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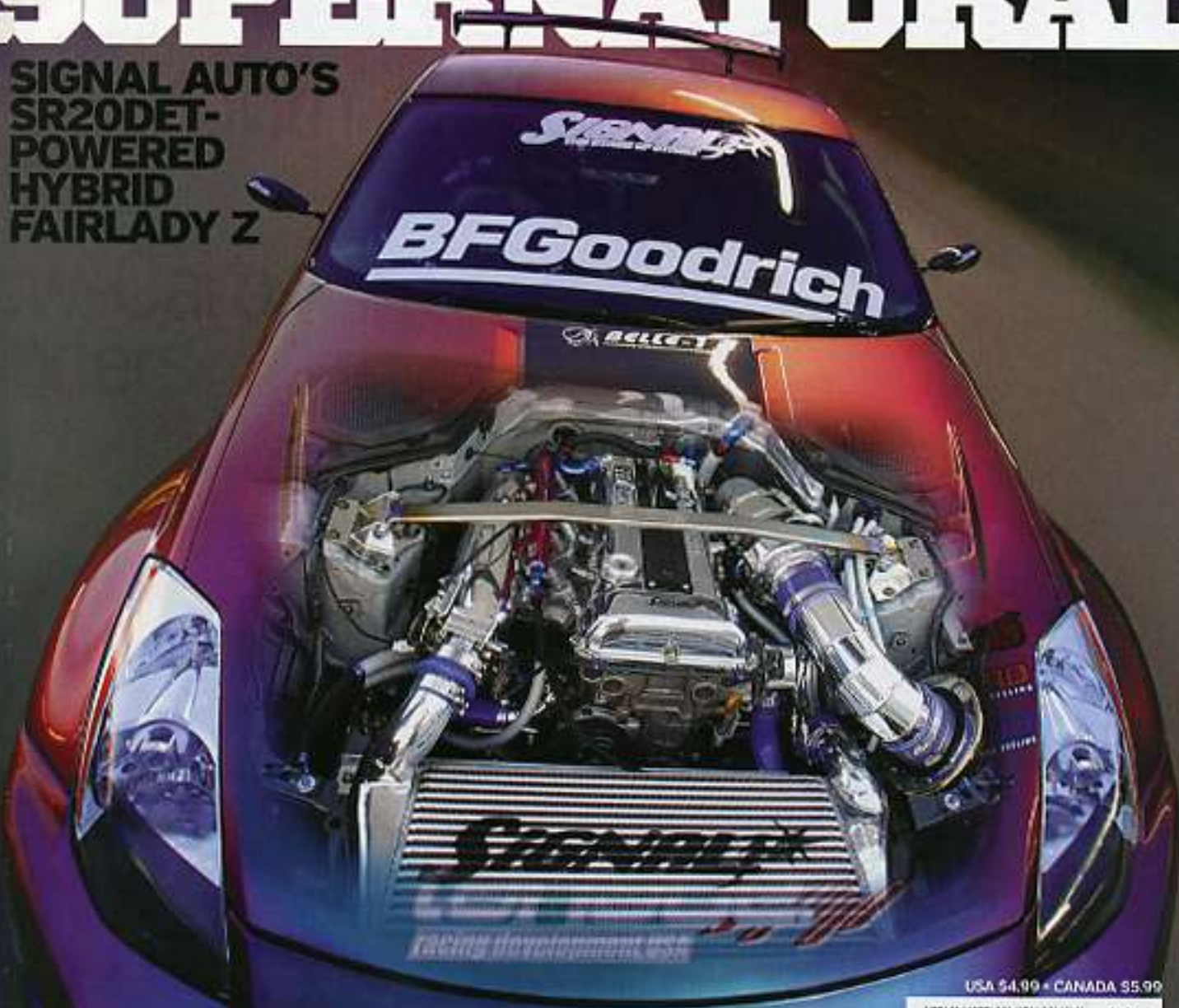


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# THREE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

**SCENE: 2004 AUTOBACS JAPAN  
GT CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 3 -  
SEPANG CIRCUIT; MALAYSIA**

WORDS/JIMMY LOUIS

SNAPS/COURTESY OF THE GT ASSOCIATION

**T**his round of the JGTC was held in the tropics of Malaysia, a place known for temperatures of more than 85 degrees. The worst part about this particular race may not have been the difficulty of the circuit but the toll the heat and humidity took on the drivers and spectators alike. Luckily, the race started late in the afternoon to bypass a good portion of the sweltering heat. That race was cancelled last year because of SARS concerns, but this year all that nonsense was put on the back burner and the race went off pretty much without a hitch. Being in the tropics proposes unique weather issues. During the morning qualifying rounds, driving rain kept speeds lower and lap times higher than in the clear and hot afternoon rounds, leading to a complete flip-flop of grid order for both the GT500 and GT300 classes.



## GT500

Jeremie Dufour, driving the Denso Sand Supra, really put the screws to the rest of the field during the morning rain-soaked qualifier and took the pole, only to drop to 13th place when he picked the wrong tires for the drier afternoon qualifying session. The number 12 Calsonic Impul Fairlady Z driven by Benoit Treuyer took the pole spot in the dramatic final seconds of the round, leaving him a full 1.819 seconds ahead of Dufour. Supras from the Team Tom's camp

took the Second and Third spots on the grid, hoping for the one-two chance at the flag, and Fourth position was held by one of the biggest surprises of the day, Masami Kageyama, piloting the Motul Key Value Fairlady Z, started out in 11th place on the grid after the morning session and moved up to the Fourth place spot in the later drier track conditions. The other Zs didn't fare as well, with the number 3 GZOX SSR and the number 1 Xanavi Nismo taking the Seventh and Eighth spots. Debuting at this event was a pair of Lamborghini Murcielagos in 16th and 18th place—not a bad





showing out of a field of 40 cars.

