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## **PRO-DUCT'S PEARSON DOMINATES ROUND TWO OF PRODUCTION TOURING CARS**

The 2011 NSW Production Touring Car Championship presented by Pollicina Motorsports moved up another gear on the weekend of April 16-17 with a total of 21 cars entered and 18 started for round two at Goulburn's Wakefield Park circuit.

The season opener at Eastern Creek just a little over a month ago saw an intense and occasionally personal battle brew between Pro-Duct's Bob Pearson and Racer-Inc's Leigh Burges, with the experienced Pearson claiming round honours after the third and final race and leads the championship on 46 points, four clear of Burges on 42.

The weekend saw the competitors compete in partly cloudy and cool conditions at the popular Goulburn circuit. Of the 21 competitors, making a much welcome return following an injury enforced layoff for the second half of 2010 is Gerry Burges. Other than a successful run at the Eastern Creek 8 Hour last December where he finished fourth outright, Wakefield Park will be his first serious tilt behind the wheel of his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VII. It was this car that son Leigh used at the first round a month ago, after the Evo VIII Lancer he was originally to drive suffered mechanical dramas on Friday Practice. The Evo VIII returns to battle this weekend.

### **POINTSORE CLARIFICATION**

Following the first round at Eastern Creek, the category's technical committee amended which competitors were eligible for each class. They included Geoff Kite and Paul Loiacono, who were originally registered for Class A. Between then and now, the pair have been re-classified as Class B cars and have been retrospectively awarded for points in Class B for round one. This also means those Class A competitors who finished in the top ten in their class move up position wise and are awarded class points.

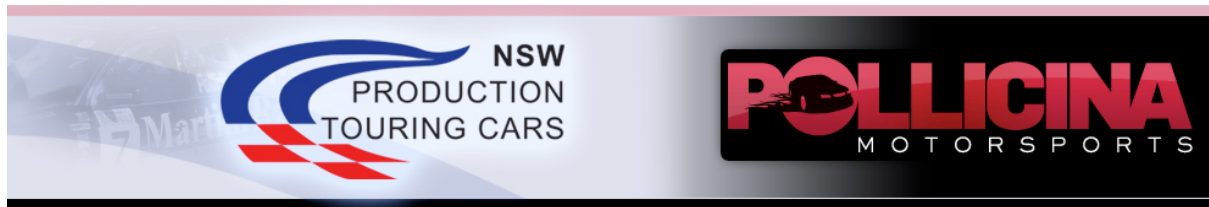
### **QUALIFYING – 20 MINUTES**

Conditions for the twenty-minute qualifying session were overcast but the signs of rain weren't visible around Goulburn. The rain was stuck in Sydney and thus proved a godsend for all competitors. Within three laps of the qualifying session, the frontrunners started to fire off quick

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times. First off the rank was Leigh Burges in the Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII. He posted a lap of 1m087.3670s, which put him on provisional pole for at least a lap. One lap later, Pearson fired off a lap that was almost a second quicker than Leigh Burges - 1m06.5760s. It would be towards the end of the session that non-registered competitor Paul McKinnon, driving the Jim Hunter Subaru WRX STi for the weekend, to come within a whisker of Pearson's time with a 1m06.6801s.

In the end, Pearson claimed another Class A and outright pole for the season to date, ahead of McKinnon, Leigh Burges then Gus Barbara, who was the fastest HSV competitor in qualifying (1m08.3168s), Rod Thorpe (1m08.6494s), Gerry Burges in the Evo VII Lancer (1m08.7516s), Tony Virag (1m09.0436s), Paul Wilbow (1m09.4641s), Brett Heeley (1m09.7800s) and Chris Reeves in the HSV VE Clubsport (1m11.8831s).

In Class B, Geoffrey Kite and Scott Sullivan were battling for the fastest Holden Commodore SS in the class. Having found themselves within championship contention after just one round, the pair weren't messing around out on the track. Kite set the benchmark on his fourth lap with a 1m10.4264s lap, before Sullivan went one better in the ex-Walden Commodore one lap later. His time of 1m10.1227s was 0.3s faster than Kite and guaranteed him class pole. Watching with interest was the car's former owner, Brian Walden, who was racing in the category as a non-registered competitor for the weekend in his VE Commodore. Rounding out Class B was Lown in Paul Loiacono's Mitsubishi Lancer Evo V (1m14.0585s)

Class C was a one-car affair once again, with Azim Sahu-Khan the only representative. His time of 1m11.9814s also put him ahead of the Reeves HSV and within reach of the Class B Commodores of Kite and Sullivan. Also making sole representation in Saloon Cars was Bradley Moss in his Ford Falcon AU. The car had plenty of track time thanks to their participation in the Shannons Nationals a few weeks before but was fragile with gearbox issues that have plagued the car since late last year. They qualified with a 1m12.3340s.

