

RACE 10 — NISMO ALONE Detroit Blacklist Underground | Event #10 of 12 Location: I-94 Expressway, eastbound — closed stretch between Gratiot and Conner Avenue exits Conditions: April, 2:00 AM | Clear sky, 19°C, dry, light wind, four kilometres of closed highway Winner: Ace — Nismo 270

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The highway event was the Blacklist's oldest format and its most honest.

No navigation, no circuit strategy, no team registration, no adjudication edge. Four kilometres of closed interstate running straight and wide and flat under the kind of night sky that a highway corridor produces — ambient light from the city on both sides, the expressway itself a dark river between lit banks, the road surface smooth in the way that high-traffic infrastructure becomes smooth over time, the imperfections distributed so evenly that they averaged into something that read as nothing. A drag of maximum extent, maximum visibility, maximum commitment.

The highway had been cleared by means the Blacklist did not document. It was clear. That was the operational fact.

Eight cars had entered the highway event. The entry was the largest since Woodward — the format drew a different participant profile than the circuit events. People who had held back from navigational races, from tight-grid events, from the complexity of the figure-8. People who knew exactly one thing about themselves as drivers: that they were fast in a straight line. The highway was for them.

Viktor Drach was here. Naturally, specifically, inevitably — this was the format that had produced his opening Blacklist win and for which the ZL1 had been fundamentally built. He did not park beside anyone. He lined up at lane five of the eight-car grid and left a lane on each side of him empty, which had the effect of making him look isolated and had the additional effect of being factually true — nobody wanted to line up next to the supercharged Camaro because lining up next to the supercharged Camaro on a highway meant spending four kilometres in Viktor Drach's wake turbulence.

Reyes was here. The Corvette Z06's flat-plane V8 would find its full register on a four-kilometre straight in a way it had never quite been able to on the circuit events. Reyes had entered the highway event twice before across her Blacklist career and had placed first once and second once. She approached the start line with the composure of someone who had calculated her odds and found them acceptable.

Kade Mors, GT-R, fourth consecutive event.

A Bugatti Chiron Sport. This was the event's anomaly — a car that existed in an entirely different financial and engineering category from everything around it, entered by a driver whose handle was "Margin" and whose prior Blacklist participation was limited to three events, none of them highway format. The Chiron was so far beyond the specification of every other car in the field that its mere presence recalibrated the event's entire competitive landscape. The crowd, when it arrived, spent the first ten minutes simply standing in front of the Chiron's nose and taking photographs.

Ace had arrived alone. Not because the DB11 was elsewhere — Mai and Shammy were staged at the 2.5-kilometre mark, parked on the service road parallel to the expressway, watching from a position that would give them the mid-event view. This was agreed before the race, explicitly agreed, no ambiguity in the conversation. This event was Ace's. One car, one driver, one straight.

She stood beside the Nismo 270 at the start line and looked down four kilometres of empty highway.

It was the cleanest view she'd had in the entire Blacklist series — no corners, no building walls, no container stacks or industrial vents. Just the road and its extent, lit dimly by the ambient city, going where it went without complication.

She breathed.

The Chiron's W16 started and the sound of it on the expressway was architectural — it rearranged the acoustic space of the highway corridor in a way that no other car in the field had managed. The crowd stepped back from it involuntarily, then recovered, then took more photographs.

Ace looked at it. Made one calculation. Filed the result.

The green.

Eight cars launched on four kilometres of American interstate at two in the morning and the sound of it was the sound of something that had no business existing and was happening anyway. The Chiron went to the front in the first hundred metres — there was no argument available about this, no tactical response to 1500 horsepower making its decision at full commitment. The crowd at the start line watched it simply disappear, the gap between the Chiron and the second car extending from present to enormous in a space of road that took under four seconds to cross.

Viktor Drach was second. The ZL1's supercharger doing its work, the gap to the Chiron acknowledged and Viktor's attention redirected from that car — which he could not address — to everything behind him, which he could. The field behind the ZL1 was going to be fought for.

Reyes took third in the first two hundred metres, the Z06 flat-plane making its case on the long acceleration. Kade was fourth, the GT-R running well within the first kilometre before its power-to-weight ratio would begin to generate the terminal velocity difference between it and the supercar entries.

And Ace was fifth.

Fifth at launch was, by any standard analysis of a four-kilometre drag, a difficult position to recover from. The cars ahead were all genuinely fast. Three of them — Viktor, Reyes, the Chiron — were fast in ways that had already been demonstrated across multiple events. The GT-R was fast in ways that four consecutive appearances had confirmed.

The Nismo was fifth and it was not trying to be first at the 200-metre mark. Ace had made a specific decision at the start line, in the moment before the green, based on the calculation she'd made while looking at the Chiron: maximum entry speed was not the entirety of a four-kilometre drag. The early leaders would reach their terminal velocity profiles and then the event became a question of how far they could sustain them against their specific aerodynamic and mechanical constraints.

The Chiron had no constraints at this speed. That was accepted.

Viktor's ZL1 had a supercharger that was working at its absolute limit from the 500-metre mark onward — efficient, powerful, running at the top of its tuned capability.

The Z06 was at full capability from 700 metres.

