

GT Academy Week

Saturday:

My journey began when I flew into London Heathrow Airport. I was picked up by Rob Barff. I rode with Breylon, David, Matt, Brett, and Parker. When we arrived at Silverstone, I stayed in the Snoozebox right outside of the straight going into Brooklands. Parker and I walked around the track, and as we walked around I saw the podium, and could only imagine what a week would bring. We continued our walk to Stowe circuit, and then walked back. He then had dinner and all went to bed early not knowing what the next day would bring.

Sunday:

I woke up at around 7:30 am and got ready in the Snoozebox. Breakfast was at 8:00 am in the common area. At 8:15 am we had a brief meeting and I met the instructors along with Gonzs and Kermit, our drivers for the week. We packed all our bags and then we all got in three Nissan Juke's for arrival shots. I rode with Russell, Edgar, and Mark. After fooling around with the filming we then changed into some workout clothes. Before lunch myself, David, Brett, and Alex went for a run with Christian and Alex around the circuit for 5 km. After the warm-up we then did sprints, up and down the hill, push-ups, and we finished with a Batak (reaction test). Then I did an interview with the film crew, just an introductory interview with Lindsay and the team. After I got all my gear fitted, open and closed helmet, suit, shoes, clothes, and a bicycling shirt. After that we did our physical medical exam with Dr. Chaggar. We had dinner at race camp and then were told to be up and ready with our racing suits on the next morning.

Monday:

We started with the normal breakfast Crunchy Nut cereal and an orange. We then knew that this was going to be our first benchmark challenge, the 370z around the Stowe Circuit. We then spent some time filming and I finally got in the car with Christian for my lap. Overall I did not know what gear to be in and how to run the course, but I thought I did okay. After that a few of us went with Kermit and got to drive RHD Caterhams with bad tires in the back. I went with Mark, Breylon, Matt, Brett, Alex. We were prepped on how to do a donut and that we would have an autocross course with a timed run and a freestyle run. I got the donut pretty easy but not how they were doing it. I was steering with the car not into it. My first two practice runs went good I just could not get the donut in the course. My timed run was the same thing I messed up the donut in the course. The freestyle run was not very good as well, still screwing up the donut. The thing I learned was I needed to slow down. After getting back we had lunch and were told our times were very bad so we were going to have to go out and run our benchmarks again. I met with Rob Barff for my telemetry. I learned about the steep sloped and how useful telemetry was. My time was a 63. --- So I felt like it went well when I looked over and saw Brett's first time was a 65. I was then told what gears to run around the track and how everything else is in third except for the two tight corners. I went out and felt like I went a lot faster. After that we all met in Racecamp with the group that now came back from the Caterhams. They posted our times on the board and I was the slowest in 12th with a 63.4 I believe. I was in awe and thought I was going to get eliminated right there, and how my opportunity was gone to be the next Nismo athlete. We then were told to get

our open faced helmets and got to drive the open wheel 1600cc 4 speed formula cars. These were a blast to drive. I only used 3rd and 4th gear, and struggled in the session but asked for a little advice on the lines after I was done. I was still pretty upset but knew I had to keep my head up and keep pushing. We then were put in the Nissan GTR's at International Silverstone circuit, with an instructor. The paddle shifting was awesome, and the car had so much speed. My instructor did an awesome job showing me the lines and I enjoyed the ride a lot. I got three laps. After this we then went in the vans and Lawrence began showing us the Quadratholon course. We did some TV stuff and we were told the winner of this event was safe from elimination. Starting with towing the single seaters, a ½ mile run, get racing gear on, hopping in single seaters for three laps around Stowe, then on a bike for around 2 miles and then 3 laps in a GTR. I knew I had to do well here to prove I deserved a spot here otherwise I would be gone. I was excited for the race to begin. After getting harnessed all up, the race began. I started to fall back in the tow but I finished up strong and was around 5th or 6th when I got my harness off. I then set my pace for the run and got past Tommy for the lead around the start finish line. He was yelling go get that GTR. I then continued my pace and built up a nice lead. I sprinted up the hill and to the finish. I hustled getting dressed and hopped in the single seater. Then I sat for a mandatory 2 minutes to get buckled up. The instructor just told me to be smooth I had a nice lead. I took off, and drove the single seater nice and smooth. I got my three laps in making sure not to run too many and came to a stop. I jumped out of the car and found my open helmet and hopped on a bike. I began the bike ride and my shoelace got caught in the sprocket. I had to think fast and gave the shoelace a quick kick, luckily it broke and I was able to continue. I continued to have a nice lead but kept pushing hard and was able to come up to the Silverstone garages with Rob telling me to slow down be careful. I dropped the bike and ran to a GTR. I had Alex as an instructor, and I took off. I got one lap in and ran wide in turn one for the second lap. I thought I was going to throw the entire race away but calmed back down and actually caught Mark who was in second, so I had an entire lap on the field almost. My instructor said no need to pass so I finished up smooth and steady. I was so relieved when I crossed that finishing line, because I knew I kept myself from being eliminated. I got all kinds of congratulations from my competitors as well from the three judges. Brett and Matt were eliminated from the competition. We then cleaned up, had supper, and went to bed.