When the lights went green, pole-sitter Treluyer tried to walk away from the rest of the field, building up a significant lead over the other drivers. Takeshi Tsuchiya in the number 36 Woodone Tom's Supra spent a brief moment sipping the First place wine only to have the glass spill and drop back to Second, where he remained until the car came in for its routine stop on the 25th lap. Treluyer came in a lap later two seconds ahead of the pace but lost his position because of a long pit stop, dropping to Third.

Attrition took its toll on a couple of the Supras early on. The Esso Ultradio car had a slow leak in one of its tires and dropped to 15th, and the Dynacity Tom's and Yellow Hat YMS Supras traded paint and slid down the ranks from Fourth and Fifth places to 13th and 14th. Andre Couto drove the Denso Sard Supra all the way from 13th place to Third in an amazing run before handing the reins to copilot Dufour on the lap 26 stop.

Yuji Ide took over the controls of the Calsonic machine from leader Treluyer during the same lap only to be passed by Shigekazu





Wakisaka in the Yellow Hat Supra. He was put out of his misery on lap 32 when he collided with two GT300 machines and couldn't finish the race.

Marco Apicella in the Woodone Tom's Supra and Dufour in Denso Sard Supra were running the one-two Toyota gauntlet. That was until Apicella did the do-si-do on lap 45 and Dufour drove around him for the lead and eventually the win. 10 laps later, Toshihiro Kaneishi, driving the number 3 G20X Z, tried valiantly to keep ahead of Richard Lyons in the Xanavi Z, but on lap 42 Lyons ran into Kaneishi, resulting in a position switch. Lyons stole the last spot on the podium, leaving the G20X machine to come in for Fourth place 15 seconds later. A close Second place went to Naoki Hattori in the Yellow Hat Supra who worked his way up from Sixth to two seconds off the leader's pace after the pit stops. The two Lambos didn't do nearly as well, with the number 15 car garnering 12th place and the number 88 car suffering from a broken suspension

and having to drop out of the race completely. Winner Dufour stated, "Toward the end of my stint, there was a situation with a yellow flag. I didn't see the green flag after that so I had to wait for the next [flag] post to make sure. It wasn't worth taking a pass so late in the race where I might have been penalized. It was a bit dark and I couldn't see if they had shown the flag or not, so I decided to play it safe. It was no problem really. I knew I had enough time over the number 35 car to make it to the end first."

## GT300

The weather and position changes affected the qualifying order in the GT300 class in the same manner as the GT500 class. Kazuki Hoshino, who was driving the Endless Daishin Advan Z, started out in Ninth after the morning qualifier and ended up sitting on the pole by the afternoon. Shinichi Yamaji, driving the Amemiya Aspara Drink RX-7, had to settle for the Second spot with a 1/10 of a second slower qualifying time. Kota Sasaki in the M-TEC NSX, who had taken from pole, followed close behind in the Third spot on the starting grid. The Loyjun Dunlop 320R, with Osamu behind the wheel, lined up Fourth in front of Masataka Yanagida in the C-West Daishin Advan Z. The Rockless MR-S fell four grid spots to Sixth from the morning run yet was still the top Toyota on the grid while the Project μ Taiyo Sekiya Celica took Eighth, the Weds Sport Celica took 10th, and the APEXi MR-S sat in 12th. Once the race started, Hoshino's pole status didn't last very long at all. By lap three Osamu and his 320R came through and charged ahead for the lead, and by lap eight Tetsuya Yamano in the M-TEC car passed Hoshino as well, dropping the Advan Z to Third. Osamu





## THE SCORE

| Class        | Drivers                           | Car                          |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>GT500</b> |                                   |                              |
| First Place  | Jeremie Dufour, Andre Cousto      | Denso Sord Supra GT          |
| Second Place | Nacki Hattori, Shigekazu Wakisaka | Yellow Hat YMS Supra         |
| Third Place  | Satoshi Motoyama, Richard Lyons   | Xenavi Nismo Z               |
| <b>GT300</b> |                                   |                              |
| First Place  | Shinichi Yamaji, Hiroyuki Iri     | Amerinija Aspara Drink RX-7  |
| Second Place | Tetsuya Yamano, Hiroyuki Yagi     | M-TEC NSX                    |
| Third Place  | Tetsuji Tamakaka, Go Miune        | Project μ B-1 Mach-Go GT320R |

led the race until the lap 20 mandatory driver switch when Yamaji took the advantage and snatched the lead before he pitted as well on lap 27. The RX-7 driver never looked back until he took the checkered flag while his competitors trailed far behind. Hoshino could no longer handle the intense Malaysian heat and dropped to Second place before he passed out at the wheel from heat exhaustion and ran into the gravel pit on the last lap. Hiroyuki Yagi in the number 16 M-TEC NSX took the Second place podium spot, with Go Miune in the Project μ B-1 Mach-Go GT320R coming up from Seventh to take the last podium step. Winner Yamaji told interviewers, "We started from Second position and I was hoping we'd be able to keep this place—and our pace—throughout the race. I noticed at the start that the cars running on Dunlop tires were very fast, I wasn't holding back. I knew I had to push as hard as I could in order to make any difference. I was also aware that it was a long and hot race, just as difficult for the others as it was for us. By keeping a good rhythm and running a good number of laps, I feel I was able to contribute my part to our success today." 🏆