



Indy Car driver Ed Carpenter and his friend/race engineer Nathan O'Rourke scored the victory at the 2009 Mazda RoboPong 200 presented by Bridgestone Sunday afternoon under sunny skies at the New Castle Motorsports Park facility outside the Indianapolis area. The 200-lap endurance event on the 1-mile circuit was an battle of endurance and attrition as from the green flag dropped, the 47 teams began their quest for the \$5k winning check and a place in the sixth year event history.

The race began with a clean start in the first few corners despite some close side to side action. Making their way to the 'highway' corner that is a long 180-degree turn after a long straight saw a number of the top contenders collected in an incident. IndyCar driver Dan Wheldon (CometKartSales.com) made a pass attempt on Star Mazda Championship driver Conor Daly (DFR/Supertune USA). Drivers from behind come with him however made contact, sending a number of drivers off track, including CJ Lintner (Comet Racing Engines/Arrow Karts), Brandon Newey (Vision Racing/Bryan Herta Autosport), Eric Morrow (Zanardi Kart/Sharing Success Racing), Jay Howard (Screaming Talent #0), and Dan Bumgarner (Margay Racing). Most were able to continue outside the top-10 while Lewis rejoined at the tail of the field. Wheldon had his exhaust shoved off and was forced to make an early stop while Newey returned on the wagon. Up front, Evan Batt (Simpson/Batt Racing) was out to a good lead from the pole position after briefly losing the spot to Daly in the first half of the opening lap. Daly however would come into the pits early with an engine issue, forcing an engine change after just three laps.



Batt continued to show the way, extending his lead with some solid opening laps. Vision Racing's O'Rourke slotted into second early and ended up running with Howard, who was able to work himself up into third quickly after the opening lap skirmish. The JD Byrider squad with Ron Peterson ran fourth as the three continued to run noise to tail for the opening stint with Rob Smith running fifth in the Margison & Smith entry.



Comet Kart Sales' Michael Busse and Ben Payne took the second place step on the podium  
(Photo: DavidLeePhoto.com)

Lap 41 saw the leader Batt run into some issues with a lap kart as the two made incidental contact in turn two. This allowed second through fourth slide through for position, putting O'Rourke at the point. Batt was the first to hit pit lane for the first run of stops on lap 51 with a clean service. Smith was next in his #26 Arrow as he got fuel and hopped back into the kart for a second stint. Howard came in on lap 54 and as he did, the drive chain popped off on the Maranello. The pit stop was longer than expected as the chain need to be replaced, putting them outside the top-10. Peterson handed over the #771 Arrow to Colton Aldridge on the same lap with no issues. O'Rourke and the #20 Arrow team held onto the lead following the pit stops as he handed over the wheel to Carpenter.

As they circulated the course, Carpenter showed the way but Simpson was running a much quicker pace. Losing a 12-second advantage, Carpenter

relinquished the top spot to Simpson on lap 79. Smith was up to third in his second stint while Aldridge slotted into fourth with the Martin Plowman now piloting the #9 Zanardi kart in the fifth position after 80 laps as the only karts on the lead lap.

They stayed that way through the halfway mark, with Batt/Simpson earning a \$500 'Pro Kartlift' stand from Kartlift.com for leading at lap 100, until the second round of pit stops. Aldridge was the first to make a spot, with no issues. Plowman came in and their stop cost them some time, falling outside the top-10. Lap 111 was the turning point of the race. Simpson ducked into the pit road for a driver change and new fresh Bridgestone rubber. After a lengthy stop, Batt hit the track only to have his brake rotor explode as he entered his first braking point. With that, their race was done and handed the lead over to the Vision crew. A quick stop that included a four-tire change, O'Rourke jumped back into their machine to pace the field. After the pit shuffling, Aldridge was second with Smith

handing their ride over to Dick Margison - a co-third place finisher from last year. Making their way into the top-five was the #50 Comet Kart Sales with Michael Busse and Ben Payne **along with #177 Atlas Concrete Lifting team of Mason Madej and Bob Zirves - who started 47<sup>th</sup> after an engine change Sunday morning.**

**Madej and Zirves however were on a 40-lap pace after a questionable fuel consumption of their 2009 Rotax power. Committed to it, they hit the pit lane on lap 120 for a driver change and fuel stop.** This put the #63 entry of R Norris Racing with Rex Norris behind the wheel. The sprint car driver was on his third straight stint, only stopping for gas and a quick swig of water. Margison was running third until giving up the position on lap 128 as he ducked into the pit lane for an early driver change as the 64-year old driver had enough. Smith quickly strapped on the helmet however their clutch had other issues as it took some time to get their Parilla Leopard refired. That put the Comet Kart Sales kart up to third, Norris up to fourth and Morrow climbed back up to fifth before the third round of stops began.