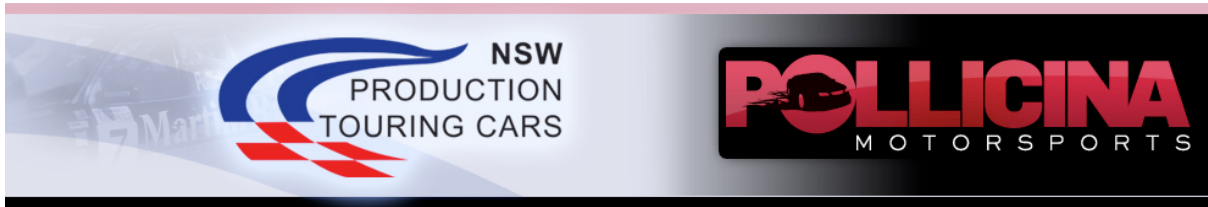
### RACE ONE – 20 LAPS

The first race for round two of the 2011 NSW Production Touring Car Championship provided the same amount of action as round one and then some, as the 18 cars that qualified battled it out around Wakefield Park over 20 laps and provided some unexpected results.

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Starting from pole position, Bob Pearson got the jump from the Jim Hunter Subaru of Paul McKinnon, who was caught napping at the start and dropped back to third. Squeezing through McKinnon and Tony Virag was Leigh Burges, who romped up to second by turn two and immediately attempted to apply pressure to Pearson. But by the Fish Hook, Pearson had already opened a two second gap on his opposition and the first lap hadn't been completed yet.

Within a space of a few laps, the complexion of the race and possibly the championship all changed. After sitting in second for the first lap, Leigh Burges suddenly was losing track position. Firstly to McKinnon, then Rod Thorpe, Virag and Gus Barbara and by the end of lap four, he had dropped to fifth place. On lap five at the Fish Hook, the turbo popped on the Evo VIII Lancer and Burges was out of business not only for the race but the weekend.

With Pearson's main rival out of the way, it was the Subaru of McKinnon who took up the mantle to apply pressure on the Pro-Duct driver and he sure did drive well to rapidly close the gap to Pearson. By lap eight, they were literally nose to tail and by half race distance on lap 10, McKinnon charged down the inside at the Fish Hook and claimed the lead.

Behind the pair, another battle brewed between Virag, Barbara, Gerry Burges and Brett Heeley. Virag and Barbara had traded positions for a couple of laps before Virag took charge of fourth place whilst Gerry Burges also traded places in their own battle until Heeley lost control at the top of the circuit with a few laps remaining and dropped two spots. Unfortunately, the car returned to the pits where it failed to resume the race.

At the front, McKinnon attempted to open the gap on Pearson but the Subaru driver got it sideways at the Fish Hook with two laps to go and allowed Pearson through to resume the race lead. From that point, Pearson would not be challenged and took out the first race of the weekend from McKinnon, who doesn't qualify for championship points, then Thorpe, Barbara, Virag, Gerry Burges and Paul Wilbow.

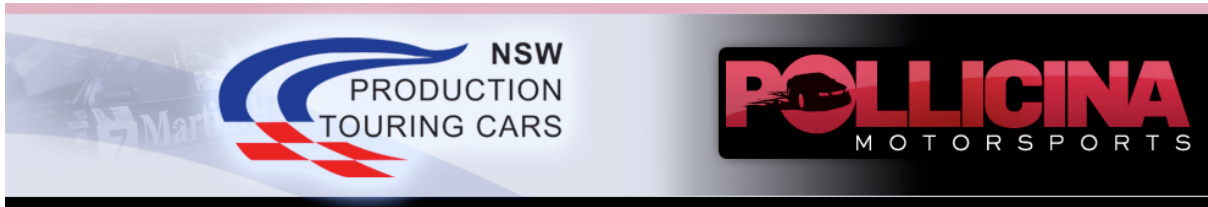
Along with the non-finishers of Heeley and Leigh Burges, the HSV VE Clubsport of Chris Reeves failed to make the grid on the warm up lap with a failed fuel pump, stopping inside the Fish Hook for the entire race.