Tuesday:

Tuesday: Buggy and In the Zone

The next morning I woke up, showered, ate breakfast and got my racing suit on. We all hopped in a van and were taken to a rally school. We knew it was the buggy race but didn't know the format or track. I was teamed up with Parker, and very excited because I believed Parker was a very good competitor. We ran our practice laps, and then it was race time. We qualified 3rd and got to pick our starting position. I took the outside line to try and get the momentum going because the buggies were governed at only half throttle. The start went terrible; I got caught up in an accident in the first corner so I was 5th (last). Teams kept making mistakes so I slowly moved up to 2nd with one lap to go in my stint. Breyton spun in front of me in one of the last corners so I just drove around and headed to the pits for our driver change. I was happy because I got first in my stint. I did notice the throttle was missing and we told them in practice, because it also happened for Parker. Parker hopped in, got his belts on in the time limit, and as

soon as he took off, it bogged and we were immediately back to 3rd. He would get passed so we were back to 4th but someone spun so we ended up in 3rd. The buggy didn't even make it back to pit road it overheated and stopped on course. I was disappointed but happy to finish 3rd with a broke down buggy. Then we went back to racecamp, and the overtake challenge was next. I was 3rd from last to go, and knew I had to push hard. I passed the Ferrari too early and had to give the position back, but still ended up passing three cars. Rob was right beside me, and critiqued my driving. He said I should not shuffle the wheel, but said my driving was okay. Parker and Tommy got past four cars; the rest of us got three, besides Breyton and David who passed two. We then were told to decide whether to do karting and long boarding or motor cross and rock climbing. I decided I would be better rock wall person, so I ended up doing the dirt bikes. I was able to practice a bit and it was a lot of fun. I dumped the bike once, and ran into the caution tape as well. Overall it was still a lot of fun. We then were put in the vans and sent to the International garages where the first challenge (karting) was. It was the crazy karts. Parker was third since we finished third in our previous challenge, but got spun and fell back. He was challenging Breyton for the last spot, but just couldn't get past. Since we finished last we got eliminated meaning we were not able to take part in any other challenges. In the motorbikes Tommy took the lead but David made up from a bad start to win. Edgar and Alex were eliminated. Long boarding was next, Mark won by a mile, and Donald and David were eliminated. Russell and Tommy had a shootout on the rock wall but Tommy won, meaning Tommy and Mark were safe from elimination. We thought Breyton was going home but to our surprise David was sent home, they said he was the slowest in the buggies. I lived to see another day! I went back to race camp had supper, showered, and went to bed excited for the next day.

Wednesday:

We all knew the obstacle course was coming and we knew with nine guys that it would probably happen. I was put with Donald and Edgar. I did not know how they assigned teams but knew from Donald's leg injury it was going to be a challenge for all of us. We were shown the course and told to do two laps. We started out and I knew it was going to be interesting. Donald's leg was killing him and Edgar was struggling as well. The first obstacle was a five foot wall. After that it was the bouncy balls followed by the army crawl under the barb wire. After that it was running through fire, pulling across the water with the rope, and then the electrical shock. After the shock we had the balance beam followed by the water with the net on top. We neared the end of the first lap and ran up the hill, and slid down. After this we ran through some muck, climbed a rope wall, and slide down in the water. We then had to duck under the water and ask for permission to get out. By the end of lap one, we were strongly in last place with a team that was all beat up. I was bleeding slightly from something, and we had two minutes to regain energy for our second lap. Donald struggled and stopped so I ran and caught up to Edgar, and then Danny said Donald was going again. I got Don through the electric shock and then he had to stop. I caught up with Edgar and we finished up with the help of Alex. We finished in last place and I was very disappointed. We luckily got to shower immediately and ate lunch. The pit stop challenge was next. Lucky for us we had Rob Barf as one of our team principals for the challenge. He told us to be cool, calm, and collected. He said, "I don't want to send any of you guys home." The team that finished 3rd in this challenge had to send someone home. I started out driving the Juke but that wasn't until Edgar was finished with his tire change. I took off going the pit road speed limit, and caught up to Russell out on

