

TOUGH



MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Elite Championship Round 7: 13/09/09

Being a two man team brings with it logistical problems of doing the jobs normally shared out amongst the clan, most importantly pushing the kart. A two man job to get the things moving, we teamed up with Touch of Prost drivers Mark Figes and Justin Dobson and agreed to give each other pushing assistance where we could. This was to work well for the entire race and Mig and I thank them for their help. As the track went green and the teams went out onto the track for practice it was Mig doing the duty of bedding in the kart. After ten minutes or so he signalled that he was ready to come in and let me have a play. I'd been watching the early lap times and Mig was running in the top five with the times in the high 46 second mark as the track and karts warmed up. On the hand-over Mig confirmed that the kart felt good so I settled in and off I went. I was pleased to report that Mig was correct and the kart felt very good, certainly the best we'd had at our disposal all year. There was plenty of pick up, good top-end speed, strong handling and confident brakes. I was finding apexes to corners like HP1 that rarely I ever trouble with my presence. I only spent a few laps out there, just to make sure the kart was good, and then returned to the pits and parked it up. Normally we use up all of the practice time available when there's three of us but Mig and I were on a mission today and we were playing a strong strategy. We knew the kart was good and we were planning to go long on the first stint so waited until five minutes before the start of qualifying, filled the tank with fuel, and I went out onto the track.

The kart had cooled while it had been sat in the pits so I took a few installation laps to warm it up again and found some space to myself on the track just in time to see the green light show to start the qualifying session. The kart was flying and after a few laps I was being shown the P2 board not only by Mig's dad but by Chris Harding who was up by the time screen at Café. This later dropped to 3rd but I knew the kart felt good. I'd soon rattled up behind a load of other karts which began to slow my progress. One was Carl Tebbutt who is a seriously quick driver so I settled behind him for a few laps until a good gap had appeared behind me allowing me to back right off on the run up to Garda. This gave a clear run to the start line and one last shot at a good lap time which I nailed for a personal best ever lap of Buckers with a 46.02 and secured 3rd place on the grid. It took laps of 45.8 from Dan Shilling and Si Rudd to knock me off of the front row so I wasn't going to moan about that.

I was still sitting in the kart as the formation laps began and for the first time in a long time I was feeling confident. There were several laps of gridding up as people found their positions in the group before the green light finally showed and we all surged towards Conways for the first time. I was sat behind Dan and he was perhaps a little slow getting the hammer down and I was down to 4th before I'd even crossed the line as Carl Tebbutt swept past, and in trying to keep out of trouble I dropped to 5th before HP2. I wasn't too disappointed by this as I'd managed to survive the two hairpins for the first lap, and that's where races can easily be lost. Carl was at the head of the group and had karts crawling all over him as he had a slower kart, so I knew that as long as I kept out of trouble and at a decent pace I wouldn't get dropped while he was leading.

As the first few laps past there was a group of five karts including myself in a train all scrapping for positions. I was being held up by Dave Waters in front of me and was beginning to get a bit twitchy as I was aware that the initial gap that had grown behind me was

beginning to close. Into HP2 I took a deep, wide line to attempt to cut back up the inside of him on the run to the Esses but instead found my old sparring buddy Carl Matthews sliding up on the inside causing me to drop a second or so behind him while I took to the dirty line to avoid contact. A small cursing session later and I was quickly back behind him. The squabble in front was getting fruity and karts were all over the track and soon I began to take advantage of people tripping over each other. Carl got pushed wide at one point so I stole 5th place back, and shortly after Dan and Dave slowed each other enough to allow me to pinch another place and then quickly another and I was into 3rd. Dan then pitted which handed me 2nd and suddenly I only had Carl Tebbutt in front of me. He was a fair gap ahead at this point but it didn't take long for me to scamper up behind him. There then followed several laps of us trading places as I would draft past him on the straights before he nipped back inside at HP1. This continued up until I was called in to the pits to hand over to Mig at our first stop.

The stop was reasonable by our generally poor standards, but somehow we'd managed to lose 17 seconds to the leaders by the time all the stops had been and gone. Even now I have no idea how this happened, but we were now back in 5th place as Mig brought himself up to speed. It was a cracking stint that he put in, slowly bringing the podium back into sight and reaching 3rd place as the strategies started to play out in the pit window. Handing back to me for my final stint I was pumped up and set about closing in on the leaders as best I could, now back in 5th after the stops had played out. The first few laps was a little fruity though as I'd not tightened the fuel cap up enough, and got a damp feeling around my backside. Confident I'd not reached the age where this should be a personal hygiene problem I glanced down and saw fuel spraying out of the tank and covering me. I rectified the cause of the problem but not before the dampness had turned to a mild stinging around the gentleman's region. This stinging developed into a definite burning, peaking at an intense pain as my nuts felt like they were on fire. I felt the best way to cool the situation was to drive as fast as possible, and by the time I came in to the pits all seemed well. I had a very enjoyable stint and the kart felt perfect and I was up to 3rd before I realised I was catching up with Geoff Lamb in the Dogz kart. I caught and past him but managed to let him back past immediately and there then followed countless laps of me trying to find a way through but never seeing the opening. I was later to lose out through the back markers and begin to drop back from him, but this turned out to be a blessing as he was caught up in a tangle at HP2 leaving the door open for me to steal 2nd place. CFM were by now a lap ahead and well clear but for the first time this season we were on for a podium and a good shout at 2nd place.

The change to Mig went well and he returned to the track still in 2nd place so we knew our pace and position was genuine and not just down to the strategies of others. Within a few laps however we were relegated to 3rd by a hard charging Si Rudd for Dogz, however Mig's pace was fantastic and kept him within striking distance and remained well ahead of BAR Humbug in 4th.

It was then that the all too common moment happened when we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory, with Mig locking up the brakes on the approach to Paddock and spinning around right in front of me. The pusher kart was quickly on hand to get him going again but the loss of three quarters of a lap dropped us off of the podium and down to an eventual finish of 6th place. It was a deeply disappointing finish, however neither of us will be too downcast over the result as our season effectively ended several races ago and we're no longer looking for points, merely to enjoy some good racing. We both had excellent races and were at the sharp end of the pack, something that after two years right at the front we'd begun to forget what it felt like. To ease any lingering pains we were both delighted to see the lap times posted after the race and we'd each dipped below the mythical 46 second barrier at Buckmore for the first time. Five time in my case and twice for Mig, with my best at 45.84 giving me a big smile that hasn't left my ugly mug. Mig should be equally happy, if not more so, as his best of 45.97 despite carrying extra weight was very impressive.

So, just one last race of the Elite season to go and one month to wait. I'll be glad in many ways to bring a poor season to a close and head into the winter months to consider my immediate karting future. I plan to finish the year in style and go out with a good finish, preferably with a trophy of some nature to show for it.