



For Immediate Release Contact Laz Denes
True Speed Communication
(256) 717-8014 or Laz.Denes@TrueSpeedCommunication.com
www.TrueSpeedCommunication.com
Online Media Kit Available at: www.TrueSpeedMedia.com

SunTrust RACING

Porsche 250 Preview

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (April 6, 2010) – While the eyes of the golfing world are on this weekend’s 76th Masters tournament in Augusta, Ga., the GRAND-AM Rolex Sports Car Series takes its act about 300 miles west of there on Interstate 20 to a pristine road course facility that has come to be known by casual observers as the Augusta National of North American racetracks – Barber Motorsports Park on the outskirts of Birmingham, Ala.

Saturday’s eighth annual Porsche 250 brings together the Rolex Series competitors – including the No. 10 SunTrust Ford Dallara team of Wayne Taylor Racing featuring drivers Max Angelelli and Ricky Taylor – for the traditional 2-hour, 45-minute shootout on the 2.3-mile, 17-turn Barber circuit. It’s quite the road course setting, snaking back and forth at the foot of naturally wooded lush, grassy hillsides, where fans sit on picnic blankets and folding chairs to create a colorful scene incredibly reminiscent of the neatly manicured fairways of Augusta National at Masters time.

Needless to say, since 2003, Barber has been a favorite stop among the Rolex Series competitors, particularly the SunTrust Racing team, which scored a victory in 2005 in its very first visit to the track at the hands of Angelelli and Wayne Taylor, his co-driver at the time who’s now the team owner, as well as father of his 20-year-old co-driving prodigy. It was one of five victories and 10 podium finishes in 14 events that year, which culminated with SunTrust’s first Rolex Series championship.

Angelelli and Jan Magnussen came back to Barber the following year to post a runner-up finish for the SunTrust team, and then the Italian driving ace was joined there by Memo Gidley in 2007 for SunTrust’s third consecutive podium finish.

The past two seasons at Barber didn’t quite measure up to Angelelli and Wayne Taylor’s standards, however. Despite starting on the pole in 2008, Angelelli and Michael Valiante struggled with annoying traction issues en route to a sixth-place finish. And then, last year, the SunTrust car’s unfortunate off-course excursion just three laps into the race left it stranded in a turn-seven gravel trap for three laps, leaving Angelelli and co-driver Brian Frisselle able only to salvage a 14th-place finish.

Still, the SunTrust Ford Dallara turned some of the fastest laps of the race at Barber after recovering from its early race mishap. And the team learned a few more things in testing there the day after the race that are sure to come into play this weekend, leaving Angelelli and Ricky Taylor hopeful they can make a huge leap from their current position of fifth in the point standings after the season’s first two events with a top result this Saturday. They’re currently 17 points behind the championship-leading No. 01 Chip Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates BMW Riley of Scott Pruett and Memo Rojas, but just three points behind the second-place No. 99 Gainsco/Bob Stallings Racing Chevrolet Riley of Alex Gurney and Jon Fogarty.

Such is the artistic beauty of Barber Motorsports Park that, for the first time, the IZOD IndyCar Series has decided to hold its first race there on Sunday, adding excitement to a racing weekend that has already enjoyed great success among the locals for the past eight seasons with the Rolex Series as the Sunday headline race.

Practice for Saturday’s Porsche 250 begins Thursday afternoon, with qualifying set for Friday at 11:40 a.m. EDT. Race time Saturday is 1:30 p.m. with live television coverage on SPEED, as well as a live radio broadcast on the Motor Racing Network (MRN) and Sirius NASCAR Radio Channel 128 beginning at 1:15 p.m. Live timing and scoring during all on-track sessions can be found at www.grand-am.com.

Max Angelelli, co-driver of the No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Dallara:

You’re 10 weeks into the season but you’re only now heading to your third race. Has it been difficult waiting between races so far this year?

