

RACE 03 — RIVER RUN Detroit Blacklist Underground | Event #3 of 12 Location: East Jefferson Avenue, Hart Plaza to the Ambassador Bridge approach Conditions: February, 10:15 PM | Clear sky, -6°C, dry surface, river wind 22 km/h northwest Winner: Ace — Nismo 270

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The Detroit River ran black and indifferent below the bridge approach, the Canadian shore a low orange smear of reflected light across the water. East Jefferson Avenue stretched west to east along the riverfront — four lanes of it, signals dark at this hour by arrangement that no one discussed openly, a corridor of urban architecture on one side and the cold open breath of the river on the other. It was, by any reasonable measure, a drag course built into the existing city. The city had not agreed to this. The city wasn't asked.

Five cars tonight.

The field was smaller than the Woodward Baptism had been — word had spread about who was running, and a smaller field in this circuit meant a higher calibre of entry. No padding. No optimistic turbo Civics making up the numbers. Five cars that each carried real intention, and five drivers who understood that the river wind would be a variable on East Jefferson, not background noise. It came off the water at a constant diagonal to the course and hit the broadside of anything moving at speed with enough force to require active management. This was not a fact that required commentary. It was simply weather, doing what weather did.

Viktor Drach was not here tonight. Sable was not here tonight. The two wins from previous races had come from names the Blacklist already knew — this event drew a slightly different rotation. A McLaren 720S in dark red, lightly modified but not overbuilt. A tuned Lamborghini Huracán running a wide-body kit that looked factory and wasn't. A stripped-out Shelby GT500, the kind that had been taken apart and rebuilt so many times it bore almost no resemblance to the production car except in silhouette. And two cars the crowd had learned to watch since the Blacklist began.

Ace lined the Nismo 270 up at position three. She'd been given the choice of lane and had taken the one closest to the river, which surprised the two drivers beside her and nobody who knew her. The river-side lane received the full weight of the northwest wind without any architectural break. Every other driver had positioned themselves where buildings or medians might offer a fractional degree of shelter.

Ace had positioned herself where the pressure was most honest.

In the lane beside her, one position over, the DB11 sat with its engine at idle warmth, Mai's hands loose on the wheel, Shammy's attention directed not at the road ahead but at the river itself — head slightly tilted, reading something in the air that arrived before the wind did. Her atmospheric awareness was not dramatic in this moment. It was quiet and functional, the way a barometer is functional.

"Sustained gusts will hit at the 600-metre mark and again at the underpass approach," she said.

"Timing?"

"The first one about four seconds after launch at race pace. The second — variable. Depends on the other cars' displacement in front of us." A pause. "It's alive tonight, the air."

Mai absorbed this. "Which means managing energy, not just speed."

“Yes.”

The Lamborghini revved twice — assertive, performative, the Huracán's V10 making the kind of sound designed to communicate threat through sheer acoustic weight. The McLaren answered with a sharper, higher note, less bass, more precision. The Shelby said nothing. Quiet cars were either slow or dangerous.

The signal tonight was an industrial flashlight, three flashes, the third being the start. The crowd on the sidewalk — smaller here than at prior events, maybe sixty people, spread along the route rather than concentrated at the line — waited with phones up and breath held.

One flash.

The Nismo 270 came up to temperature. Ace felt it reach the threshold she wanted — not maximum, not floored, the exact point where the powerplant was ready to deliver without lag. She had learned the car well enough by now that the communication was physical, through the column and the seat and the soles of her feet.

Two flashes.

The McLaren went to full rev hold. The Lamborghini followed. The Shelby dropped a gear below its hold point and let the engine bark. Mai brought the DB11 to its own threshold, the V12's resonance filling the interior with a bass note that was almost tactile.

Three.

The launch was clean across all five cars — no tire spin disasters, no false starts. They moved as a group for approximately the first eighty metres, which was the longest the field would hold that formation. The McLaren broke first, its mid-engine advantage off the line giving it a half-car lead that extended toward a full car by the 200-metre mark. The Lamborghini tried to answer and the answer wasn't quite there — the wide-body kit was not entirely working in its favour on this particular surface, something in the aerodynamic balance asking for more road than the width of East Jefferson provided.

Ace moved at the 200-metre mark.

Not the launch velocity she could have summoned — she hadn't burned everything at the line. She'd held something back deliberately, and that reserve came in now as a clean surge that moved the Nismo from fourth to second in a span that the crowd watching from the sidewalk would describe later, inaccurately, as instantaneous. The Nismo found the gap beside the McLaren and then moved past it in the pocket of slightly calmer air that ran just left of the lane's center, and the McLaren's driver, to his credit, recognized what had happened without being able to prevent it.

At 600 metres, the wind hit.

It arrived the way Shammy had described — not as a gust but as a presence, a lateral pressure that leaned on the Nismo's broadside with decisive force. Ace had been waiting for it. She'd been waiting since she chose the river-side lane, since she listened to Shammy's read from two lanes over with enough attention to internalize the timing. The correction she made was small — not a fight against the wind, a negotiation with it, the car redirected rather than wrestled — and she came through the wind event without losing meaningful position or momentum.

Behind her, the McLaren went slightly wide. Not dangerously, but enough. The Lamborghini went wider, catching the same gust later than expected, the driver correcting with more wheel than the

situation required, which cost velocity.

The DB11 moved through the wind zone in third and lost almost nothing. Mai had timed it precisely, the V12's mass working in her favour at the critical moment, Shammy's hand braced lightly on the door panel as the air found them and released them again.

The underpass approach.

The Nismo reached it first. The variable gust Shammy had mentioned — the one that depended on the displacement of the cars ahead — hit Ace from a slightly different angle than the first, coming off the concrete geometry of the underpass structure itself rather than clean off the river. She felt it before it arrived, some edge of instinct that lived below conscious processing, and adjusted her line left by perhaps half a metre, threading through the gap between the central lane marking and the lip of the underpass wall.

Clean. Through. The other side.

She crossed the chalk at Hart Plaza first by two and a half car lengths, the Nismo 270 carrying its speed through the finish like it intended to keep going well past the point where the race had ended. She brought it down gradually, feeling the machine settle, and brought it to a stop on the plaza's outer edge with the river at her back.

First win.

She sat with that for a moment in the quiet of the idling engine. The crowd was audible in the distance — approval, surprise, the particular register of a crowd recalibrating. Behind her, the McLaren and the DB11 crossed the line in close succession, the Shelby fourth.

Mai pulled the DB11 alongside. Both windows came down — Mai's on the driver's side, Shammy leaning across from the passenger seat, her silhouette framed by the glow of the far shore.

“Clean run,” Mai said. Not effusive. The fact of it stated plainly.

Ace looked at her. Said nothing. But something in the set of her expression acknowledged it — a breath released, a fraction of tension that had been carried since Woodward now set down.

“The first wind correction was textbook,” Shammy added, and she sounded genuinely pleased in the way she always did when something went exactly as the physics said it should. “You felt it before it hit.”

“You told me when it was coming,” Ace said.

Shammy smiled. “You still had to do the rest.”

The cash envelope arrived, pressed through the window by a hand belonging to a face Ace didn't look at. She took it, set it on the dash, and looked out at the river for a moment — black water, far lights, the long cold surface of it carrying nothing but its own movement.

Three races. One win.

The Blacklist had opened a door. What came through it would depend entirely on what they did with the space they'd just earned. —

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