

BY JEFF ZURSCHMEIDE

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On the podium after Sunday's 50th annual Rose Cup race at Portland International Raceway: (from left) Brian Richards, winner Matt Crandall and Robert Holden.

Matt Crandall of Milwaukie had just one major obstacle to overcome Sunday before he could put his name on the Rose Cup trophy – his father-in-law, Nick Fluge.

Crandall and Fluge were the dominant drivers going into the 50th annual race at Portland International Raceway, both driving Roush-powered Mustangs with about 850 horsepower.

Both men wanted to place their names on the coveted 50th position on the Rose Cup trophy, and 25 other drivers began the day with the same idea.

Crandall and Fluge qualified first and second for the race, followed by 1993-1994 Rose Cup winner Brian Richards, who pulled his Chevy Camaro out of mothballs, and Robert Holden of Woodinville, Wash., in a bright orange Corvette.

"I was up all night worrying about what was going to break," Crandall said.

Crandall made a good start and claimed the first major goal of the race – he was leading as the field went into Portland's critical Turn 1 at the Festival Curves, with Fluge tied to his rear bumper.

The pair extended their lead on the competition in just a few laps.

The only challenge to Crandall's dominance came on the fifth lap, when Fluge executed a daring pass, again on the entrance to Turn 1.

"I saw him coming, and it was fair, so I let him by," Crandall said. "And there was a lot of the race left, so it wasn't that big a deal. Actually, I don't like leading – I'd rather be in second. The races go a lot longer when you're leading."

With the positions now reversed, Crandall was chasing Fluge and looking for an opening, when disaster struck.

"He (Fluge) was going into Turn 7, and this big puff of smoke came out," Crandall said. "It was the power-steering pump, and with the big tires on these cars, without the power steering it's just impossible to turn."

Fluge struggled his car into the pits and left the track wide open for Crandall.

But the race had one more twist that gave other drivers a chance – a full-course caution brought out the pace car 30 minutes into the 45-minute race. The field bunched up behind Crandall, with Richards and Holden on his tail. If any move was going to change the results, it would have to happen at the restart.

“I was just focused on trying to chase him down, but I made a few mistakes,” Richards said. “I got on the gas too hard and got a little sideways. I gave Rob Holden some good scenery.”

Once the restart was settled, Crandall drove a smooth and conservative race to the checkered flag in the event organized by the Portland Rose Festival Association and the Sports Car Club of America.

The podium ceremony was heavy on the history of the event, with past winners Todd Harris (2008), Brian Richards (1993, 1994), six-time winner Steve Hodge, seven-time winner Monte Shelton and Jerry Grant, winner of the first two Rose Cup races in 1961 and 1962 on hand to share the moment.

“From watching past winners like Todd Harris and Steve Hodge run this race, I just wanted to be up here. I just wish Nick (Fluge) was up here with me,” Crandall said.

“I’m very proud of Matt,” Fluge said. “He drove a great race. I thought he was the outstanding driver of the day. I have no regrets.”

In addition to the Rose Cup, the Rose Festival awarded the Wemme Trophy to Portland racing icon Norm Daniels. The Wemme Trophy commemorates the 1909 road race between Portland and Gresham and is presented each year to an outstanding driver in the SCCA Vintage race. Daniels raced the same Chevy Camaro in the Vintage event and in the Rose Cup race this year.