“I’ll have to say I have never been a big fan of long breaks, especially after you are coming off of a result that you are not happy with. That’s the way our schedule is, right now, but it will pick up as the season goes along. We finished sixth at Daytona, then we took the next four weekends off and came back hoping for a good result at Homestead. We finished sixth at Homestead, as it turns out, and then we had to sit and think about it for another four weekends off. The good news is that we have a great car and a great team, so we have every reason to feel like we will have a good result at Barber this weekend because it has been one of our more successful tracks. We need to have a good result this weekend and I know we can get it.”

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Max Angelelli, co-driver of the No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Dallara (continued):

After running the Barber race in July the last five seasons, is it a refreshing thought to be going back there for an early April race?

“It will make a big difference. Barber is a track that has always been hard on the drivers, not just because our race used to be in the middle of the summer and it was always very hot. It is a very challenging track with not a lot of straightaway and a huge number of corners, so you are always busy, busy, busy. But the fact that that the weather will be much cooler there this weekend is going to help a lot.”

What does it take to have the best car at Barber?

“Because there are a lot of corners and not a lot of straightaway, you need a car with a very good front end. You have to have a car that will turn. This is what a really good racecar does, and this is where our focus will be as we get ready for the race. The Dallara-Ford combination on the SunTrust car has demonstrated that it is very good at Barber. We had a little mishap early in the race that ended our chance at winning last year, but we came back and turned a lot of very fast lap times after that. We won the pole there with the Dallara two years ago, so we definitely know we can be fast there. Ricky (Taylor) likes the track a lot, so I am feeling very confident about our chances.”

Ricky Taylor, co-driver of the No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Dallara:

You head to Barber this weekend in the top-five in points and just three points out of second. What are your thoughts after the first two races of the season?

“It’s two consistent sixth-place finishes that got us there, but we’re definitely looking for better than that. We knew the first two races were going to be tough for us. Obviously, the 24-hour can go any of a number of ways and we got out of there with a sixth-place finish after a lot of visits to the garage during the race. So that could have been a lot worse. Homestead has historically been one of the more difficult tracks for the Dallara, particularly in the area of tire wear, and we made a strategy decision there that just didn’t pan out because there was just one yellow during the race instead of the usual six, eight or 10. Obviously, we’re looking for much better results as the season goes along, and we’re definitely hoping for a big finish this coming weekend at Barber.”

You equaled your best career result of fifth in a Daytona Prototype at Barber in 2008. Is it safe to assume you like the track?

“It’s one of the most beautiful tracks in North America. It has all sorts of elevation changes. It’s got a great motorcycle museum. And it’s a lot of fun to drive. It’s a fun track. The racing can be a bit of a challenge with the GT cars out there with us. It’s a narrow track and that makes it difficult to work your way through traffic. So that’ll play a big part in the outcome for everybody, but the experience of racing at the track the last two seasons will definitely help me. This year, we’ll be there with the Indy cars for the first time, and they use a different brand of tire than we do, so that might make things a little more challenging, too. We’ll just have to see how the two different kinds of rubber on the track get along.”

Wayne Taylor, owner of the No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Dallara team:

It was five weekends ago that we last saw the series race at Homestead. What have you and the team been working on during the layoff to get ready for the rest of the season, which begins this weekend at Barber Motorsports Park?

“The SunTrust team is in great shape. We just haven’t had the results to show for it, for various reasons. So we really have taken a close look at all the little things that make such a big difference, basically fine-tuning everything from our pit stops, to driver changes, to race preparation. And we worked very hard on every bit of it. Such a long layoff like we’ve had, now, for the second time this season, is okay when you’re coming off of a good race. But after finishing sixth at Homestead for the second race in a row made us want to get back to racing as quickly as possible. Even with all the hard work on the details, at end of day, racing is what makes you better, so we’re excited to get back out there this weekend. We’ve had some success at Barber, and we’ve also had some problems. Last year was not a fun year, there, but we did have a good test the Monday after the race and came away very excited at the things we found. It’s a venue we like a lot. It’s another big race for SunTrust. And with the IRL there, it’ll certainly raise the awareness in Grand-Am and what we do. The only difference will be that we’re the Saturday headline instead of the Sunday headline. But, it seems to me, Alabama has always brought out the big crowds to see us, so I would expect that to be no different this year.”

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