

[www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au](http://www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au)

MEDIA RELEASE

## **VIRAG/HODGES WIN MOCOMM CUP WITH CHAMPIONSHIP BATTLE** **WIDE OPEN**

The NSW Production Touring Car Championship of 2011 headed into the business end of the season, with the annual running of its one-hour endurance race at Goulburn's Wakefield Park circuit on August 20-21, complete with a race sponsor.

Motorsport radio communications company MoComm, also proud sponsors of NSW Production Touring Cars, stepped up their involvement with the state level production car category by becoming naming rights sponsor of the one-hour race, which is now known as the MoComm Cup.

This weekend saw a modest field of 16 cars competing over three races, two of which were points scoring. The final race, which is the MoComm Cup, was a double points race. That meant those vying for the NSW Championship title, such as Geoff Kite, Paul Loiacono, Tony Virag, Rod Thorpe and Azim Sahu-Khan, had an added incentive to close the gap on current championship leader, Bob Pearson.

Speaking of Pearson, the current championship leader was major omission from the entry list of the fourth round. His no-show from this weekend now opened up the championship battle and is sure to be decided at the final round. Also not making the grid was last year's race winner, Jim Hunter. The Subaru driver, who shared the victory with Barton Mawer despite the latter driving the race solo, is busy preparing for the Sepang 12 Hour in Malaysia in October. He will share the driving duties with MoComm boss, NSWPTC president and fellow competitor, Gerry Murphy.

Making welcome returns this weekend are Graeme Shaw and Jim Stewart. Canberra-based Shaw will make his Wakefield Park debut this weekend in a fully repaired Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X RS. At the last round at Eastern Creek in June, Shaw sustained heavy front and rear damage when he crashed at turn one on the first lap of the second race. It was initially thought that the damage would force Shaw to miss this round and the planned attack on the Targa West Rally in Perth, but his entry to this weekend is a positive sign.

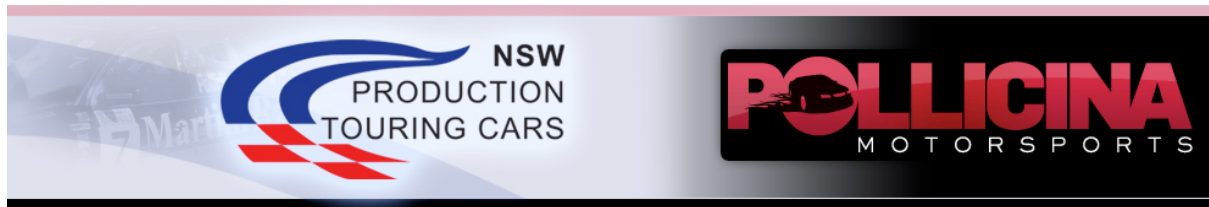
Jim Stewart returns to the championship for the first time since competing in the second round of the 2010 Championship. He will also be the solo Subaru competitor for this weekend.

Along with the aforementioned pairing of Barbara/Murphy, other entries that have opted co-driver pairings are Chris Reeves, who has entrusted former Formula Vee competitor, Bruce Colbey; Brett

**Presented By**

Page 1





[www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au](http://www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au)

## MEDIA RELEASE

Heeley has employed the services of Improved Production competitor Ahmed Baghdadi and Gerry Burges has teamed up with son Leigh to be a formidable pairing. Leigh will be competing for the first time since round two back in April this year.

### QUALIFYING

As with previous rounds of NSW Production Touring Cars, some of the pre-event action happened during Friday practice and it was all down to one thing – engine dramas. After showing impressive pace from his new car, Matthew Holt's HSV VE GTS succumbed to oil pressure issues and had no choice but to park the car for the weekend. If it couldn't get it any worse for the HSV runners, it did when Toni Virag broke a timing chain in his VY GTS mount. It involved an overnight engine change, which became a headache of sorts for his co-driver Steve Hodges. He was already busy enough maintaining two engines he had built for Gus Barbara and Paul Wilbow. For Barbara, he had destroyed his first engine and then suffered crank case pressure issues with his second before running the new engine supplied by Hodges.