By lap 150, O'Rourke and Peterson were the lone drivers on the lead lap as the Comet entry ran third with Morrow up to fourth after Norris made a pit stop. Smith was back on track and was able to climb up to fifth, eventually third when Morrow and the Comet squad made their third and final stops on lap 152 and 153.

Things remained consistent as seven teams raced for the top-five positions. Out front, there was no question as to who was there as the Vision Racing squad continued to run consistent pace. Making their final stop on lap 170, Carpenter was able to hop in and return on track maintaining the lead with a three lap advantage before the stop, losing just one of the laps. The Comet team found themselves in second after the stops with Norris on his fourth stint in third.

With 20 laps to go, Norris pulled into the pits having run 180 straight laps. The decision, wise at the time however cost them the third spot as they fell to sixth spot as he handed the Italkart to Robby Parish. That put Aldridge in the JD Byrider kart into third with on the same lap as the #51 Free Spirit Racing entry (Robby Seward/Jacob Knueven) and **the charging Madej aboard his Birel.**

As the laps wound down, Carpenter was able to cruise the remainder of the distance. Taking the checkered flag after 200-laps, Carpenter became the second IndyCar driver to score the victory in the sixth year. For O'Rourke, while it was a thrilling victory, it was a shining moment that will quickly be overshadowed with the birth of his son in the next few days. As consistency has been the key factor in winning the endurance event, the only issued came with a broken seat strut on the bottom right that gave Carpenter a little heat in the last few laps.



*The JD Byrider squad with Colton Aldridge and Ron Peterson earned their best run at the RoboPong 200, placing fourth  
(Photo: DavidLeePhoto.com)*

Following the consistency theme, the Comet entry with Payne and Busse avoided the wrecks and the karting gremlins to earn the second position, three laps back from the leaders. For Busse, it was his fourth RoboPong while Payne enjoyed his first attempt on the podium.

The race to watch in the last laps was the chase for third. Aldridge continued to hang on, despite a bad push even after a tire change in the final pit stop. **Madej, also making a tire change on their fourth and final stop, was clocking in much quicker lap times. As they entered the five to go, Madej closed the gap considerably and made the move with just three to go. Madej crossed the line four-seconds ahead to earn the final podium spot.** Completing the top-five was the Free Spirit Racing team - which had an average age of 14.5-years old, who was forced to make an early stop with a rear bumper meatball flag. Crossing the line on the same lap, four laps down from the

leader, HAAS (Troy Pew, Tim Bannon, Brandon Cross) came from the 23rd starting spot to finish sixth with only carburetion issues as their only problem during their race.

Five laps down in the seventh spot was the RacetoaDomain.com team with Kevin Martz and Dustin Kessinger. Despite a heavy off into the turn one barriers, they regrouped to hammer out and finish out the event. Norris and Parish fell to the eighth spot, taking no new tires throughout their 195 laps.



*Coming from last, Mason Madej and Bob Zirves ran up to third in the closing stages of the race  
(Photo: DavidLeePhoto.com)*

An amazing drive was put in by Linter and last year's co-champion Billy Lewis. After gaining a number of positions after their first lap incident, a seized clutch wrecked the engine enough to require an engine change. Despite that, they put down a winning pace to climb up to the ninth spot by the checkered flag, just six-laps down.

Ending the top-10 was another crazy story of the event as Indy Lights driver Gustavo Yacaman and current Top Race Junior Argentina driver Camilo Echevarria muscled their way up from a tough 28th qualifying effort. Yacaman, a former Stars of Karting JICA National Champion, and Echevarria overcame a 2-minute penalty to move into the top-10 in the closing stages of the race.

In the end, nearly \$22,000 in cash was handed out to the top-10 with the top-20 teams all receiving a \$1,000 certificate to RaceSimsrus.com courtesy of Wagner Race Products. Though the race was did not draw as many teams as seen in previous years or as many spectators, the event was still a success for all those involved. The NCMP staff worked 110%, the teams put on their A-game and the event unfolded as unpredictable as anyone could have imagined. Plans are in the works for next year's event, along with the upcoming Ironman 150 planned for NCMP in just three weeks with another large purse being offered. To those that endured the RoboPong 200, a congratulations goes out to all those who stick with all the battles and tribulations to cross the stripe and earn the checkered flag.



*Robby Seward and Jacob Knueven - the youngest team in the field - ran to a fifth place finish  
(Photo: DavidLeePhoto.com)*