

RACE 05 — EIGHT MILE CROSSING Detroit Blacklist Underground | Event #5 of 12 Location: Eight Mile Road, Van Dyke Avenue to Gratiot Avenue — east corridor gauntlet Conditions: March, 11:03 PM | Partly cloudy, 6°C, dry surface, light commercial traffic cleared Winner: Mai & Shammy — DB11, steel-blue

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Eight Mile Road was the city's membrane.

One side was Detroit. The other side was not Detroit. The road itself was neither — a six-lane arterial that had been drawn along the northern city limit with the certainty of a border post, and which had accumulated over decades every kind of commercial pressure that a boundary road attracts: the neon-lit storefronts, the used car lots, the fast-food grids, the gas stations at intervals like punctuation. Tonight, from Van Dyke Avenue east to Gratiot — approximately 3.8 kilometres of it — traffic had been routed off by a combination of flaggers in visibility vests claiming a water main incident. This had worked. The road was clear.

The run was a single drag with one hard constraint: at the 2.5-kilometre mark, a dogleg turn — left, approximately 35 degrees, introduced by a jog in the road geometry where the boundary line itself had been compromised by old survey error — broke the straight-line character of the event and introduced a handling element that no amount of raw horsepower could substitute for. You needed to be fast and then you needed to be precise, in quick succession, and the transition between those two demands was where this race would be decided.

Six cars. The field had shifted again — some of the prior participants absent, replaced by two entries that the crowd, now growing with each successive Blacklist event, did not fully recognise. An Alfa Romeo Giulia QV, heavily modified, in the kind of Italian red that looked aggressive even standing still. A Dodge Viper ACR — the track-package version, wide, low, carrying its aero load with blunt authority.

Viktor Drach was back. The ZL1 sat at the far right lane looking exactly as it had on Woodward — black, unmarked, the supercharger audible at idle as a whisper that promised it would not remain a whisper for long. He'd won the opening event. He'd sat out two since. His return communicated something, though what precisely it communicated remained, as with Viktor, a matter of reading between the lines.

Ace and the Nismo 270 were at centre-left.

The DB11 was at the far left lane, which was the outside of the dogleg turn. This was not ideal geometry for a car of the Aston Martin's width. Most drivers looking at the grid arrangement would have said the far left lane was a disadvantage — wider turning radius, longer path through the dogleg, more time lost in the transition. Mai had chosen it without hesitation when the lanes were offered, which meant she had a reason, and the reason was Shammy.

"The outside of the corner," Shammy said, as they settled into the lane, "has cleaner air at the exit."

"Confirmed," Mai said.

"And the surface in the inside lane has a crack run — maintenance repair, maybe two centimetres proud. At speed it'll affect any car that takes the inside line." She paused. "The Viper will take the inside."

"The Viper's aero needs the inside radius," Mai agreed.

“Then we're fine.”

The Alfa Romeo revved at the grid — a sound that was sharp and Italian and entirely too enthusiastic, which occasionally corresponded to genuine speed and occasionally corresponded to anxiety and there was no reliable way to tell until the lights dropped. The Viper's ACR package sat on its aero kit with the composure of something that had been designed to produce downforce rather than simply go fast in a straight line. At the dogleg it would have significant structural advantage — if its driver knew the road.

The light rig went green.

Eight Mile launched.

The ZL1 went to the front almost immediately. Viktor's starts were not elegant — they were decisive, which was not the same thing. The supercharger opened at full output from the second the wheels bit and the Camaro went down the left-centre of the road with the mechanical certainty of something that had sorted its priorities a long time ago. By 400 metres it was clear. By 600 metres it was gone in the sense that the gap was no longer a gap that could be closed by anything except mathematics working hard in the remaining distance.

Ace was running second. The Nismo moving with its characteristic absence of drama, threading the space between Viktor's wake and the Alfa Romeo's increasingly urgent attempt to establish third position. The Viper was running fourth, its driver managing the aero loads methodically, the wide car using the width of its lane entirely without apology.

The DB11 was fifth.

For 2.4 kilometres, the DB11 was fifth.

Shammy sat with her window open a precise two inches — not enough to affect aerodynamics meaningfully, enough for the air to come to her. She was monitoring the gap between their position and the dogleg with the kind of attention that existed below the line of conscious strategy, tracking the rate of closure the way her kind tracked weather fronts: not by calculation but by arrival, the event registering before the mechanism was fully articulated.

“Coming,” she said.

Mai's hands shifted on the wheel — grip to grip, a micro-adjustment, weight transferred, the DB11's front end responding before the turn was visible.

The dogleg appeared.

Viktor hit it first. The ZL1 went through the transition at a speed that was impressive and cost him — not catastrophically, but the supercharger's momentum pushed the rear slightly wide and Viktor corrected with the kind of automotive reflex that came from doing exactly this kind of thing repeatedly over years, and he came out the other side with his lead reduced by perhaps a half second. Still first. Still gone.

