

Press Release



Lauder takes Suzuki race championship lead

The weekend's 9-11 December second round of the 2011/2012 Suzuki Swift Sport Cup championship held at Christchurch's Powerbuilt Tools Raceway has seen Turua teen AJ Lauder take the series lead after the weekend's three races.

Following on from Saturday's race win, Lauder finished fourth and second in today's results to overtake Taupo's Mark Gibson for the lead in the six round series.

The morning's race win went to Takapau's Sam Barry after an incident filled eight laps that saw Oamaru's Joseph Paton's Frosty Boy liveried Swift up-ended during the second lap. Despite rolling, the car sustained largely superficial damage and looked equally as scarred as the majority of the field from the reverse-grid race. Joining Paton on the sidelines, early series leader Mark 'Spud' Gibson suffered significant frontal damage – the first time in four races all cars hadn't finished.

Starting from pole for the afternoon's final race for the weekend, AJ Lauder seemed to have the measure of the field and quickly ran from the grasp of the chasing pack. However local driver Chris Cox was able to get close enough to catch Lauder's draft and tuck in to his slipstream. Laying in wait for a chance of the lead in the closing laps Cox and Lauder started a tit-for-tat swapping of positions before Cox got the final run to the chequered flag. His win made him the third different race winner for the weekend and eventual round winner.

"I got in front and the objective was to get away, but AJ hung on so I knew if he got me back I'd just have to pick a new opportunity to do it again closer to the end of the race. Thankfully we got away with it and got the win so it was fantastic," said 19-year-old Cox.

"To come here and get the round win has really brought us back in to the championship chase, so we'll keep pushing like this, keep trying to get more race wins and hopefully the championship too."

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Finishing second in the weekend standings, Lauder now leads overall by 43 points from Gibson, with Chris Cox a further two points behind. The 17-year-old contractor employee said the final race win was his secondary objective to securing the overall series lead.

“That’s a good weekend for us,” said Lauder. “We had a good first race, picked up battle scars in the second and just about got there in the third, but finishing second was good enough for the overall lead.

“The championship lead was important and while we were trying to secure a second race win, Chris had a bit more pace than us.”

In fine yet blustery conditions, the 13-car field was a lot more evenly matched during the Sunday racing, having narrowed the Saturday time deficit.

“A gruelling weekend for everyone I think best sums it up,” said Suzuki New Zealand’s motorsport manager Darren Stevens. “History shows how the track really brings out the driver’s true character and the morning’s heated racing only benefited the calmer tactics.

“But what was really impressive was the way the teams all pulled together to help each other out to ensure every car was in the best shape possible for the last race.”

For series co-ordinator Paul Burborough, he said the overall results reflected how teams’ had really stepped up since the series opening round at Pukekohe in early November: “It was a great weekend for the championship and probably no surprise local Chris Cox came up with a top result, but also too for Sam Barry and AJ Lauder. To have three different race winners and a new series leader is a great way to make things interesting.

“But also how much closer the chase for the title now is – two points separating Mark Gibson and Chris Cox for second and third.

“I think the weekend also illustrated it’s easy to overlook the simple things. Things like tyre pressures and basic adjustments have far more impact on the car’s handling than engineering a radical setup that may work great in one corner but costs in the other nine.

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Now breaking for the Christmas/New Year holiday season, teams' have five weeks to prepare for the third round of the championship. Being held at Invercargill's Teretonga raceway from 14-15 January 2012 the decision North Island teams' face is where they leave their cars in the South, especially those requiring more serious panel repairs.

"The teams' and series are very strong on appearance, so having them looking as pristine as possible for the Teretonga weekend is a big goal. We realise many of the North Island teams' have preferred repairers so taking them home makes sense, but with Christmas and the associated festive season shortening available preparation time many would prefer to leave their cars in the South and entrust some of the Suzuki dealer options," added Stevens.

"It's also a test of teams' championship commitment. With the Timaru round a week after Teretonga, the back-to-back pressure adds another dynamic element to the series – the cream will rise to the top you might say."

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