So as qualifying dawned for the morning, conditions were wet which suited the all wheel drive cars down pat. The V8 powered runners have struggled in the past against the all wheel drive cars, but in this qualifying session, they were very much on par with the likes of Burges, Stewart and Shaw. As early as the second lap, Gus Barbara had set the benchmark, posting a 1m22s lap in the wet conditions, initially upstaging Leigh Burges and the predicted all wheel drive domination. Although the conditions were still wet, the times steadily dropped.

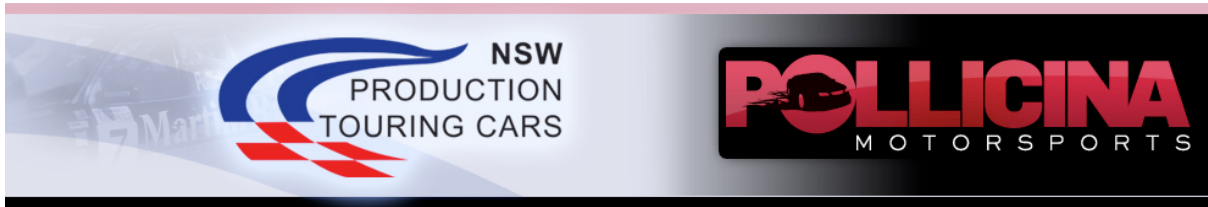
By the end of the 15-minute session it looked like Barbara had finally gotten rid of his misfortunes that had best him so far this year, setting a time of 1m19.8989s. But it was to be short lived. Burgess managed to cross the line with seconds before the chequered flag came out to complete the session and managed to go 0.4s better with a 1m19.4975s.

Behind the front pair, there was still plenty of fighting amongst some of their rivals. Rod Thorpe was having a duel with Class B leader Paul Loiacono for the right to start third and like Barbara and Burges, that was decided on the last lap of the session Loiacono had initially staked his claim with a 1m21.2562 but moments later, Thorpe went 0.5s better and took third. Behind Thorpe was Brett Heeley (1m21.6378s), Virag (1m22.1116s) Paul Wilbow (1m22.4985s) Shaw in his Evo X RS Lancer (1m22.8780s) Stewart's Subaru (1m22.9476s) then the FPV F6 of Kingham (1m34.9785s). Kingham

**Presented By**

Page 2





[www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au](http://www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au)

## MEDIA RELEASE

had gotten in a moment of strife early in the session when he unintentionally hit Thorpe's Commodore entering Turn Two, but both escaped with very little damage.

With Loiacono dominating proceedings in Class B, it was left for the remaining three contenders in that class, Chris Reeves, Paul Lane and David Atkin to fight it out. As soon as the cars hit the track, it was the Reeves HSV CE Clubsport that was quicker than Lane and Atkin, but it wasn't Reeves who qualified. It was Bruce Colbey who took the driving duties during the session and qualified second fastest in the class with a 1m25.1362s, 2.02s quicker than Lane, who's best time was a 1m27.1501s. Rounding out the class was the BMW M3R of Atkin (1m27.4345s).

Azim Sahu-Khan was again the lone representative in Class C and with the wet conditions favourable to the some of lesser-powered cars such as his Honda Integra Type R, his time of 1m28.6038s was on par with the likes of Colbey, Lane and Atkin.

In the co-drivers qualifying session, Gerry Burges took pole with a 1m15.2651s, 1.2s quicker than Ahmed Baghdadi in the Heeley HSV (1m16.4980s), followed by Steve Hodges in the Virag HSV (1m18.4399s), Thorpe, Gerry Murphy in the Barbara HSV Coupe (1m19.5217s), Shaw, Peter Lown in the Loiacono Evo V Lancer (1m20.1732s), Stewart, Reeves in his HSV (1m22.6886s), Wilbow, Phillip Holden in the Lane VX Clubsport (1m24.5885s), --, Kingham and Sahu-Khan.

