

# Joe Kopp - Gas City, Indiana

## Short Track GNC National - June 19, 2010



If ya remember, we just got rained out here a couple of weeks ago, so they quickly rescheduled this one and we were gonna give it another try. I got to fly home this last week, but I have to tell you about my airport experience first. I'm was just taking a carry on bag with me, no checked luggage, which makes it much quicker once I get to the destination. So I'm going through the security checkpoint in Spokane, and I had put a pair of large channel lock pliers in my bag last night, that we had forgot at home last month when we headed back east for the summer with the race truck. So then security stops me and says that you can't take these because they are over 7" long I guess. So my only option was to check my luggage back at the counter, or throw them away right there. I mean they are only probably a \$20.00 pair of pliers, but I wasn't giving them up that easy. So I tell the security guy I'll just go check my luggage. But my I knew I wasn't gonna do that, I had a plan. uuh ooh, huh? hahaha I decided to walk out of the airport and into the parking garage right across the road and hide them somewhere and get them when I flew back home. So got out in the garage, knowing there are probably security cameras somewhere out here, but I didn't see any, so I quickly took them out of my bag and hid them behind a Pepsi machine. No one was watching me, as far as I could tell. So anyway, I go back into the airport and go through security again, and start heading to my gate to fly out in a few minutes. So I'm a walkin' down the hall way, and next thing I know, I'm down, face first on the ground getting frisked some security people! hahahaha, gotcha didn't !! I never got stopped or anything like that, but I for sure was thinking of that exact same thing happening as I was walking through the airport that day, kind of peaking over my shoulder as I walked. They must not have seen me hide the pliers I guess on cameras, so I'll have to check and see if the pliers are still there when I get back home today. I'll keep ya updated! Too funny huh! I like living on the edge as you can tell.

Once we arrived at the Gas City track for the race, it looked like it was going to be an awesome little Fast short. They had gotten a lot of rain the night before, so the pits were a little wet in places, but I have the answer for that. If you ever come by the races, check out my pit pads that lay on the ground in my pit area. They are made by MotoConcepts [www.MotoConcepts.com](http://www.MotoConcepts.com), and they are trick, light, clean and easily transported, and best of all, CHEAP! And they make the race day experience so much nicer and cleaner.

We had never had a race here before, so this track was new for everyone tonight, and everyone was saying how fast this layout looked, with some good dark dirt and just the nice shape of the track with some good banking and all. Everyone was super excited to get out there. Practice/qualifying time now. I was pumped and could not wait to go twist the throttle hard on this track. On my first lap, I entered turn one kind of easy, as I knew I had to do some learning before I went at it hard. After one lap, I could tell right away, that this track was way, way different than I had expected it to be. So much for having a lot of traction and thinking I was gonna grab huge handfuls of throttle here, as I quickly figured out that it was a very slick type of clay, with not much bite, and the track had a neat shape to it, but it was very hard to read exactly where I wanted to be each lap. After all my years of experience, I'm usually one that can read a track pretty good before I ever get on it with my bike, but this one had me confused so far. After that first lap, I definitely had to quickly readjust my thoughts on how to ride this track. I mean it was probably one of the most sketchy middle of the corner short tracks I have ever ridden on a 450 single. Because the track had huge wide corners, which allowed for some very high speed entry, but the middle of both turns was just super slick and there was a point in every turn where I knew I had to get back on the throttle and finish the turn. I put in some decent laps I felt, and when we came back in, I was sitting at the top of the board with fast time in round one. I was surprised, but at the same time I knew I could ride a slick technical track as good as anyone, but I think my strength is that I feel I can just adapt quicker than most to changing conditions, and I think that my years of off-road riding and a lot of Endurocross riding the last couple of years has helped me, as conditions are constantly changing in an Endurocross, lap to lap.

After the next round, we changed the gearing as I knew that was off a little, and this time I ended up in the 3rd spot in times. Then for the last round, we made a couple of more changes, and I came back in with fast time for our group again, but a group a couple after us, had some more rubber laid down on the track by then, and there were a few riders that picked up the time too. My practice group had the top 12 guys in the points, and I had fast time in that group two times and third once, so I felt I was ready, and I just wanted to race em'. Enough lap timing, let's see who gets to the checkered flag first.

I was in the first heat, and it was a stacked one. It was Rob Pearson, Chad Cose, Chris Carr, Ken Coolbeth, myself and others. I knew I needed a top two finish for the Dash for Cash and front row in the Final. Off the line I jumped out there good, but then she started spinning a few feet out. So I kind of went backwards quick, and came out of turn two in fifth. I already had a game plan on how to pass here, so I went to work. First I got by Carr and Cose, then it was Coolbeth with Pearson leading the group. It took me a few laps to find a way past Coolbeth, but I finally did around 1/2 way. Now Pearson was leading with a decent gap on me by now. I worked hard at it and managed to chase him down pretty quick, and I could see where him and I both had our strong spots. I was on his wheel, and on the last lap, we came out of turn two, and I was trying to cross his line so that could set him up for a last corner pass that I really felt was gonna work. But just as we started to exit turn two, he spun it up, and I just about ran right into his rear wheel, I mean it was CLOSE! This made me check up and gave him that little edge going into turn three for the last turn. Pearson ended up getting the heat race win. We ended up having the fastest heat race time of the day plus we had gotten away from the rest of the pack. The Dash would be my next race in a while.