The GT-R was at its ceiling from 400 metres.

The Nismo 270 reached its ceiling at 900 metres.

Later — not at the time, but later — the Blacklist's data-minded participants would discuss the highway event and use different language. Some would call it the patience race. Some would call it the ceiling race. Shammy, standing on the service road at the 2.5-kilometre mark, watching the cars approach in sequence, said nothing for the first three kilometres and then said: "Now," to nobody, half a second before Ace made her move.

Because at approximately 2.8 kilometres, three events occurred in close sequence.

First: the ZL1's supercharger reached the edge of its sustained output curve. Not a failure — Viktor's car was mechanically sound — but the characteristic inflection point of a supercharger at maximum continuous load, where the power delivery became marginally less efficient, the additional output per unit of throttle dropping at a rate that was physically unavoidable. The ZL1 didn't slow. It simply stopped accelerating.

Second: the Z06 reached its own terminal profile, the flat-plane V8 at 8000 RPM in top gear doing exactly what it was built to do and nothing more.

Third: the Nismo 270 had not reached its ceiling yet.

Ace brought the car up in the final 1.2 kilometres of available road with the reserve she'd been carrying since the start. The Nismo's ceiling was higher than anyone who had watched it across ten events had been given specific reason to know — the car had been run conservatively at the lower straight-line events, circuit-optimized for the hairpin and figure-8 formats, and on the highway was encountering, for the first time, a stretch of road long enough for its actual power profile to fully deploy.

The gap to fourth — Kade's GT-R — closed first. The GT-R had reached its own ceiling at 400 metres and had been sustaining it since, running an honest pace against the field with no reserve. The Nismo passed it at 2.9 kilometres, the gap reducing from three car lengths to zero in the final 400 metres of racing with an authority that made Kade look twice in his mirror because it arrived faster than mirrors were designed to communicate.

Third next. Reyes saw the Nismo coming from 3.1 kilometres onward — it arrived in her mirror and grew at a rate that was, for a flat-plane Corvette running its maximum, not acceptable. She pushed the Z06 to find more and there wasn't more to find, the engine already at its ceiling, and the Nismo came through her gap and was past her and gone before the 3.4-kilometre mark.

Viktor Drach at 3.4 kilometres. Viktor was looking in his mirror at the same time he was processing the reality of what he was seeing, and what he was seeing was the Nismo 270 that had spent nine events being compact and precise and controlled and occasionally fast in context-specific ways now arriving on the I-94 expressway at a velocity that had no obvious antecedent in what he'd observed from it before.

He pushed the supercharger. He found the fractional additional output at the very edge of its sustainable range. He gave everything the ZL1 had to give.

Ace pulled alongside at 3.6 kilometres.

For the next 200 metres, the two cars ran side by side — the black supercharged Camaro and the deep-matte Nismo, four hundred metres of American highway, the crowd at the finish line beginning to register what was happening from their position and the sound of it arriving before the cars did.

The Nismo moved ahead at 3.8 kilometres. Not dramatically. Not with visible excess. Simply ahead.

She crossed the finish line first by three quarters of a car length.

The crowd at the finish — two hundred people, the largest in any single location across the Blacklist series — experienced the event with a volume and duration that the highway corridor caught and extended, the sound bouncing off the road surface and the overpasses and coming back at a different angle, and for several seconds the expressway was an instrument playing something back.

Viktor Drach crossed second. He brought the ZL1 to a stop on the run-off and sat in it for a moment. Then he got out and stood beside the car and waited. This was not a defeat he needed to process urgently. It was a fact he needed to integrate.

The Chiron had crossed the finish line first by sixteen car lengths. “Margin” had won the event in an absolute sense and collected the cash and departed without communication, which was his established pattern.

By the field-within-the-field — by the Blacklist's internal standings, which separated the hypercar outlier and evaluated the competitive class — Ace was first.

The Nismo 270 sat on the run-off, engine returning to idle. Ace stepped out into the highway night, the expressway empty ahead and behind, the city visible on both sides as a continuous low glow.

From the service road parallel to the highway, she could see headlights. The DB11 was there, parked at the observation point, its lights on. She couldn't see Mai or Shammy from this distance. She looked anyway.

The cash envelope arrived. She took it. Put it in the car.

Third win. The event that had no complexity, no navigation, no team strategy. Just the road and the car and the question of what the car could actually do when you gave it space to answer.

The answer, apparently, had not been previously announced.

Later, at the staging garage, Shammy sat in the folding chair she'd brought specifically because nothing in the garage was built for 195 centimetres, and she said: “We didn't know you had that much left in it.”

Ace looked at her. “I knew.”

A pause.

“The ceiling,” Shammy said. “You were holding it.”

“All series.”

Mai set down the event schematic she'd been reviewing. “For a highway event.”

“For when we needed it,” Ace said. She said it without emphasis, as a plain statement of preparation carried forward from the first event to the tenth, and the two of them — Mai and Shammy both — understood that this was simply how she operated: not withholding, not deceptive, but building toward the moment where the reserve would matter.

It had mattered tonight.

Two events left.

The highway sat outside, empty and long and honest, doing nothing in particular.

The city went on around it the way it always did. —

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