### RACE ONE – SIX LAPS

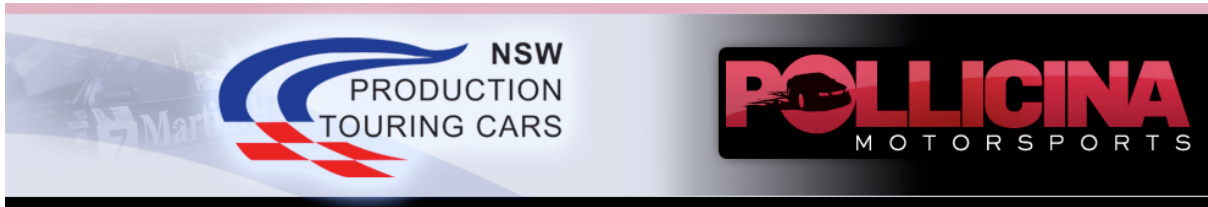
Conditions for the first race over six laps were still quite wet when the 14 cars lined up to take the start. As the conditions were ideal for the all wheel drive cars, their ability to jump away from the field would be demonstrated to great effect when they left the start line. Leigh Burges got the jump from Barbara, Thorpe and Loiacono in the Evo V Lancer, with Stewart in the Subaru charging through the pack to fall in behind Thorpe. Buy turn two, Stewart's enthusiasm went a touch too far, when he punted Thorpe and spun him around. Thorpe would drop the rear and start his fight back up the field.

Once Leigh got the race lead, he would take full command of the race. As much as his rivals tried to keep within his pace, the conditions were just perfect for Leigh and the Evo VII Lancer. So the focus of attention quickly turned to the battles behind the Lancer. With Thorpe out of the picture, it was Barbara, Loiacono, Virag and Stewart that were battling away for a top five spot and a good starting position for the MoComm Cup. Barbara maintained his pace throughout the event and managed to

**Presented By**

Page 3





[www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au](http://www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au)

## MEDIA RELEASE

withstand early race pressure from Loiacono, until the latter started to fall away after two laps. The Class B leader would drop back to sixth where he would stay for the remainder of the race.

The next person to throw a challenge was Virag and the dramas from Friday had become nothing more than a distant memory. The pair was fighting intensely for most of the race and with Stewart's Subaru hounding at their heels, they were getting serious amongst each other. The three car would soon become four when Heeley's HSV VX GTS tagged onto that battle near the race end.

But at the end, no one could stop Burges. His lead between himself and the four-car pack behind them was 41s by the race end and he cruised to a comfortable victory after six laps. Behind him though, the fight for second wasn't over. As Barbara and Virag approached the final corner, both drivers lost control but managed to contain their track position. Virag got away quicker and hauled in Barbara to take second place on the line. Behind Barbara in third was Stewart, Heeley, and then it was Thorpe who recovered seven places to finish seven on track, followed by Shaw, Wilbow and Kingham.

Loiacono would not be headed in the battle for Class B. His high starting position and early battle for the race lead ensured that he would take a comfortable class victory and sixth outright. Behind him, the battle for the minor placing was between Paul Lane, David Atkin and Bruce Coleby in the Chris Reeves HSV. Coleby gained the upper hand at the start, despite being extra cautious in the wet as he didn't want to damage Reeve's car and despite an early race battle with Lane and Atkin, he remained trouble free to take out second. But as Coleby is not a club member, he was ineligible for points. Lane would take third in class but claim second for points whilst Atkin spun at the Fish Hook on lap four and beached the car and was unable to finish.

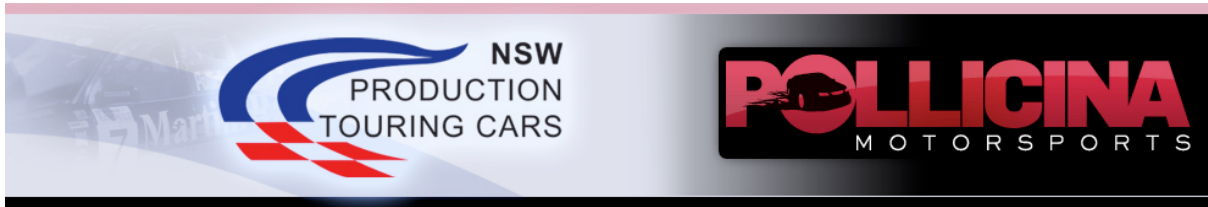
Azim Sahu-Khan was enjoying the wet conditions and hoped for a strong showing in the MoComm Cup. He would comfortably take out Class C and a few were starting to wonder if a top ten finish was possible.