Ace went through second. The Nismo took the 35-degree transition at what appeared to be an improbable speed, the car's line through the corner so precise that it used exactly the road it needed and no more, and she came out clean, second by a margin that was now closer to Viktor than it had been at the two-kilometre mark because Viktor had lost something in the dogleg and Ace had not.

The Alfa Romeo hit the crack repair in the inside lane exactly where Shammy had said it would be. The rear end stepped out — not terminal, not a crash, but a correction that absorbed a full second and deposited the car back into third by survival rather than skill.

The Viper came through on the inside line, its aero kit pushing it into the corner, and the ACR package earned its reputation in that moment — the car used its downforce to rotate through the dogleg in a way that defied its own width, and it came out of the corner fourth, which had been its position going in, but moving at a rate of acceleration that was going to make the final kilometre interesting.

The DB11 came through the dogleg on the outside line and did not lose time.

This was the thing. On the outside of a 35-degree bend, a car as wide as an Aston Martin DB11 should lose time — the radius was longer, the path was longer, the physics of it demanded a price. The price was not paid. The DB11 came through the corner and accelerated out of it at a rate that the five cars ahead of it registered differently: Viktor didn't register it at all, too far gone. Ace registered it. The others registered it in the way that cars register what is approaching from behind — in the mirrors, in the growing sound.

The final kilometre.

The DB11 went through the field not violently but with the inevitability of something that had been planning this exact sequence from the moment Mai chose the far left lane and Shammy opened her window two inches. The Alfa Romeo was fifth and became sixth — passed before its driver fully understood a pass was happening. The Viper held fourth the way a locked door holds — firmly, technically, until the DB11 found the line that the Viper's aero package was not configured to defend and went through it.

Third.

The Nismo was second, running the final four hundred metres with every capacity available, Ace having made the decision at the dogleg exit that Viktor Drach was not going to be caught tonight and redirected that energy into what was actually achievable. She crossed the line second with the Nismo exactly where it had been for the final stretch — fast, precise, spent.

The DB11 crossed the line third.

Viktor Drach crossed the line first with three car lengths of space and the quiet authority of someone who had not yet encountered the event that would take that from him.

The crowd celebrated. The Viper found the line fourth. The cash went where it went.

And then the marshal approached the top three with the results sheet and the conversation that followed took perhaps twenty seconds, during which the crowd shifted and recalibrated.

Viktor Drach had crossed the line first.

But the route confirmation — flaggers reporting back, timestamps checked — had caught the ZL1 clipping the inside marker at the dogleg, a defined course boundary, which constituted a route deviation under the Blacklist's increasingly formal penalty system. The margin was three centimetres. The penalty was disqualification from the podium result. Second became first.

Ace crossed as first. DB11 moved to second.

But the route confirmation had a second item. Ace's line through the dogleg had been run at the permitted boundary but not over it. Ace stood confirmed in first.

And then the Viper's driver filed a challenge on the DB11's corner exit — claiming the acceleration off the outside line exceeded what was possible under the available grip and therefore some undeclared modification had been used. The challenge process took twelve minutes by the light of phones while the crowd waited. The DB11's drivetrain and tire spec were presented. The challenge was reviewed by the three-person Blacklist adjudication team who handled exactly these situations, whose existence confirmed that the operation had become sufficiently organized to require them.

The challenge was dismissed. The DB11's exit had been possible within the declared specifications. The outside line had simply been run correctly.

Final result: Ace, first — Nismo 270. Mai and Shammy, second — DB11.

Then, three minutes later, the adjudication team completed their review of Viktor's corner infraction and the result was amended again: Viktor Drach, disqualified from first. The positions ahead of him moved up.

Ace became first. The DB11 moved from second to first alongside — the format used tonight was individual result plus crew result, and the DB11 was the top crew finish.

Final amended result: Ace — Nismo 270, individual winner. Mai & Shammy — DB11, crew winner.

The cash was redistributed. Viktor Drach received nothing and said nothing about this. The crowd dispersed faster than usual — the adjudication process had run long and the cold was settling back in with March's particular indifference.

In the DB11, Mai sat with the engine off, tablet in her lap.

“Second race,” she said.

Shammy was watching the night air over Eight Mile Road settle. “Second?”

“Second time we've had a result adjudicated rather than just taken.” She looked at the tablet. “The systems they're using are becoming more formalized.”

“Is that a problem?”

“It means someone is trying to give this legitimacy.” A pause. “Which means someone wants it to last long enough to matter.”

Shammy looked at her. “It already matters.”

“Yes,” Mai said. “That's what I'm concerned about.”

She started the car. The DB11's engine filled the space and they pulled out of Eight Mile Road onto the side street and into the Detroit night, the city's membrane behind them, everything else still ahead. —

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