track, I couldn't get past him but we ended up leapfrogging him on the next stop. Don changed the tire and it went well, and Edgar hopped in. I did the next tire change and it went alright. I stumbled on a few of the lugs but overall went okay. I then hopped back in the car again. I stopped too short on my pit road mark but it was okay. We were gaining on the 1st place car. We took the lead on the next stop. I had the last pit stop and it went nice and smooth. We ended up coming home with the win, safe from elimination. I thanked Rob, our jackman, and lollipop man for all their help. Donald, Edgar, and I were very pleased from our comeback from the defeat earlier in the day. Breyton was let go, and had an interesting goodbye speech. We returned to base, ate supper, as well as got some words of wisdom from the judges. I then showered, and went to bed, still in awe I was continuing to fight on.

Thursday:

We woke up and got split into three groups. We all watched the MSA video and we were off to the National circuit to get some instruction with the RHD 370z's. I learned a lot in this session even though the car was missing from fuel starvation, and felt like I had a good showing. Then we went back to Stowe and took out the 370z racecars. I didn't heal and toe, even though I tried for a bit, and ran three sessions with three different cars and instructors. All three times I felt like I got faster, even though Parker passed me in the first session. It was a safety test, so as long as we didn't go off or spin we would pass. The last part of the morning was with the written test. After that we had to do our 370z benchmarks again. We were supposed to do our two flying laps, come in, get instruction from one of the judges, and go out again for one flyer. I went out and the instructor said I had to work on the back part of the course. Rob then told me to carry more speed through corner one. I went out and hit a few cones in turn one, and got yelled at by my instructor saying I didn't need to push that corner. I then missed a shift in the next straight. The back half of the course went good, but I was scared my time from the missed shift was bad. I was told from Christian I lost a lot of time from that miss shift. After that they didn't even tell us our times, in the van we went to Gymkhana at an abandoned airfield. We met Chris Forsberg, and were shown the course. We got two laps to learn the course, one from each side. The course began with a trip around the storage container, then a slalom, a foam wall (10 sec penalty if we hit the foam), then two gates, (one which I missed in practice), then the ice road, the water balloon station (two balloons if we hit both we only had to go around once, but if we could not hit any in three tries we then had a two second penalty for each balloon missed), and the tank to drift around. Then the stop box (where the penalties were served), the J turn reverse, the ice road again, the two gates, slalom, and then finish. This was a very intense challenge. The winner of the first round was safe and done racing on this circuit, the loser went on to the second round, if he won he was safe, if not, he went onto the final round where the loser was going home no questions from the judges. Very cruel! After eating lunch I was up. I tried to visualize the course so I would not make any stupid mistakes like I did in practice. My run was neck and neck with Tommy. He had a slight edge, but I hit both my balloons and he did not. After that I had a smooth clean run, no reverse in the ice road, and finished up first. It was a sigh of relieve knowing I was safe (for now). The other first round winners were Mark, Parker, and Alex. Donald won the second round against Tommy and Russell beat Edgar. The final race was against Edgar and Tommy. Tommy pulled out the win and Edgar was sent home. Back in the van we went, we got our closed faced helmets and off to the short track we went for the stock car challenge. We arrived, signed on, and had supper.

