



Fortunately, rain did not come out during the night to greet the participants of the “25 Hours of Thunderhill” endurance race. However, the cold certainly made things tougher. Before long, dawn broke and the circuit began to become visible again, giving us an opportunity to check the status of the race. During the night, the latest model Porsche 911, which had been in the lead, left the race, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> place 1998 model Porsche 911 also retired with transmission trouble. Ironically, that left the top position to the oldest Porsche that participated in the race – the 1974 model 911. Second place shifted to the BMW M3, and 3<sup>rd</sup> to the Subaru Impreza WRX. The two production based spec 2006 Honda Civic Si vehicles, which started at 45<sup>th</sup> and 46<sup>th</sup> due to misfortune in the qualifiers, continued to move up, and at dawn were in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> place overall, maintaining the first and second places for their class.

As the race entered its final stages, those problems prevalent in endurance racing began to appear more regularly – accidents, gearbox failures, blown engines. One of the production based Honda Civic Si had brake trouble. It lost considerable time due to time in the pit replacing the front rotors. The other Honda Si, however, continued in good condition, and moved up to 4<sup>th</sup> place overall, right behind the Impreza WRX.

On a different note, one of the drivers of the six Subaru Impreza SRX vehicles entered was a fourteen year old boy, Auston Harris. Although he doesn’t yet have an ordinary driver’s license, Auston was allowed to drive under special provisions not seen at races hosted by large groups. To let you know – he was very fast.



The noon finish approached without a change in the members of the top group. The production based Honda Civic Si was in 4<sup>th</sup> place overall, the top in its class. In 5<sup>th</sup> place stood the 1992 Civic, while 6<sup>th</sup> place was taken by the other production based Honda Civic Si that had overcome the delay caused by the brake rotor replacement during the final stages of the race. The overall race winner was the previously mentioned 1974 Porsche 911, the veteran team that had taken 2<sup>nd</sup> place overall two years ago. The top 10 finishers included many types of vehicles – both old and new – and we once again became aware not only of speed but also the difficulties of endurance racing that must be overcome.

After the race was over, we spoke with Kim Wolfkill, one of the production-based 2006 Honda Civic Si divers. Kim's team included Honda associates Lee Niffenegger, Chad Gilsinger, and Matt Staal.



Kim knows the course and this race well, having been the overall winner of the 25 Hours of Thunderhill in the past. Speaking of the Civic Si, he said, “As a machine for superior endurance racing should, this Civic showed drive that never varied from the beginning to the end. Despite the fact that the grip of the endurance tires used wasn't so good, vehicle behavior was stable from start to finish.”

“The Civic Si seemed completely like a production vehicle, but because the handling is superb, the body is strong and hard, and it has excellent balance, it is a car that is fun to drive. Production vehicles usually have a slight under-steer feel, but with this car, all such indications were eliminated. Moreover, the damper hardness and tire pressure, adjusted during practice, were perfectly tuned, meaning that we faced the race in top condition.”

“Therefore, the more I pushed, the better it was. It was easy to pass cars and move into gaps between other cars on the outside. Steering and response were excellent, so cornering posture was stable and engine response smooth. In no time at all I reached a comfortable rhythm, enabling me to really take on the race. It was a real pleasure to freely operate this machine.”

Kim also touched on the engine's strong performance. “It goes without saying that the engine is superb, and I had complete faith in it. I took it up to 8,200rpm, but it was still super smooth. It is a typical VTEC engine, except for the race a different intake manifold and exhaust were fitted, for better air flow and increased efficiency, and a new ECU used. This created a superior power unit that fully demonstrated its potential performance.

“If the brakes had been just a little better, it would have been an even better machine”, Wolfkill lamented. “In the tests, they were fine in terms of performance, but at the end of practice on Friday, it was clear that they wouldn't stand up to 25 hours of hard braking. Therefore, we were cautious in our braking. We maintained a pace that was about two seconds per lap slower than top performance, to reduce the load on the brakes. Naturally, this is an endurance race, so this was an acceptable strategy.”

Of course, their race was not trouble free. The team received a five minute penalty for spilling gasoline on the lane while refueling in the pit, and they had an accident.

“We were part of the fastest group in the race, and passed many cars. However, among these were some machines that weren't expected to be any slower than our machine, that had excellent performance.”



One of these was a racing spec replica Cobra. In this incident, the driver of the replica Cobra was completely unaware of the Civic Si, which was attempting to pass the Cobra on the outside, while cornering at 170km/h. “We collided with his machine as it moved to the outside, flew out onto the grass, and returned to the course. Luckily, the vehicle behind was not directly behind us, so that helped.”

“This incident proved how tough the Civic is. Returning to the pit and getting out of the vehicle to check it over, I saw that the left rear wheel was dented, and the trailing arm damaged. The pit crew removed the trailing arm from another Civic, replaced the one on our machine, and carried out a complete realignment. We lost only eight laps during this operation. Now, with the machine in top condition, we once again started our charge towards the front, winning back the laps we had lost, and regaining our position as first in class.”

The result was an impressive 4<sup>th</sup> overall. They kept the pressure on the Porsche (the overall victor), recorded the fastest lap, and drove their hearts out for 1,935 miles (roughly 3,100km). They were rewarded for their 25 hours of hard work. Without dispute, they were fantastic. I applaud them for their competitive spirit.