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## ARM CHAIR RACE DIRECTOR – PWC @ COTA

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We're bringing back the Arm Chair Race Director series and starting off with this past weekend's Pirelli World Challenge season opener from Circuit of the Americas in the weirdly cool Austin, Texas. We'll be discussing the race weekends as a whole, get into a little nitty-gritty detail of the races, the coverage, etc. This series is not meant as a direct critique of the race officials for any series we'll be talking about, but some issues may come up, so let's get into it.



First I want to talk about the atmosphere at the track. This was my first time at COTA and I thought it put on beautiful racing for all classes – GT, GTS and the Touring Cars – a great circuit overall for racing. But from a viewing standpoint, I was left a little disappointed, especially with the track monitors turned off everywhere except the main straight. There are a lot of great sections to watch the cars from, but the complex as a whole feels very industrial, (a little too F1 IMO), and for a series that is as welcoming and fan friendly as PWC, COTA, well, isn't all that welcoming. The crowd, while enthusiastic and very into the racing, was small, even though the venue claimed 30,000 people through the gates. Saturday appeared a little stronger, but I have a feeling the rain and cooler temps and minimal local promotion kept the crowds away on Sunday, something the series can't be too happy with. For the fans that were there, the racing was absolutely fantastic. Each race, from touring cars up to the big boys in GT, was packed with action, a lot of passing, and thrilling finishes. While I wasn't a fan of COTA from a viewing standpoint, I am a fan of it from a racing standpoint. It's a track that races well for all forms of race car – open wheel, prototypes and tintops. I think COTA could be a great place for PWC in the near future, but there are some improvements

that could be implemented, from both the series and venue, to really make this place pop. If the 2016 COTA rumblings I heard in the paddock come to fruition, we may not have to wait long.

For 2015, the series race officials have gone to a three member committee and for the most part, did a pretty good job in race control. There was very little caution time (thanks to the drivers for *mostly* respectful driving as well), and they avoided any major on and off track drama. There were a few teams and drivers I spoke to that were a little unhappy with the consistency in some calls, exceeding track limits specifically, especially in the GTS classes. In the included pictures, multiple teams and drivers mentioned this "racing line" was a common one, and with it not getting called for a penalty, shaved seconds off each lap and costing some teams shots on the podium. To be fair, the cars below were not the only ones making this line. There were also some questions and confusion from teams about a few drive through penalties given and if the series "gave them the option" to serve the penalty or if it was officially given. For the most part, I think Brian Till and committee did a fantastic job for race weekend #1, although with some room for improvement, and as the committee and drivers start to get a feel for how each party will work together, it will only get better.



This post has had an unintentionally negative tone so far, but that is not the theme for the start World Challenge's 26<sup>th</sup> season. There were FAR more positives this weekend that should not be overshadowed by a few tick marks. The driver lineups and guest appearances were fantastic – Madison Snow, Guy Cosmo and others got to dip their toes in the PWC waters over the weekend. Having Kevin Estre, Nicky Catsburg, Olivier Beretta, Ryan Eversley, Chris Dyson and JD Davison join Johnny O Connell, Ryan Dalziel, Mike Skeen, Andy Pilgrim, Peter Cunningham, James Sofronas and Butch Leitzinger is truly incredible. Seeing the young talent on display – Michael Lewis, Alec Udell, Nate Stacy, Jason Cherry and many more shows the strength in the ladder system PWC is developing and what to expect over the next few seasons. The machines on display are second to none (and not just in the GT classes!). The new Camaro Z28 in GTS is incredibly cool, the McLaren 650S is amazing, the new Caddy is gorgeous, vicious and wicked all at the same time, the Nissan GTR is just crazy, the list goes on and on. With all of these factors coming together, how can anyone not be happy with what the series is putting on display? You have to really nitpick to be upset as a fan of racing in North America right now especially with what World Challenge is offering you. The series should be very happy with how this new era of Pirelli World Challenge kicked off, but with a few tweaks still

needed, I expect them to be diligent and thorough with their improvements to keep the series moving forward. These are still early days in this new-look Pirelli World Challenge, but WC Vision has set the ground work for this racing flower to really start blooming.

### **Weekend awards (winners will receive nothing but a hearty handshake from me)**

***The "What did I just see?!" Pass:*** Nicky Catsburg on the outside of Mike Skeen at turn 2 in race 2....in the rain

***The "Holy Crap! How'd they do that?!"***: Ryan Eversley – GT/GTA/GT Cup Race 2. With the weekend not going as planned for RealTime Racing, watching Ryan pedal that car through the rain to a 5<sup>th</sup> place finish was extremely impressive.

***The Weekend Dominator:*** Johan Schwartz – Sweeping the top step of the TCB podium

***The Race Wizard:*** Kevin Estre – GT/GTA/GT Cup Race 2.