

Tech-modified forks, as well as the same Michelin Pilots as used by Hopkins.

For Hopkins, the weekend would prove difficult. In the first practice session on Friday, he ran off the track in the hairpin. Then, after going with leaner jetting (240F/250R versus the 250R/260K run at Laguna Seca), Hopkins went out in the second session on cold tires and immediately high-sided, suffering a small fracture and torn ligaments in his right ankle.

"It was real hard to walk on the rest of the weekend," said Hopkins, "and I'd have to take right-hand corners slower than I normally would."

In Saturday's practice session, Spies was almost three seconds in front of everybody. But amazingly—considering his injury—Hopkins made up the deficit and stole pole away from Spies by 0.15-second.

"I was just shifting up an extra gear everywhere in the infield because I was getting better drives out of the corners," Hopkins explained.

In the race, Hopkins got the restart holeshot after a first-lap red-flag incident, but he was passed by Spies on the front straight, only to get back in front when Spies tucked the front end in turn one. Spies recovered from his bobble, and a race-long battle ensued.

"We were pretty much equal around most of the track, but I could get him on the brakes coming off the back banking," said Hopkins, who was still running stock exhausts. But Spies was faster on the straights. "We were switching back and forth for most of the race."

On the penultimate lap, Spies ran the fastest lap of the race, a 1:49.524, 1.600 seconds quicker than the pole time.

"It came down to the last lap, and I was behind him," said Hopkins. We were going into

turn four and I ducked underneath him. Right before we got onto the long back straightaway, I knew he'd probably pass me because he could easily get my draft. So I went wide in one of the corners to let him go by me so I could use his draft on the long back straightaway. But I ended up screwing up my drive coming out of the corner, and I wasn't able to get him where I planned to get him. So I rode behind him, and I came into the last corner and I just barely got him on the brakes—I just stuffed it underneath him."

Hopkins held his lead past the finish line, just 0.013-second ahead of Spies.

"He's a good rider," said Hopkins about his adversary. "He's a clean rider."

Spies said "(Hopkins) was just riding really good and wasn't making any mistakes—and neither was I. We were just so even, it just came down to the last corner when he got underneath me. We both don't like running into each other—you know, we'll rub—but we're not for the T-boning stuff."

Since getting Hopkins' RS250 sorted in the first race of the series at Road Atlanta, tuner Keith Perry has left the bike's suspension set-up the same. Perry said Hopkins prefers to work on learning the tracks rather than confuse things by changing the bike.

At Pocono, Hopkins' bike was visibly slower than Spies' bike. So, before the final race of the Aprilia Cup series, at Texas World, Perry fitted Arrow exhaust pipes to Hopkins' Aprilia. Perry said the Arrow pipes fit very well and weigh (a combined) four pounds less than the stock exhausts, adding that replacement mufflers are less expensive to replace in case of a crash.

Perry wasn't able to work with Hopkins at Texas World—he had to oversee Team Valvoline EMGO Suzuki's effort at the Pikes Peak AMA