I knew my bike was working pretty good, but there was definitely room for improvement. Jerry Wilhelmy at General Engineering [www.GEheads.com](http://www.GEheads.com) has been working with me to help us figure out good ways to make our hot rod bikes go fast when slick conditions like this come up. You know, a lot of power is a good thing, but if ya can't get it hooked up to the ground, it ain't gonna help ya too much. So we dug out the laptop computer, and went to work "tuning". I knew the 4 lap Dash was always a good place to try things, but at the same time points are awarded for the top 5 positions in it too, so yah, it is a good place to try something, but nothing too drastic. Once again at the light, I got a not so good start, but I just rode turn one and two smart, and came out of turn two in third place, with Wiles out front and Mees in second. Coming out of turn four, I got by Mees. I quickly got on Wiles rear wheel, and just about had him passed a few times in the next couple of laps, but he beat me to the stripe at the finish, and got the win, with me second, Mees third, then Person, Sam Halbert and Weidman last.

I felt the changes me made for the Dash worked good, so we stayed with what we had, put gas in the bike and we were ready.

For the main, I had fourth pick, which I took the far outside starting spot, and it looked like a good one. At the flash of the light my Team Latus Motors Honda [www.Latus-HD.com](http://www.Latus-HD.com) ripped out of there. It looked like I had the holshot to me, but Wiles had a good start too, and he was down on the inside of me. So we both ran it into turn one side by side, but I had to give him the edge as he went right to the far outside edge, and I had nowhere to go but off the track or back out of it and don't get in a hurry. I chose the later. hahaha Maybe 15 years ago I would have went for it, but old age and wisdom does come in handy at times like this. hahaha We went down the back stretch with Wiles up front and me second, and I was thinking that this is exactly where I wanted to be. Then as we go into turn three, Mees throws it in there really hard way down low, as both Wiles and I had entered pretty high. Mees got by me as I had to check up to avoid him, but things like this usually happen on lap one and two of a National with these guys, especially on a shorttrack. Then it settles down after a couple of laps, well, usually. On the next lap I get back by Mees and set out after Wiles who had a good gap on me by now. I quickly made up the ground and I was now glued to his rear wheel. After a few laps, I could definitely see where I was stronger than him, but I did not want to get in too much of a hurry, as I knew it was a long 25 laps, and Wiles is a guy that will usually charge back pretty hard when passed, whether his bike is working that good or not. I could see that his bike was not working as good as mine, plus I knew these track conditions suited me better than him. So I felt that when I did pass him, that I would be able to get away, but then it is always easier said than done too. I could see he was starting to move his lines around, trying to find a better line, as I know he could hear me right on him, so I'm sure he was thinking that there must be a better line somewhere that I was using. I might have been a little higher than him on some spots of the track, but really, we were running about identical lines. I ran a lot of laps, just glued to him and I was getting tired of waiting around for the "easy" pass to happen, so I figured it was time to go. I just about got by him going into turn three the next lap, but I once again had the outside with him under me, and I chose to keep it safe as I know what he has done at times when someone is trying to pass him on the outside. Then just as we enter turn three the next lap, the red lights start flashing. Someone had crashed and was on the track in a dangerous spot, so that meant the race would be stopped. I looked back right then to see that Wiles and I had built up a very good gap on the rest of the pack, which would have made for a fun finish between us two.

This red flag meant we would have a single file restart, with 11 laps to go. It was Wiles at the point, then myself, Mees, Pearson and I'm not sure of the order after that. I had a good starting spot right behind Wiles, and at the light, we both jumped out of there pretty good, then a few feet out, Wiles rear wheel started to go sideways, and then it came over and caught my front wheel and this made me check up and pull in the clutch. Then I quickly tried clutching it to get the RPM back up and get going again, then as you probably knew was happening, about four more guys went wizzin' past me going into turn one. Dang, 2nd to about 5th or 6th in a few seconds. Time to fire back! I don't even remember who all got by me, other than Mees, Pearson and a couple of others, but I remember I got by one of them in turn two. Then I remember getting Pearson coming out of turn four the next lap, and within a lap or two I was in third behind Wiles and Mees. I tried not to be in too much of a hurry still, but I knew time was running out, and there is only so much patience I have when I know the checkered flag is about ready to fly. I started charging real hard, but the harder I charged, the worse I went. Wiles was out front, with Mees glued to him, then myself right behind. This restart had obviously given Mees a jumpstart on the race, as he was running pretty good now and before he was quite a ways back. It was hard to pass one guy on this track, but two of them running side wheel to wheel pretty much was making it even that much harder. I was starting to have a little mistrust in my front end, as I had lost the front a couple of times recently in the middle of the turn. But I knew it was just from me pushing it too hard, so I kept telling myself to settle down, and it will come. The last couple of laps came and I pretty much had it in cruise mode, as I was still right there, but I knew I could not afford a slip or crash right now, and this track really would not allow for much of a mistake. As it was still very sketchy right in the middle of the turns, and I felt I was pretty close to my limit right now, and I knew I maybe had a little left to possibly try, but I just didn't think it was worth it tonight. I'll betcha Mees was thinking the exact same thing, because he is one of those guys that will usually make an aggressive last corner charge, but he never tried anything crazy in the last turn either. 2nd in the Dash tonight and 3rd in the final was a good night for me. Wiles ended up winning, with Mees 2nd and myself third.

This bumped me up to the lead in the overall Grand National point standings right now, with a 14 point gap over Johnson in 2nd. I WILL just keep doing what I have been doing, and that is Charge, Charge, Charge every time I am on the track. Now we go to Lima, Ohio! Yahh baby, cushion, and one of my favorite tracks all year long.

*Until next time, G'Day!*

**Joe**

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