



*Younger gun Ben Spies, a 15-year-old Texan who came up through WERA 125cc Grand Prix and Formula Two racing.
Photo by Brian J. Nelson.*

kins noticed a drop-off in engine performance. This held back Hopkins from challenging Spies in Sunday's qualifying, and his 1:54.38 was much slower than the 1:52.79 set by Spies, and was also 0.28-second slower than the time turned by Ryan Landers.

"I just went out and rode as hard as I could," said Hopkins, "but the bike wasn't running really good."

Prior to the race, Hopkins' crew was contemplating a jetting change, but there were problems more serious than jetting.

"We found he had lost the electrode off the bottom (front) cylinder's spark plug," explained

Hopkins followed Landers going on to the last lap, and Castanos pushed Hopkins around the first two corners. Hopkins moved to the outside of Landers in turn three, then was forced wide as Landers fought to hold his line. Castanos tried to steal the inside line, but instead low-sided off the track.

Hopkins then passed Landers in turn four, holding his second-place to the end and clinching the title.

"We're happy," said Hopkins. "This is the first big Championship I've ever won, so it's pretty cool."

While Hopkins won the title, Ben Spies won the race, finishing 13 seconds ahead. Spies said he went slightly quicker in the race than he had the last time he raced his RS125 at Texas World, this with DOT tires. "I was drifting both ends through the corners," said the promising young talent.

And so the Aprilia Cup Challenge delivered its spec-class promises: Exciting racing and developing young talent.

Zero Gravity's Glen Cook realizes that, in a spec class or otherwise, competitors are always searching for a power advantage. Post-race tear-downs only go as far as the top end, leaving clever tuners liberties with the bottom end that is too labor-intensive to examine each race. To take that issue out of the equation, Cook said they are "strongly considering" making the Cup Challenge a dyno-monitored, horsepower-limited class, with an accompanying minimum weight limit.

Cook is still in the process of finalizing the Aprilia Cup Challenge schedule for next season. He said he'd like to have the Cup Challenge series as a full-time AMA program, though that is not likely. A more probable option is to join the Formula USA/PACE series, or a schedule could be pulled together with individual race promoters as it was in 1999.