



Professional Touring Car Racing Made Affordable

How Pink Ribbon Racing Won the 2018 USTCC Championship in Lexus.

Pink Ribbon Racing fell into United States Touring Car Championship (USTCC) competition almost by accident in 2018. When driver Nik Romano bought a 2001 Lexus IS300 on craigslist for \$3000, it was completely stock, had an automatic transmission, and was, as Nik discovered, an incredibly good daily driver. He had been wanting to turn one into a race car for a number of years. He and JJ Chen of Pink Ribbon Racing had been talking about partnering up for a season of NASA racing in the new ST5 class. USTCC was on their radar, but being a Southern California based team, they originally opted to go with the local series.

Starting a race build from scratch is a big job, especially when you don't have a shop, and even more so when the car being used is not commonly found at the racetrack; any development work would have to be done without any help. The work began in Nik's driveway; starting with general maintenance, then moving on to stripping down the interior and gaining familiarity with the drivetrain and suspension design. A small group of close friends, who would later become the team, put in work after hours as often as possible. The car would bounce between several driveways, home garages, and even an extra space storage unit (with the doors closed to avoid being asked to leave) to have the racing seat and other safety equipment fitted, as well as the sunroof removed, race shocks and springs, and FIGS Engineering suspension components installed. With the totally stock body and wheels, it was still easy to drive the car from destination to destination without garnering any unwanted attention. This included a drive all the way from LA to Sacramento and back, to have the roll cage fabricated and installed by Kontrolle Engineering. The automatic was swapped out for a factory 5 speed manual, and a Cusco LSD was installed at Indotech Motorsports, who would continue to be a big supporter all year.

It took about a year to get the car to a point where it was ready to hit the track for the first time. There was a list of adjustments to be made, but the initial testing was promising, even on the set of used Craigslist-found slicks it was on. With the NASA season fast approaching, Patrick Chio from SpeedSF track events, a longtime friend of Nik's, got in touch to offer support to the team to be his teammate in USTCC. Patrick would run the Touring Car (TC) class, and Nik and PRR would run in Sportsman (SP) to fight for points in the Escort Radar Top Team championship. Running two series in the same year in the same car is, basically, a terrible idea: it's twice the wear-and-tear on the car with half the time in between events to maintain it and make improvements. It's also a lot more money when you factor in travel, hotels, food, race tires, and other expenses. When all was said and done, PRR likely ran with the tightest budget on the entire grid in USTCC: they would have to make a little go a long way, but they were confident in their car, driver, and team.



The USTCC season started off as strong as could be hoped for, with a great battle between last year's champion, Tom Pitre, in damp conditions at Thunderhill Raceway in Willows, CA. The two swapped for the lead a few times, but at the end the Lexus would take the checkered flag. Race 1 set the tone for the next few races, with a commanding lead at races 2 and 3 at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, CA and Sonoma Raceway in Sonoma, CA, respectively. Another of the competitors, a BMW being driven by Edgar Lau, was getting some major upgrades however, and would prove to be an even bigger challenge in the races to come.

The final four rounds were all hotly contested battles between the Lexus and BMW. The early race wins allowed PRR to be strategic with where they pushed hard and where they didn't, which was especially important with the NASA regional and national championships on the line as well. Each race was a battle of strengths, the Lexus nimbler through the turns and the BMW with more straight line speed. By the final race back at Thunderhill, the championship could be won by a number of different drivers in the large SP field depending on finishing positions. In the end, the consistency, strategy, and speed of Pink Ribbon Racing and their Lexus IS300 would win out and take the championship in their debut season, against a field of veterans. They would go on to win three championships in that same car, all in 2018. An incredible year for a car nobody saw coming.

Nik and Pink Ribbon Racing would like to thank SpeedSF, Indotech Motorsports, Cusco USA, Figs Engineering, Swift Springs, BC Racing, Counterspace Garage, Option Lab Wheels, and TrackSpec Motorsports, as well as family and friends for the support in the 2018 season.



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