This was the funniest part of the day; we had burgers and sausages with 'Born in the USA' and 'Sweet Home Alabama' playing in the background. After supper we had a filming session, where people asked who they feared the most. Alex and I were not called, Tommy was called the most. Rob asked us if that bothered us and we answered, no. Then we got in the cars and our practice sessions of 10 laps began. The track ran clockwise and was all right turns. I was the fastest in practice, but struggled in qualifying getting 3rd out of 7 guys. We then switched to our nice cars, and the race began, 30 laps. I was able to get into second by the end of lap one, and hunted down Alex for first. He ran a few defensive lines for a few laps, but I was able to sneak into first. I looked back but since there was no mirror I couldn't rearview mirror drive. I finished first with Tommy second. I hopped out of the car, and immediately got on the roof since the TV crew told me to, and celebrated. I was congratulated from the judges. We then sat and waited for the judges' decision. Parker and Donald were talked to by the judges with Donald getting eliminated. I was congratulated by the judges for improving as well. My number 6 green car ran great! We got in the vans and headed back to race camp with one day remaining. I did a quick TV interview with Lindsay when I got back and then headed to bed. Still in awe I made it to the final day.

Friday:

We woke up, put on workout clothes, and were expecting a bleep test, but all it was, was a little warm-up run around the track, sprinting from the back to the front. Then some pushups, training ball exercises, and lunges. After this I showered and had breakfast. We then saw them setting up for the Braking Challenge. I was nervous for this since we had to get up to 70 mph and then stop in the box. We did some TV stuff, and came back to base to wait for the competitors to go. I was last since I won the stock car challenge. I went for my test run and was a little too fast through the gate, since all our test run was, was to see our speed, we couldn't turn in and brake. I came around again, and came up to the starting line. I lined up got a okay start and took off I got to 120 km/h and coasted and hit the brakes once I passed the blowup arch, and stopped successfully not taking any of the guys out, which would have cost one second each. My instructor said I was close on speed, so I was a little worried. After I came in and the guys said I did well I was happy. I was still nervous who was getting eliminated and if we were having a dogfight. The judges met with us, and said I did a nice job and even though I was not the fastest I made it look easy. Russell was let go. We then were told to get our helmets, and off we went to the paddock, to talk with the judges. They asked us if we were 100% committed and to our surprise Tommy said no. They then took him out of the final race, and did some more TV interviews. We then were briefed on our ride along as well as the rest of the afternoon. We were taking the instructors out on the national circuit, in the race 370z's. Danny Sullivan was my first passenger. I forgot to shut off the traction control so I was slow out of corners and got yelled at by Danny. After I came in and told him what happened, he calmed down. He said I did okay just a few different lines on different corners. Boris Said was next up. Boris said I did alright except for my shifting. He said I needed to be a little quicker and therefore I would gain time. I then drove with an instructor who told me some ideas for lines and different brake markers. Rob was last. Rob was very helpful drawing diagrams and showing me how I need to run a few corners. Then after we were taken in the van, and off to the International circuit for a briefing from the MSA. After that we had some filming to do, and then we then got our helmets, Hans, and new nomex hoods all, all set to go. I climbed into the car for our qualifying session. This was on a

completely different track, the International circuit. I went out after Mark and was not really gaining on him. We came in and I was told I had the pole by a tenth. The race was next; Boris said as I was getting in the car, this is going to be your defining moment in your racing career. I went out, was lined up at the start line, and then the flag was waved for the warm up lap. I came around, Kermit helped me make sure I did not go over the line, and I waited for the lights. The red lights came on, and a few seconds later they were out. I luckily got away smoothly and hit all my shifts. Mark, who was alongside did not get the best start so I had the lead. Alex got a good start and almost went in between Mark and me. I was smooth and slow on the first lap, and this started a battle between Mark and Alex. From there I was able to pull away slowly. I had one bad moment in Stowe where I thought I was going off, but luckily I gathered it back up. The laps seemed to take forever but I finally saw the checkered flag, with Alex, Parker, and Mark rounding out the order. I came into the pits and sat there for 20 minutes. I finally got to come in, and was greeted by the judges. I then waited to hear the finally announcement, and it came. I won GT Academy! I then gave a short speech thanking everyone for their help and support. I was so very excited, and was told to go to the podium. We sprayed champagne and I was given the red helmet, a trophy, and a participant trophy. I then got given a phone to call my dad. I gave him a call and he was in awe that I won. Then I was introduced to my new boss Bob Neville, and was rushed away by Kermit back to racecamp. Back at camp, I had all my belongings packed up I did a final interview with Lindsay. I couldn't believe how it didn't even set that I had won. After the interview I ate supper, and was taken with Gonz and a few of the other guys to the hotel where we would be staying. We had a wrap up party for everyone and I went to bed around 2am. I fell asleep rather quickly from being so tired, but still couldn't believe I had done it! I had won GT Academy!