



# Busy weekend for Napa's TNI Racing in Sonoma

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Last weekend the FIA World Touring Car Championship (WTCC) did international battle on the twisty and technical track at the raceway in Sonoma, bringing thousands of fans to the facility to watch the event.

As a support race to the World Touring cars, the United States Touring Car Championship (USTCC) gave drivers a chance to show the crowd their racing skills on what many of them consider to be their "home" track.

Napa's TNI Racing fielded three Mazdas for the race, the they found themselves very busy all weekend long.

The drama started on Friday during qualifying, when Doug Makishima crashed the red No. 3 Mazda into a concrete barrier in Turn 3.

The car was heavily damaged but luckily for Makishima, he was unhurt.

Luckily for TNI Racing, sponsor American Canyon Collision Center was willing to keep its doors open late Friday night and try to straighten the frame of the car.

Joel Ramos of American Canyon Collision Center worked for hours on the car and pulled off a miracle on his frame-straightening machine.

"Joel saved us," said TNI Racing owner Ron Valtierra. "A lot of people in the paddock at the track had written this car off. But we got it fixed! It never would have happened without American Canyon Collision Center."

The frame was fixed on the red No. 3 car, but the engine was still giving the team some problems. The turbo on the Mazdaspeed engine wasn't providing enough power, and it was smoking badly during testing. The TNI Racing crew didn't give up. Led by their crew chief, Simeon Gracy, the mechanics — Drew Ferneau, Daniel Rose, Victor Martinez and AJ Gracy of Performance In-Frame Tuning — got busy immediately and replaced the turbo with just minutes to spare.

"It was close," said Valtierra, "but in the end they got it done and we made the race."

Because the car missed qualifying, Makishima had to start in the back of the field for the standing start in front of the packed grandstands.

TNI Racing team driver Rob Krider had a plan for the beginning of the race.

"I told Doug to follow me at the start," said Krider, who qualified the No. 4 car on the sixth row. "I knew I could get a good start with the FIA lights and I wanted to make a hole in the field for Doug to come through with the faster car."

The team's plan worked, and into the first and second corner, Makishima was able to quickly move the car up through the field.

Because of the hard work done by the crew all weekend long, all three TNI Racing cars — the blue No. 43 car driven by Felipe Cabezas, the red No. 3 car driven by Makishima, and the burgundy No. 4 car driven by Krider — finished the race, helping with the manufacturer championships point chase for Mazda.

Cabezas had the best finish for the team, with a sixth-place effort.

The USTCC honored the TNI Racing crew with a set of mechanics gloves for all of the team members for their incredible achievement.

"I can't say enough for all of these guys," said Valtierri.

"They worked so hard on these cars before and at the race, especially AJ from Performance In-Frame Tuning and Rich from T.E.M. Machine Shop. These cars ran great all weekend thanks to their engine skills."

"This team did a great job," said Napa City Councilman Jim Krider. "It was interesting for Krider Racing to be a part of another team for a weekend and see how they operate from the inside. TNI Racing was very impressive. We came away learning a lot from this operation. Just having the opportunity to race on the track the same weekend as international racing superstars like Alain Menu and Gabriele Tarquini was awesome. I'm honored TNI Racing asked Rob to drive for them."

Sunday's USTCC race was won by Brandon Kraus in a Honda Civic.

The next event on the USTCC calendar will be Oct. 20-21 at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca.



AJ Gracy, of Performance In-Frame Tuning, gets on top of the engine of the No. 3 car while Drew Ferneau works underneath to replace the turbo with only minutes to spare before the race begins. Victor Martinez photo

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