

RACE 11 — STORM BORN Detroit Blacklist Underground | Event #11 of 12 Location: Corktown — Michigan Avenue to the old Tiger Stadium site, extended circuit Conditions: April, 9:17 PM | Active thunderstorm, heavy rain, 16°C, 45 km/h gusts, surface standing water Winner: Mai & Shammy — DB11, steel-blue

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The storm arrived before the cars did.

It came off Lake Erie in the late afternoon with the particular authority of April weather that has been building pressure all day and finally commits — not a gradual overcast or a cautious drizzle but a full structural event, the sky going from grey to dark grey to the specific green-black of a serious Great Lakes storm in the space of forty minutes. By 7 PM, the rain was heavy. By 8 PM, the lightning was continuous enough that the crowd at the Corktown staging area had stopped counting the interval between flash and thunder.

Seven of the eight registered cars showed up anyway. This was expected by nobody except the people who had registered them.

The Corktown circuit used Michigan Avenue as its long straight, turning south into the grid around the old Tiger Stadium site — a loop that ran through a neighbourhood of mixed renovation and maintained vacancy, the stadium's ghost geography still shaping the street layout around a footprint that existed now only in the city's memory and its roads. The circuit was 2.9 kilometres per lap, run for three laps: tight, fast, wet.

The weather had eliminated one entry and filtered the crowd to approximately ninety people, many of them sheltering under the overhang of a bar on Michigan Avenue that had closed for the evening but left its canopy lights on, which gave the staging area an amber glow that the rain transformed into something that looked, in photographs taken that night, like a scene from a place that had not entirely agreed to be real.

Reyes was here. She had a wet-weather tire setup that she'd mounted in the afternoon, which told the field that she'd been watching the forecast. Viktor Drach was here, which told the field that Viktor Drach did not care about forecasts. Kade Mors, four events running, the GT-R's all-wheel drive making the wet circuit a more manageable proposition than it would have been for a rear-drive entry. The Lotus Emira, back for its second appearance, its driver having apparently made peace with the fact that narrow city circuits were this series' primary language. A local entrant — a Subaru WRX STI in gunmetal, running wide all-season rubber, the driver looking at the weather with an expression that suggested this was exactly the kind of race they'd been waiting for.

The DB11 arrived last. It always arrived last. This had become a pattern so consistent that the crowd had begun to expect it, and the steel-blue Aston Martin coming through the standing water on Michigan Avenue while rain beat on its roof was the signal that the event was about to begin.

Shammy stepped out of the DB11 into the rain and did not put a hood up. She was 195 centimetres of storm-attuned elemental standing in an active thunderstorm in the middle of Corktown, and the rain moved around her in a way that was subtly wrong — not visually dramatic, nothing that would photograph clearly, but those close enough noticed that the rain seemed to find her differently than it found the other people on the street. She stood in it for a full thirty seconds with her eyes closed.

The crowd at the bar canopy watched her and said nothing.

She opened her eyes. Got back in the car. "Wet glass," she said.

"I know," Mai said.

"The Michigan Avenue straight — the gutter system on the north side is blocked. The water is sheeting across the inside of the straight from the kerb at approximately the 400-metre mark."

"Depth?"

"Three, maybe four centimetres at peak. Moving, not pooled. The left lane is more exposed than the right."

"Then we run the right lane on the straight."

"Yes." A pause. "But the right lane through the stadium section has a drain cover that's sitting proud — maybe half a centimetre, but at speed and in the wet it's enough to unsettle the rear."

"How far past the apex?"

"About twelve metres."

"Then we apex early and straighten before the drain cover."

Shammy looked at her. "You're going to apex early in the wet."

"By twelve metres."

A silence. "That's precise."

"That's what I need," Mai said, and started moving toward the grid.

The event ran on a modified signal in the rain — the standard green LED rig had been covered with a waterproof housing that one of the marshals had produced from the back of a van, which was the kind of preparation that confirmed the Blacklist's operational evolution over twelve events. The rain hammered on it. The green still read clean.

