

Bryan Crauwels wins Luxsim24 Challenge at Circuit Zolder



The fourth round of the Vertex Stock Car Cup sponsored by Luxsim24 was held on the legendary Belgian circuit at Zolder, last night. After thirty thrilling laps, it was local Belgian driver Bryan Crauwels who took the win, his first in the series after a dramatic final corner melée.

The fourth round of the Vertex Stock Car Cup was contested on the challenging Circuit Zolder and it was the first time the series has visited the circuit. Twenty-five drivers lined up on the grid for the thirty lap race, with the series two leading drivers Vertex Sports' Alex Sedgwick and Mills Motorsports' Connor Mills tying on points, with two races to go.

Qualifying took the usual format of two flying laps and, at the end of the 10-minute session, it was series leader No.9 Alex Sedgwick driving the Vertex Sport Ford Mustang who set the fastest time, his second consecutive Pole position. Second fastest was Brands Hatch race winner No.38 Ben Creanor, driving the race

sponsor's, Luxsim24 eSport Chevrolet Camaro. In third was No.70 Aaron Smith driving the Aaron Smith Racing Chevrolet Camaro.

The grid for the race saw Sedgwick and Creanor line up on the 1st row, Smith and BTCC driver Daniel Rowbottom on the 2nd row and local driver Belgian Bryan Crauwels and joint series leader Mills making up the third row.

As the twenty-five cars approached the start of the race side by side, the line headed by pole-sitter Sedgwick got the better start as second-place driver Creanor spun up his rear tyres dropping down to sixth.

As the field fanned out as they fought for position on the first lap, it was Braxx Racing teammates Sedgwick and Crauwels who led the field, positions they would hold until they pitted on lap eighteen.

The demanding nature of the circuit saw several drivers out-braking themselves and running wide resulting in a few position changes. By lap 6, the field started to spread out but the battle at the front remained as intense as ever with Crauwels right on the tail of Sedgwick. Second-place starter Creanor had managed to move back through the field and was now back in third place.

On lap 11, Creanor caught the lead cars and was now on the bumper of Crauwels who had to now defend instead of attacking Sedgwick for the lead. With Crauwels battling with Creanor, Sedgwick started to pull a small gap at the front. Then as quick as the Creanor and Crauwels battle had started it was over, as Creanor became the first driver to pit for fuel and new tyres.

Creanor now with new tyres rejoined the race in 13th place, just as the sun started to go in over the circuit, dropping the temperature, and helping the drivers on older tyres by improving grip levels.

On lap 13, more cars headed for the pits but the leaders stayed out. Sedgwick held a half-second lead over Crauwels and, on lap 15, joint series leader Mills pitted for new tyres and fuel. Whilst in the pits, Creanor passed Mills but the lead cars continued on old tyres and Sedgwick increased his lead. As the cars approached

the end of the 17th lap, the leader Sedgwick hit pit road, followed immediately by Crauwels. The race lead was now taken up by No.88 Billy Fletcher driving the Luxsim24 eSports Ford Mustang and Creanor moved into second place.

The two previous lead cars exited the pits in 3rd and 4th place with Sedgwick benefiting from a quicker pit stop and giving him a three and a half-second lead over 4th place Crauwels. With ten laps to go, Sedgwick was only six seconds behind second-place Creanor, with new tyres.

With better tyres and grip, Sedgwick immediately reduced the gap to Creanor lap by lap. Following closely in his footsteps, Crauwels also started to catch the lead cars.

With Creanor catching the race leader Fletcher who was still on old tyres, Fletcher pitted on lap 21 and handed the race lead over to Creanor. However, the hard-charging pair of Sedgwick and Crauwels quickly reduced Creanor's lead down to just two seconds, in three laps.

As the leader and the chasers started to catch more backmarkers, Creanor extended his lead to just under three seconds over Sedgwick. Crauwels, pushing as hard as he could, made a mistake and out braked himself at the hairpin, running straight on but, with a sufficient gap to the next car, he retained his third place but only by a second.

With five laps to go, Sedgwick caught Creanor and immediately attacked for the lead. On older tyres, Creanor had to start to defend and, in doing so, allowed Crauwels to close the gap, so the battle for the lead became a three-car fight.

On lap 29 at the hairpin, Sedgwick went for the overtake on Creanor on the outside. Getting alongside, the two cars entered the hairpin but Creanor, holding his line, squeezes Sedgwick off the track and retains the lead.

As the battling trio came around on the penultimate lap, the hairpin again caught out Sedgwick, as trying again to overtake Creanor, he locked his rear brakes forcing him wide and allowing Crauwels to nip past into second place. With Creanor only just

ahead at the next corner, Crauwels made a move to take the lead, but makes contact with Creanor, allowing Sedgwick to nip back into second.

As the trio crossed the line to start the final lap, they were all locked together. Creanor on older tyres had no choice but to defend at every corner and blocked all the challenges from Sedgwick; the race was going to go all the way to the final corner.

As the cars raced into the final corner before the start and finish straight, Creanor had just one corner to hold off any attacks. With all cars on very worn tyres, the cars were moving around a lot and the drivers were struggling to hold their lines.

As Creanor tipped his car into the final corner he left a small gap - immediately Sedgwick went for the gap but Creanor closed it down; already committed, Sedgwick had nowhere to go and caught the back of Creanor's Chevrolet Camaro causing Creanor to run wide, allowing Sedgwick to move through and win the sprint to the line from Braxx Racing teammate Crauwels. As the flag fell, Braxx Racing crossed in first and second, on the home track for the Belgian team.

Creanor recovering, crossed the line in fourth place after being passed by the hard-charging Aaron Smith who took the last step on the podium.

However, first past the flag does not always mean a race win and, even before the cars made it back to the pits, the race officials deemed Sedgwick had gained an unfair advantage through the contact with Creanor, and issued him with a thirty-second penalty, give the race win to teammate Crauwels and relegating him down to 11th place.

With Sedgwick picking up a penalty, the final result saw Crauwels pick up his first win and become only the fourth driver in the series to take a win, Smith moved up to second and Creanor got a well-deserved third place.

The series now moves on to the final round at Martinsville Speedway, back in the USA, for a final oval race. With a new winner at Zolder, the battle for the series title is now all to play for and a strong 5th place finish and the penalty for Sedgwick see the

series being headed by Connor Mills, now 5 points ahead of Alex Sedgwick, with Bryan Crauwels just 12 points further back.

Who will leave Martinsville as Series Champion? We will find out on the 13th May...