Class B provided just as much excitement as their Class A cousins and it lasted right up to the chequered flag. Geoff Kite and Scott Sullivan traded the class lead twice with Kite leading the class

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on the first lap, before Sullivan took the mantle on lap two and stayed the class leader for a number of laps. He withstood the intense pressure from Kite and even from non-registered competitor Brian Walden, before Kite got the upper hand with a few laps remaining and re-took the class lead. He would go on to win the class and finish in the top ten, with Sullivan a close second. Rounding out the class was Peter Lown in the Paul Loiacono Evo V Lancer, who was unable to stay with the Commodore pair with a car that wasn't producing enough boost to be competitive.

Of the single car competitors in Class C and Saloon Cars, only Azim Sahu-Khan finished. The Honda driver was in his element around Wakefield Park and with the tight layout suiting his Integra, Sahu-Khan was able to menace some of the Class B cars, which included Sullivan and Walden. It made for some interesting racing and Sahu-Khan was enjoying it. He would go on to win his class and finish 12th. As for Bradley Moss, his Ford Falcon AU was driving like a pig around Wakefield Park. A week ago at the Shannons Nationals, in the hands of Cameron Moss, the car suffered a gearbox failure at the same circuit. In the first race, the car didn't seem to like being out there and after going off at the top of the circuit on lap 12, the car headed for the pits and retirement.

### **RACE TWO – 16 LAPS**

Pro-Duct's Bob Pearson has won the second race of Round Two of the 2011 NSW Production Touring Car Championship, but only just. The 16 lap sprint around Wakefield Park saw another enthralling battle between Pearson and Paul McKinnon in the Jim Hunter Subaru WRX STi that was decided literally on the finish line on the last lap.

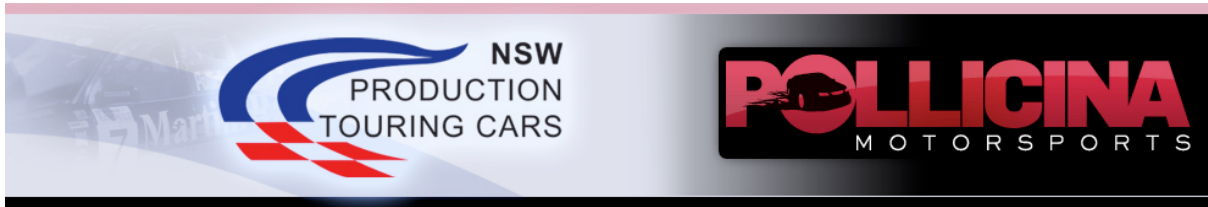
Conditions for race two were cold but the sun was out, making the outlook for Sunday somewhat promising. At the start, Pearson and McKinnon got the jump on everybody else, but it was McKinnon who poked his nose out front by turn two and started to consolidate his race lead. Going nowhere though after the start was Tony Virag, who broke a driveshaft on the grid and ending a promising weekend so far.

With McKinnon attempting to stamp his mark on this race, charging through the pack was Rod Thorpe in his HSV GTS. After finishing in the top three in race one, his confidence levels were at an all time high and by lap two, charged past Barbara and Pearson to climb up to second place. His time in the sun was brief before dropping back to third after Pearson got past him at the final corner one lap later.

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Behind the top three, another battle was raging between Barbara, Gerry Burges, Brett Heeley and Paul Wilbow. Barbara was leading this four-car battle for most of the race, facing intense pressure firstly from Wilbow in the HSV Clubsport then Gerry Burges in the Lancer Evo VII. Wilbow eventually fell back one place to sixth when Gerry Burges took the spot on lap 10 and it would take another three laps for Gerry Burges to reel in the 2010 champion and take him at the final corner, claiming fourth and trying to make up time to Thorpe and his HSV.