In the non-points scoring co-drivers race, held in twilight conditions, Gerry Burges took command of the race and wouldn't be headed, despite the fading light that occurred at the end of the day. He would go on to win from Ahmed Baghdadi in the Heeley HSV, followed by Stewart, Thorpe, Hodges in the Virag HSV, Gerry Murphy in the Barbara HSV Coupe, Reeves, Peter Lown in the Loiacono Lancer, Wilbow, Phillip Holden in the Lane HSV, Kingham, Sahu-Khan and Arthur Scerri in the Atkin BMW.

**Presented By**

Page 4





[www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au](http://www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au)

**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **MOCOMM CUP – ONE HOUR**

In what was an entertaining race this afternoon, Tony Virag and Steve Hodges strategically outplayed their rivals to take out the MoComm Cup one-hour race at Wakefield Park, which doubled as round four of the 2011 NSW Production Touring Car Championship.

Starting from pole, Leigh Burges got the jump at the race start from Rod Thorpe, followed by a rapid firing Jim Stewart, Gus Barbara, Virag, Paul Loiacono and Brett Heeley. By the time the field negotiated turn two, Leigh was in front and attempting to stamp his authority on the race with a gaggle of HSV's behind him. It remained the status quo for the first two laps, until the first casualty of the race occurred just after the start of lap three. A differential failure struck the Heeley HSV and stopped just after the exit of Turn Two. The Safety Car was deployed for two laps to remove the Heeley HSV, before the race resumed on lap five.

Playing mind games with his opposition, Leigh deliberately held up the field until they crossed the control line in order to gain an upper hand on the restart. It worked to his advantage as he retained the race lead and would continue for the next 11 laps until Jim Stewart became the next race victim. Having been passed by Loiacono three laps previously, Stewart pulled off on Lap 13 at the same spot Heeley retired and retired from the race. The second safety car of the race was deployed, which also would be the last for the race.

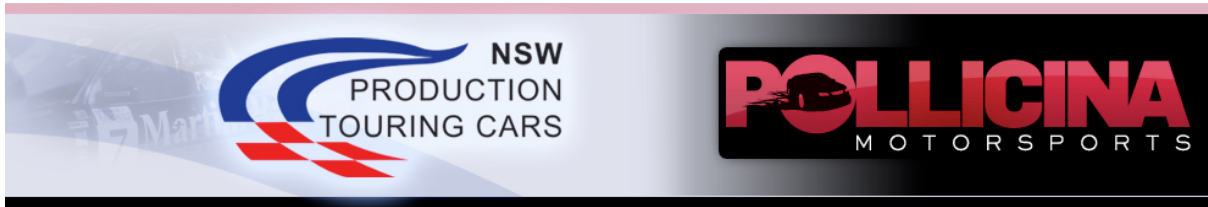
The Safety Car also proved to be good timing for the competitors, as the pit stop window opened 90 seconds later on lap 16. The main question was who would make the first move and it was Virag and Barbara who would do so. Once in the pits, it was a race between the pair to get their tyre and driver changes completed before the Safety Car came past. It was Virag who got his stop done first and with Hodges behind the wheel, they managed to return to the track before the Safety Car came around. In fact, the Safety Car returned to the pits after two laps, so Hodges had to work hard to stay in front of the Burges Lancer when the race resumed.

For the next 20 minutes during the pit window being open, Burges and Thorpe, who was the former's closest rival, were staying out on the track for as long as they could whilst those around them were pitting at various stages. Finally, 12 laps after Virag and Barbara had pitted first, Leigh finally pitted from the race lead and handed over to Gerry Burges. Their pit stop was a quick one, but

**Presented By**

Page 5





[www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au](http://www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au)

## MEDIA RELEASE

not quick enough to stay on the same lap as Hodges, who had taken the lead and lapped him. Gerry would eventually resume in fourth, but would unlap himself in the final 15 minutes of the race. Thorpe was the last of the 15 cars to pit right at the end of the pit window, but managed to stay on the same lap and came out of the pits in second place.