Seven cars launched into the Corktown storm.

The Michigan Avenue straight in 45 km/h gusts with standing water across the inside lane was an immediate eliminator of confidence. The Subaru went wide at the 300-metre mark — not a crash, a controlled understeer that cost it two positions without ending its race. The Lotus tried the inside lane and the water sheet at 400 metres unsettled its front end at exactly the moment Shammy had predicted, and the driver spent valuable time recovering rather than pressing.

Reyes ran the right lane on the straight. Her wet-weather tires found grip in the surface water with the efficiency of rubber designed for exactly this. She went to the front at the first bend.

Viktor Drach ran the left lane and hit the water sheet at 400 metres and the ZL1 — rear-wheel drive, massive power, not on wet-weather rubber — produced a moment that the people watching from the bar canopy would describe for weeks. The Camaro went sideways in a controlled rotation that Viktor managed through reflex and the particular stubbornness of someone who has no intention of lifting, and it came out of the correction still third, Viktor's expression invisible behind the glass but his body language through the chassis communicating that he considered this situation acceptable.

The DB11 ran the right lane.

It ran the right lane at a speed that the wet circuit didn't obviously support, and it ran it cleanly, the V12's power delivered through Shammy's atmospheric awareness of exactly where the road's grip was and wasn't and how the standing water was distributed in real time — because the distribution was changing. The storm was not static. The water sheet was moving, the gutter blockage feeding its edge further across the lane as the rain continued, and Shammy was reading its advance the way she read all atmospheric events: not as a fixed variable but as a live one.

“Two metres left,” she said at the 300-metre mark of the first lap.

Mai moved two metres right on the straight.

“One metre right,” she said at the exit of the stadium section's first bend.

Mai moved one metre right, and the DB11 cleared the proud drain cover with twelve metres of straightened car, exactly as planned, the rear finding its grip and holding it.

Third lap first corner. The field was: Reyes first, Kade second, DB11 third, Viktor fourth, Lotus fifth. The top five had managed the wet circuit with varying degrees of success — Reyes methodically, Kade by virtue of the AWD GT-R's natural wet resilience, the DB11 by the method described, Viktor by the brute willingness to manage what the car gave him regardless of whether it was supposed to give it.

The gap between first and second was two car lengths. Between second and third, one and a half.

Second lap. The rain intensified at the midpoint — April storms in Detroit did not maintain a steady state. This one decided to increase its output for approximately six minutes, which corresponded almost exactly to the second lap of the Corktown circuit. The standing water on Michigan Avenue went from sheet to flow, the drainage system overwhelmed, the road surface becoming something that required active management rather than careful navigation.

Reyes maintained first but the gap narrowed. Wet weather tires on a flooded straight still required speed reduction — physics did not offer exceptions for preparation. Kade's AWD held second but at a cost: the GT-R's traction control was intervening frequently, the system doing its job correctly but creating a rhythm interruption at the exit of each bend that wasn't present on the dry circuit.

The DB11 closed the gap to second in the second lap. Not by attacking — by sustaining. Mai's lap time through the storm's peak was consistent in a way that the conditions should not have permitted, and the consistency was Shammy's: she was reading the storm's specific events — the gusts, the rain pulses, the water distribution shifts on the straight — and communicating them in real time, and Mai was executing on that communication without the fractional hesitation that would have occurred if she'd been reading the environment herself. Two systems, one decision, no latency.

Third lap. The final loop.

Reyes took Michigan Avenue in the rain with everything her wet-weather setup had built across two laps of temperature and learning. She was driving the lap of her race rather than defending a position — there was a clarity to it, a commitment to the remaining distance that was purely forward-looking. The Z06 on its wet rubber found grip in places the rain had obscured, and Reyes held first through the stadium section with the conviction of someone who had run this specific kind of race before.