But at the front, McKinnon had the race in command until his brakes started to fail. With four laps remaining, the pedal in the Subaru went to the floor and McKinnon's lap times started to suffer. This allowed Pearson to close rapidly and the last four laps provided the best racing so far this season. Where McKinnon gained in outright speed, Pearson gained when his rival backed off early due to his brake dramas. On the last lap, Pearson found a way to get past McKinnon at the final corner and the pair was side-by-side right up to the finish line. Initially, the race was declared a dead heat but the timing officials post race went back to both car's Dorian transponders and declared Pearson the winner by 0.0007s.

With Pearson first and McKinnon second, though McKinnon gets no championship points, Thorpe came home a distant but happy third ahead of Gerry Burges, Barbara, Wilbow, Heeley and Chris Reeves, who came home just outside the top ten in 11<sup>th</sup> outright.

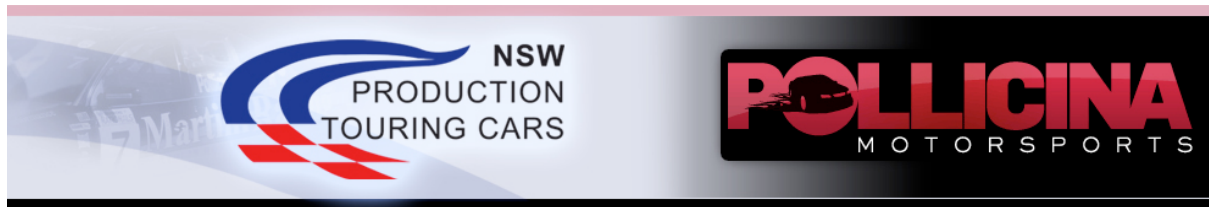
Class B again saw the Geoff Kite-Scott Sullivan battle rage on, just as competitively as it was in race one. Sullivan got the jump on Kite at the start and was even ahead of Heeley for the first two laps, before Heeley gained the upper hand and passed the ex-Walden Commodore. From lap three onwards, Sullivan kept his cool from Kite, who was showing signs of exuberance and occasional aggressiveness as he tried to find every opportunity possible to pass Sullivan. But it was to no avail, as Sullivan took out class honours and made it one race win apiece. Peter Lown still struggled with lack of turbo boost in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo V, but made it to the finish to claim third in class.

Azim Sahu-Khan again attempted to upstage his bigger engined rivals in his Honda Integra whilst consolidating his Class C domination. Sitting in the cusp of the top ten all race long, he managed to stay in touch with non-registered competitor David Atkin in his BMW M3R whilst staying ahead of the HSV Clubsport of Reeves. Reeves would eventually round up Sahu-Khan and claim 11<sup>th</sup> outright, but Sahu-Khan's 12<sup>th</sup> outright was still impressive.

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Bradley Moss managed to fix the gearbox dramas that plagued the Ford Falcon in the first and got the car up and running for the second race. Staying out of trouble, he finished in 15<sup>th</sup> outright but with no other competitors in Saloon Cars, he further consolidates his domination in the Saloon Car class.

### **RACE THREE – 18 LAPS**

After two tightly fought races throughout the weekend at Wakefield Park, Pro-Duct's Bob Pearson took the Production Touring Car bull by the horns in the third and final race and dominated from start to finish in the 18 lap event.

In what was an already action packed event, the surprises in race three kept coming, especially for defending champion, Gus Barbara. As the lights went out, Pearson got the jump again from the Jim Hunter Subaru WRX STI of Paul McKinnon and Rod Thorpe. But as the field left the line, the HSV GTS Coupe of Barbara broke a driveshaft on the line and the driveshaft spat out onto the track in rapid fashion. It ended the weekend for the champion and seriously dented his championship hopes.

Meanwhile, with the top three already establishing themselves early in the race, the real battle was once again between Gerry Burges, Brett Heeley and Tony Virag with Paul Wilbow and Scott Sullivan adding them into the mix. Virag started from the rear of the grid after failing to start race two and charged up the field to be ninth on lap one before steadily progressing into the top six by lap six. In front of them, Wilbow and Sullivan, who was leading Class B ahead of Geoff Kite, were quickly on the pace with Gerry Burges and Heeley.

