



true visions



## **Panther Team Thailand**

2018 SUPER GT RACE REPORT

### **Rd. 1 Okayama International Circuit**

Panther Team Thailand competed in the opening round of 2018 Super GT Series, held April 7 to 8 at Okayama International Circuit; their sophomore season in the series. The two drivers, Nattavude Charoensukhawatana and Nattapong Hortongkum will continue to sit behind the wheels, but the car has changed to LEXUS RC F GT3.

#### **■ Qualifying**

Since its shakedown at the start of the year, the RCF had been tested during the joint test in Okayama International Circuit along with other tracks. Both drivers were basically happy with the car, but with limited amount of time to drive, they had not enough time to fully come to the development they expected before the opening of the series.

Team was expecting to spend Saturday free practice for the final set-up, but with unexpected cold weather in the Okayama International Circuit had prevented them from making any improvement before the qualifying.

During Q1, Hortongkum took the wheels as he has become much faster. With low temperature, the tyres were left cold but managed to score 1"27.587; which was 0.572 seconds faster than car #48, however not able to proceed to Q2.

#### **■ RACE**

Sunday was still under cold weather, and difficult track condition. For the first time, Hortongkum started the race and he managed to keep the position during the start with difficult track conditions. However, the track never seem to improve the grip and having difficulty warming up, the team decided to pit early to change the tyres.

Hortongkum boxed at lap11, changed tyres and returned but dropped to the bottom. Still, he was able to keep steady pace until the end of lap36, where he returned to the pit again to change tyres, refuel and pass the car over to Charoensukhawatana.

Charoensukhawatana managed to keep steady laps despite feeling difficulties with the tyres, finishing 3laps behind the winner. Although dropping to the bottom of the field, the best lap time was 27<sup>th</sup> among 29 cars, looking positive for future rounds.

#### **■ Official Result**

Qualifying: 28<sup>th</sup> in GT300 (29cars total) 1"28.587

Race: 24<sup>th</sup> in GT300 (29 Cars total) 48laps (3laps behind the winner)

#### **■ Quotes**

(A) - driver : Nattavude Charoensukhawatana

After 5 laps into my drive and was already under steer. Driving was difficult, but it was not that bad weekend. The car was definitely better for us. The set-up was not perfect but I am confident we can do much better than last year.

(B) – driver: Nattapong Hortongkum

I was little nervous at first because it was first time for me to start the race. The tyre was not warming up, and I talked to the team because it was difficult to continue. After the pit stop, the car felt much comfortable, I was able to keep steady pace and improve my position.

Last year, the lap time was unstable during the race, but RCF is much reliable, I am looking forward to racing more in this car.

Team Manager: Suttipong Smittachartch

Because the track on Okayama International Circuit is not wide, I was hoping no accidents this week. The drivers were more consistent and was able to finish the race. We are not happy where we finished in the race, but considering it was our first race with the RCF, I think it was alright. Last year, we were always at the bottom of the field, but this year, just looking at our lap time in qualifying, we are much competitive to other cars. This week, the we struggled under the weather, but I hope we do better for next round in Fuji Speedway.