

Press Release



Stormy weather beaten by Suzuki race driver

Not even torrential rain and gale force winds could stop Turua 17-year-old AJ Lauder from winning two of the three races at Invercargill's Teretonga race circuit in the weekend, extending his lead in the Suzuki Swift Sport Cup series over rival Chris Cox.

Having won Saturday's double-points enduro race around the 2.62km circuit, Lauder's second win in the final race secured victory for the series third of six rounds.

While the predicted hail and gale westerlies did eventuate the morning race was held in clear conditions. A ten-lap reverse grid race based on yesterday's results, two safety car incidents punctuated the action. Oamaru's Joseph Paton became the first victim, slipping from the track before heavily impacting with Rob Gibson's car and then the tyre wall. Hamilton's Glen Collinson held on to take his maiden win in the series, followed closely by Upper Hutt's Jamie Gaskin, Hamilton's Shaun Lawrence and Nelson's Kent Yarrall. The five cars were just on a second apart at the chequered flag.

As the cars started the final 12-lap race in the afternoon a sudden switch of wind direction from the west to the south dragged ominously looking storm clouds toward the track. Just as the cars started their third lap torrential rain dumped on the circuit. Driving with due caution the race continued without significant incident. Then on the seventh lap early bravado from Hamilton's Glen Collinson became a race stopping incident. Passing Shaun Lawrence for position on the main straight Collinson got wide at the sweeper where the car spun, dug in to the dirt and gently rolled over.

As the wind swung back to the west to drive the rain away, Rangiora's Chris Cox got to pass for the lead as the race restarted. Lauder returned the move on entry to the first turn.

"I was far enough around that I knew I could give it a good crack. He eased off and I snuck around the outside," described Lauder of the move.

On a later lap Hamilton's Shaun Lawrence lost grip on the entry to the same first turn,

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spearing backwards from the track before being captured by the dirt trap. Lauder went on to take the chequered flag by a narrow 0.4sec margin, Cox finishing second, Mark Gibson third and Kent Yarrall fourth. Gibson pipped Yarrall by a mere hundredth of a second on the run to the line.

Lauder's win extends his championship lead to 58 points over now second placed Chris Cox. Mark Gibson drops to third, 140 points behind Lauder.

"I knew if I got off to a good start I could pull out a lead, which I had until the red flag came out. So I had to start from scratch," added Lauder, who said the changeable conditions made it tough for everyone, not just him.

Moving to second overall, Cox said the cat and mouse moves were part of a plan to win the weekend: "I knew that I had to win the race to win the round," said Cox. "Congratulations to AJ, he held me off. I got him last round, he got me this time. Now it looks like it will be a championship that will go right down to the wire and I'm looking forward to that.

"It has been very tough to drive these conditions and to keep it on the track and come home with the results we have is great - as we're only half-way through the season. There is a long way to go and plenty more points out there.

"With Timaru next weekend it was important to keep the car clean and we'll keep going from here looking for those results."

As some teams made basic repairs before departing the inclement climate for next weekend's fourth round near Timaru, Suzuki New Zealand motorsport manager Darren Stevens said it was a great result given the weather contrasts.

"It was entertaining and challenging, although it was good to see a few of them holding their own. Castrol Scholarship winner Kent Yarrall, got on to the round podium, which was a good result even though he missed a third place in the last race by half a bonnet length. He must like the wet - the way he's performed here this weekend."

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Suzuki Swift Sport Cup series co-ordinator Paul Burborough said the class showed an impressive level of ability when mixing championship aspirations and difficult weather conditions: "It was unfortunate for Glen Collinson after his morning win he went from zero after being hero. Then with Chris Cox and AJ Lauder swapping positions in such wet conditions, especially when there is so much at stake. So it shows the talent we have in the class when they can race so hard and both finish.

"Overall the conditions have been very testing; it's been a very cold wet and yucky weekend. But moving forward; Timaru next weekend and the championship is as close as ever."

The fourth round of the series heads to Timaru's Levels Raceway for the second in back-to-back weekends of championship racing, 20-22 January 2012.

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