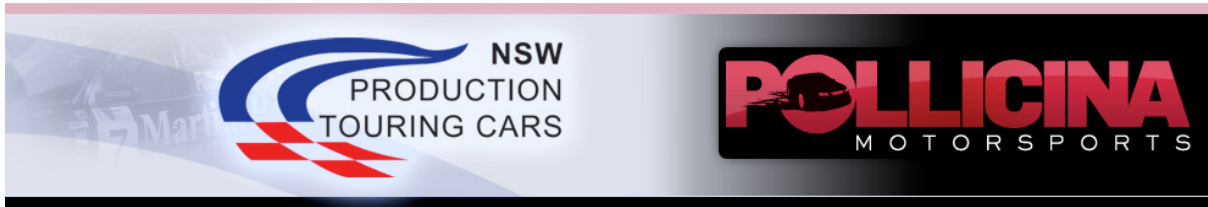
This remained the status quo for the first five laps until Gerry Burges rounded up the pair by lap five. Then, the exhaust in Wilbow's HSV Clubsport broke and drastically halted his performance. He would drop well back through the field by race end. Then, Heeley's impressive run came to an end when he pulled into the pits after 11 laps and retired. He hadn't had a decent run all weekend, but showed signs of things to come in the ex-Matthew Holt HSV.

At the front, Pearson made the third race a total domination. McKinnon opted to conserve his brakes in the final race, after cooking them in the first two during the round, but his competitive streak impressed many in the paddock, even though he'd finish second on track and score no points. Pearson would go on to win then Thorpe in the HSV GTS then Gerry Burges and Virag. After the race though, Burges was given a minute penalty added to his race time for an on-track indiscretion and

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thus demoting down one spot. It meant that Virag moved ahead of the Lancer driver and gained a few extra points. Behind Virag and Burges came Chris Reeves and a faltering Wilbow.

Though Sullivan took the initial charge in Class B, Kite was not going to lie down in the quest for class glory in the final race. After battling with some of the Class A cars early in the piece, Sullivan and Kite would eventually settle down and have their race within a race. Sullivan would lead the class for the first 10 laps before Kite pounced on lap 11 and made his move. Kite would not be headed from that point onwards and would take out the class win for the race and the round ahead of Sullivan. Peter Lown in the Mitsubishi Lancer Evo V finished third in class for the weekend.

Class C and Saloon Cars were again trouble free for Azim Sahu-Khan and Bradley Moss respectively. Sahu-Khan again tormented the bigger engined cars and almost finished in the top ten for the first time this season, eventually finishing 11<sup>th</sup> outright. The 2010 Club Champion was performing well and could benefit in terms of championship points should more cars compete in Class C later on in the season. As for Moss, the gearbox issues that plagued him at the beginning of the weekend stayed away and the Ford Falcon AU stayed out of trouble to take an easy class win in Saloon Cars.

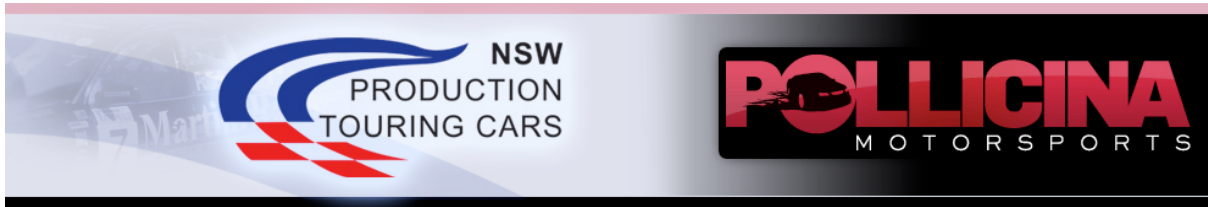
So after three exciting races, Pearson now has a firm grip on the championship lead of the 2011 NSW Production Touring Car Championship. He now leads on 94 points and is 14 points clear on Geoff Kite, who now sits second in the championship on 80 points. Rod Thorpe elevates himself up into the top three on 60 points, then Scott Sullivan on 58 and Bradley Moss on 54. As for Gus Barbara, he now sits eighth in the championship on 47 points whilst Leigh Burges drops from second to ninth, still on 44 points.

The championship now moves back to Sydney and to Eastern Creek on June 18-19, where the championship battle will resume. Though Bob Pearson still maintains his lead, it's still up for grabs to anybody and can only take one retirement for the championship to be wide open again.

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