For the remainder of the race, no one could catch Hodges. Both Virag and himself had played out their strategy perfectly and they went on to win the MoComm Cup for 2011, 31s clear of Thorpe in second, then the Burges father and son duo in third after passing Barbara/Murphy 11 laps from the finish. Barbara/Murphy would finish fourth followed by the Evo X RS Lancer of Shaw and the FPV of Kingham. Not making the finish along with Heeley and Stewart was Paul Wilbow, whose engine expired 13 laps from the finish and denied him a possible top three result.

For the first 23 laps of the race, the Evo V Lancer of Paul Loiacono and Peter Lown was comfortably leading that battle for Class B honours, despite a persistent misfire that had plagued the car since Saturday. The car reached as high as fourth outright in the race, before pitting on lap 23 for Loiacono to hand the car to Lown. However, their pit stop did not go so smoothly and they lost almost three laps in the process. This allowed the HSV VE Clubsport of Chris Reeves and Bruce Coleby to take the class lead, having benefitted from being one of the first crews to pit during the pit window. Also performing well was Paul Lane in his HSV VX Clubsport, who stayed clear of any trouble before pitting on lap 17 when Phillip Holden took over.

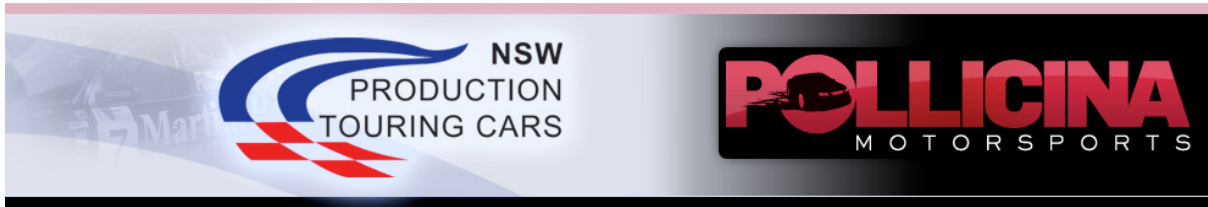
After the pit stops were complete, with Loiacono/Lown now struggling with misfire becoming more aggressive, Reeves/Coleby took full command of the class battle. They would go on to win Class B, ahead of Lane/Holden and then the BMW M3R of David Atkin/Arthur Scerri who was struggling with their own engine dramas but managed to finish. Rounding out the class was Geoff Kite, who arrived on Sunday morning having missed all of Saturday's racing and racing with a slipping clutch all throughout the one-hour. Loiacono/Lown finally succumbed to the misfire issued and pitted a few laps before the race finish. Although they attempted to cross the line in the pits, they were classified a non-finisher.

Azim Sahu-Khan's persistence in the MoComm Cup would pay off quite generously, as he kept his nose out of trouble in his Honda Integra Type R. Starting near the tail end of the field, Sahu-Khan gradually climbed up the leader board thanks largely to those that retired during the race and would go on to finish an impressive eighth outright and first in Class C. It would also give him a very slight

**Presented By**

Page 6





[www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au](http://www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au)

## MEDIA RELEASE

chance of winning the State Championship, but retaining the Club Championship as defending championship was more realistic.

With Bob Pearson's non-appearance, the championship battle has become wide open. Four drivers will go into the final round, battling it out to win the 2011 championship. Pearson still leads on 131 points, now one point ahead of Tony Virag on 130, followed by Geoff Kite on 124 and Rod Thorpe on 118. Three drivers also have outside chances; Azim Sahu-Khan on 110, Paul Lane on 109 and Paul Loiacono on 102. In the Club Championship, up to 11 drivers all have mathematical chances to win with the current top five being Tony Virag on 77 points, Paul Lane on 67, Gerry Murphy on 64, Paul Loiacono on 62 and Azim Sahu-Khan on 60.

The championship will go down to the wire once again at Eastern Creek, the venue for the final round of the 2011 NSW Production Touring Car Championship on October 22-23 and as in previous years, it will be a exciting conclusion to a competitive year.

**For more information on the NSW Production Touring Car Championship, log on to the website at [www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au](http://www.nswproductiontouringcars.com.au) or contact the category's media manager, Conor McNally at Beast Productions on 0413 702 368.**

**Presented By**

Page 7

