



V8 Supercars Fujitsu Series

Bathurst (The Big One) – October 2008

Bathurst is the biggest race of the year and I had never even been to the town let alone the race track before. So to try and get some insight into how I could make it around this forbidding mountain a week before the race I travelled up to Bathurst with a team-mate and we drove around the track in a road car - even at 60km/hr it feels fast coming down those hills and sharp bends.

Three days prior to the race I stupidly had a fall whilst training and badly hurt my right wrist. After x-rays I was told it was only a sprain. So my weekend consisted of strapping my wrist and having no pain killers due to them being banned by the sport anti-doping agency which V8 Supercars are part of. The results of my x-rays were also sent to a specialist who got in contact with me after the race weekend and as it turns out the wrist was fractured and I raced all weekend on it. Maybe it was the nerves and adrenalin but it hurts more now than when I was racing.

Thursday practice was my first drive at Bathurst, perfect sunny day and we made a few changes during the day to get the car faster. By the end of the day I was about 10 seconds off the fastest guy, which in racing is a lifetime. I also found out I was the only driver who had never been there before. It is one of those tracks which you cannot make one mistake or try to push too hard to test the limits, if you do you hit a wall. This is the first time I have ever been 300 km/hr which you get up to on Conrod straight, but a totally unexpected feeling is when you go up the hill and down there are two sections where your stomach actually goes up into your throat like on a roller coaster, this happens on every lap. I have never concentrated so hard in my life. That evening I spent looking through video footage and studying data all night to find some pace. I finished the day in 30th place from 36 cars.

Friday qualifying was early in the morning and by three laps into it I had dropped six seconds and was sitting in 27th. I was getting faster every lap until I had a puncture coming up the hill. Luckily I was in a straight line up the hill and not coming down, but that was the end of my session. Over the weekend four drivers were airlifted to hospital due to big crashes in to the wall. No room for error.

That afternoon was our first race. I started in 28th and slowly worked up to 20th spot. I got stuck behind a slower driver and spent the entire race trying to get past. The place where I had a chance was on Conrod straight. I had stayed in 20th until the last lap and I passed him going through the chase. I was so excited I passed him that I was too busy looking in my mirrors to see where he was, forgot to brake hard enough and ran off the end of the road and through the dirt at the end of Conrod. I lost three places and finished 23rd.



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Saturday Race two was the first time I have ever been nervous in a race car. We were sitting on the start grid with a dry track and dry tyres and out of nowhere heavy rain began to fall and the entire bottom section of the track was wet. Racing V8 Supercars in the wet is hard with wet tyres let alone on dry tyres at Bathurst. We started under a safety car and I actually made up spots very easily in the wet much to my surprise. I ran around the entire race in 17th until the last lap up the hill I didn't cover my line well enough and one car pushed me close to the wall and I had to back off. This cost me drive up the hill and three cars got past me. I finished in 20th and 20th for the round.

I am still sitting in 20th for the series, my goal of 15th overall this year might be out of reach now but I should move up into the high teens by the end of the next race.

The next and final race is at Oran Park in Sydney on 5th December 2008.

James Bergmuller

