev (RUS) Liqui Moly Team Engstler	Volkswagen Golf TCR	1:44.608	1:44.484	1.061
7	7	Lorenzo Veglia (ITA) Liqui Moly Team Engstler	SEAT León	1:44.749	1:44.506	1.083
8	15	Loris Hezemans (NED) Target Competition	SEAT León	1:44.494	1:44.513	1.090
9	25	Stefano Comini (SUI) Target Competition	SEAT León	1:44.564	1:44.530	1.107
10	45	Hugo Valente (FRA) Campos Racing	Opel Astra OPC	1:44.708	1:44.563	1.140
11	23	René Münnich (GER) WestCoast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	1:44.483	1:44.746	1.323
12	80	Munkong Sathienthirakul (THA) Craft-Bamboo Racing	SEAT León	1:45.081	1:45.089	1.666
13	4	Tomas Engström (SWE) Liqui Moly Team Engstler	Volkswagen Golf TCR	1:45.342		1.919
14	31	Tin Sritrai (THA) Asia Racing Team	SEAT León	1:45.387		1.964
15	52	Alain Menu (SUI) Top Run Motorsport	Subaru STi TCR	1:45.984		2.561
16	68	Michael Choi (HKG) Prince Racing Hong Kong	Honda Civic TCR	1:46.074		2.651
17	35	Rafaël Galiana (FRA) Target Competition	SEAT León	1:46.330		2.907
18	69	Kevin Pu (CHN) Asia Racing Team	SEAT León	1:46.399		2.976
19	38	Kenneth Lau (HKG) Prince Racing Hong Kong	Honda Civic TCR	1:47.020		3.597
20	27	Robb Holland (USA) FRD Ford HK Racing Team	Ford Focus ST	1:47.078		3.655
21	97	Johnson Huang (TPE) Roadstar Racing Team	SEAT León	1:47.689		4.266
22	56	Samson Chan (HKG) Roadstar Racing Team	SEAT León	1:47.772		4.349
23	65	Douglas Khoo (MAS) Niza Racing	SEAT León	1:55.241		11.818
24	66	Filipe C. de Souza (MAC) Roadstar Racing Team	SEAT León			

Car66, All qualifying times cancelled, Stewards' decision 3 refers.

Fastest time : 1:43.423 in lap 2 by nbr. 10 : Gianni Morbidelli (Honda Civic TCR)

Publication-time

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Steward	Steward	Steward	Timekeeper
			P.Harnwaree
Page 1 of 1			

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