



SVDP Racing

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SVDP Racing are pleased to report a victory on home turf as class winners in the Creventec 24 Hour Dubai sports car endurance race held on 10-12 January 2013.

The team of Dubai Based expat racing enthusiasts, headed by 2007/2008 DAMC Open Saloon Champion Spencer Vanderpal, had tasted success before, having achieved second place with their BMW 120d D1 racer in the 2011 running of the same event. Having extensively lightened the car by over 200kg, 2012 turned out to be less successful, with a DNS in Dubai and a trip to the 24H Barcelona marred by reliability issues including steering failure and an engine swap 9 hours into the race.

With that in mind the preparations for Dubai were extremely thorough. Engine and chassis prep. was taken care by specialists Wubbe Engineering in the Netherlands before shipping to Dubai where body repairs and aero mods were carried out in Spencer's garden! [Thankfully Spencer's wife Angela is very much a part of the race team and this was nothing she hadn't seen before]. Longer range was assured by a 120 litre ATL tank and a new digi-dash and data logger was installed to aid driver performance.

Despite being a locally based team, the day jobs of most of the crew are anything but and so the week of the race saw them assemble at team HQ [aka Spencer's house] having flown in from Oman, Algeria, UK, Netherlands, Afghanistan and South Africa! Any jet lag was treated as good preparation for the race, and many long hours were put into the car before she rolled into garage 12A of the Dubai Autodrome on Tuesday morning.

That old adage "the best laid plans...." came to mind sooner than the team would have liked with a turbo failure towards the end of Wednesday's free practice. This materialised to be the early warning sign of a full on engine failure with the third piston giving up during qualifying – exactly the same failure as the previous 2 engines. Both the owners and mechanics at this point thinking lady luck was most definitely one of the team sponsors.....

Fortunately, the race preparations covered just this eventuality and a coordinated show by the mechanics saw the car out and roaring with just 1hr 45min taken for the engine swap – pit in to pit out! This included the Heath Robinson engine remap designed to limit the peak loading [thought to be the root cause of the failure]; a piece of cardboard gaffer taped to the underside of the throttle pedal!

Despite going on to claim 3rd place in qualifying, the events of the day contrived to cause rather a sour mood in the garage as night rolled in and prep. for the race itself reached deep into the night. Exacerbated by their perceived lack of good fortune, there was no escaping the minds of the mechanics that any problem with the untested spare engine would result in forced retirement.

The unseasonal bad weather the morning of the race did little to aid this frame of mind, yet everyone turned to their duties with additional vigour and aplomb. The true friendships within the team gradually cut through the morning gloom and by the time the car took its place on the grid the mechanics were smiling, focused and looking forward to the challenge.

Spencer himself had elected to open the proceedings, settling into a steady pace that proved to be a perfect benchmark for the Drivers to follow. Jason O'Keefe drove strongly to move up to second position and a conveniently timed Code 60 allowed UAE Touring Car racer Jonathan Mullan to take over and move to P1 as the Red Camel Racing Seat Supercopa came in a few laps later under green flag conditions.

With a dust storm that morning and the impending threat of rain, local knowledge had given the team cause for concern as dusk closed in. Barely half an hour would pass between Code 60 conditions as drivers found the fine dust would make the track reminiscent of driving in semi-wet conditions, the result being that the marshals and tow truck drivers were kept extremely busy as braking points were overshoot and expensive trips were made into the tyre wall.

Despite this being his first visit to Dubai, Kris Budnik experienced a baptism of fire under such conditions as he found out what it meant to be racing against a grid where over half the cars were capable of creating a 70mph+ speed differential at the end of the main straight. "I feel like I'm spending 80% of the lap looking in my mirrors!", he commented, yet still kept pace with Spencer's benchmark lap times and gave reason for distress when a BMW 130i GTR got very out of shape into turn 6 and shunted the left rear of the 120d. This caused extensive damage to the lights, arch and diffuser but thankfully stopped short of affecting the structural bodywork or suspension. Fortunately the only further race incidents were paper based – stop go penalties for minor refuelling rule infringements.