The DB11 passed Kade's GT-R on the Michigan Avenue straight with a move that was, in the conditions, entirely unreasonable. The AWD advantage the GT-R carried did not help it on the outside of a straight-line pass when the car doing the passing had Shammy telling it exactly where the grip

was and a V12 that was running in a power register the rain had not managed to suppress. The DB11 went past the GT-R cleanly, no drama, the pass completing before Kade could make a defensive adjustment.

Second. One and a half car lengths behind Reyes. Final stadium section ahead.

The final stadium section was the circuit's most technical element in the dry. In the storm, it was a different event entirely: each corner an individual negotiation between the car's capabilities and the road's current state, the rain hitting the windscreen hard enough to require the wipers at full speed and still leaving gaps in visibility, the kerbs holding pools that needed to be read individually at each approach.

Mai ran the final section on memory and Shammy's voice. Not visual assessment — Shammy was tracking the road's state through the atmospheric sense that had no clean name, describing bend conditions as they approached each corner with enough lead time for Mai to set the car before the corner arrived. "Grip through this one, pool at exit." "The apex is clear, give it full commitment." "Brake ten metres later, the surface has drained."

The gap to Reyes closed to one car length by the penultimate corner.

The final corner. A right-hander onto the Michigan Avenue approach to the finish line, wide, cambered slightly outward, the rain hitting the apex with a directional bias from the northwest gust that pushed water across the inside of the corner in a pattern Shammy had been tracking for two laps.

"The inside is two centimetres deeper than it was on the first lap," Shammy said. "Stay centre."

Mai stayed centre. The DB11 came through the final corner at a speed that was, on a wet circuit, unreasonable in the way that things which happen regardless of reason are unreasonable. The car found its grip in the centre of the corner, the V12 picking up the straight in a surge of controlled power, and the gap to Reyes's Corvette on the final 300 metres of Michigan Avenue was the only remaining question.

The question closed.

The DB11 crossed the finish line alongside Reyes — and then, marginally, ahead. Marginally. The timing system recorded 0.3 seconds. Three tenths of a second, across three laps of Corktown in a thunderstorm, at the end of a race that should not have been possible to run at the pace they ran it.

The crowd under the bar canopy erupted into the rain. The lightning made a comment. Nobody listened to the lightning.

Reyes brought the Corvette to a stop and sat with the engine running for a moment, rain on the roof, the timing result visible on the adjudication marshal's board. Three tenths. She got out into the rain and stood beside her car with an expression that was specific and private and that she took some time to set aside before accepting the result with the professionalism that had defined her across the series.

The DB11 stopped on the run-off, wipers at full speed, rain still coming.

Shammy stepped out first. She stood in the thunderstorm with the same absence of complaint she'd demonstrated thirty minutes ago at the start, and looked at the finish line chalk dissolving in the rainwater, and the city around them glistening under the storm, and the lightning somewhere over the river making its regular announcement.

Mai stepped out beside her. Stood in the rain. Did not put a hood up because Shammy hadn't put a hood up and the symmetry of it felt correct.

"First time," Shammy said. It was the same sentence she'd used after event nine.

"Different first," Mai said.

"Yes." A pause. "Ours."

The rain came down between them and around them and the Corktown streets channelled it south toward the river, the city's drainage doing its best with what the storm was giving it. The bar canopy was emptying now, the crowd filtering out into the wet to find their cars, to tell each other what they'd seen.

Ace's Nismo appeared at the turn onto Michigan Avenue — she'd finished fifth, her dry-circuit precision finding its limits in the storm without Shammy's live atmospheric feed. She brought the car up alongside the DB11 and stepped out into the rain and stood with them.

Three people standing in a thunderstorm in Corktown.

"One left," Ace said.

"One left," Shammy agreed.

The rain didn't let up. The lightning kept its schedule. The storm was not finished with Detroit tonight, and Detroit, as usual, was not particularly concerned about that.

One event left. The Blacklist's final race.

Everything that had been built across eleven events was about to be asked what it was for. —

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