Checks and repairs from the shunt [red duct tape for the lights!] and another code 60 contrived for the lead to be lost to the Seat who gradually extended their lead as night ran on, dawn broke and the crowds reappeared for the final run to the finish.

And what a race it was. The team experienced a few minor worries [a failing alternator, a loose rear suspension link and problems with the headlights] but thankfully the larger gremlins had elected to stay at home. However, this good fortune also extended to SVDP's main class rivals – the Seat and a VW Golf – as after the 18hr mark there were less than 20 laps separating the three. SVDP's Wubbe Herlaar drove his nomex socks off in his final stint in the car, setting the team's fastest lap of 2:27.866 whilst closing the gap to first place.

Glued to the timing screens, the team allowed the Seat to become their nemesis and rival. Seemingly infallible, their 5 lap lead and 2:24.052 response to Wubbe's effort saw them looking comfortable for the win with only 3 hours to go. Comfortable that is until their preceding 21hrs of near qualifying pace [the Seat was routinely 5-10 secs a lap faster than the SVDP BMW] created a chink in their armour and their car spent 45mins in the pits to cure an intermittent engine problem.

At the last driver chance, both cars were fully fuelled and left the pits within seconds of each other, the SVDP car holding a 5 lap advantage as the Seat's star driver took off on a mission to close it down. The BMW now with a loose toe link and a failing rear wheel bearing just could not afford another stop and so calculations were made and remade to work out the maximum lap time driver Jonathan Mullan could afford to drop to and still retain the lead. The max. allowable difference to was 18 seconds per lap. On the first timed lap out with 2 hours to go the Seat team made their intentions clean and the difference was a distressing 21 seconds.....

Fortunately for SVDP, Jonathan was not going to let victory fall from grasp at the last moment and wrung every last ounce out of the mighty BMW. Keeping calm, avoiding traffic, protecting the car and benefitting from the faster cars easing off to defend their position, Jonathan took the chequered flag with 476 laps under the BMW's belt against the 474 racked up by the Seat. A close yet emphatic victory.

As the champagne was spilt and well earned beers consumed, the wider implications of the win became apparent. The team was so focussed on the fight with the Seat they had not noticed their march up the leader board and 37th place overall from an 80 car starting grid. Not only was this have been good enough to have beaten 2nd place finishers in the A3T and A4 petrol classes, but it also beat the 2nd placed SP2 class 6.2 litre Corvette C6!

Needless to say that the start to the 2013 season has been somewhat jubilant for SVDP Racing and the celebration will roll on through the weeks to come. As the team turns towards two planned excursions to Europe – a return to the 24H Barcelona and either the 24 Hours of Spa or Britcar – it will give them much encouragement to have such a well deserved trophy on display in team HQ. Be sure to follow their updates at www.svdp-racing.co.uk.

SVDP would also like to share their triumph and extend their congratulations to fellow local teams Lap57; who placed first in the A2 class and an astonishing 29th overall; and the Moutran Brothers [Duel Racing] who shared the same pitbox and made the podium despite having to rebuild their gearbox on the garage floor [aided by more than a few tools from the SVDP tool box!]. A great weekend for Dubai's race teams! Big thanks also to the Hilton Hotel Dubai Jumeirah Beach for sponsoring the team and fuelling the drivers and mechanics with food so good they had to be dragged [or rolled!] back to the pit.

Text Credit: Phil Craven.

Photo Credits: SVDP Racing / Darren Rycroft [CircuitProDigital] / Tim Ansell [SLRPM].

Team Owners: Spencer Vanderpal / Chris Wishart.

Drivers: Spencer Vanderpal / Jason O'Keefe / Jonathan Mullan / Kris Budnik / Wubbe Herlaar.

Crew Chief: Egbert Herlaar.

Time Keeper: Ian Rodgers.

Mechanics: Richard Bailey / Sam North / Phil Craven / Jason Lyness / Max Nalborczyk / Chris Wishart.

NB – PHOTO FILES TRANSMITTED SEPERATELY