

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Winter Man of Steel Round 2: 17/12/06

I had high expectations going into this race. I know it's going to be a long time before I'm fighting for a podium position in this company, especially given the track time my fellow MOS drivers get in down at Buckmore, but regardless of that I was confident I would put in a good performance after my confidence inspiring showing in the Star Pupil.

Although ambient conditions were dry but bitterly cold, the evening starts always leave the circuit with greasy dew covering the top surface of the track. While certainly not wet conditions, it does keep you alert heading into the corners.

Feeling in a festive mood, and handing out mince pies to all the guys in the briefing room, race director Alan was moved to give us all an extended qualifying session. This allowed a drying racing line to develop, but conditions would still be difficult for the first few laps. Heading out onto the track for the qualifying I let a few karts pass until I could make space to for a shot at a good qualifying lap. Sadly though, while the kart seemed initially okay just off race pace, once I put the hammer down the front end grip completely deserted me. It was disappointing to say the least, and I had to make do with spending my few laps out on track experimenting with lines and points of apex.

The result of qualifying was a thoroughly soul destroying 20th place, made all the more intolerable by friend and rival Adam Michaelis putting his kart on pole, over three seconds quicker than me.

The race start wasn't as tense as normal, given that I'd only got five karts sitting behind me on the grid. On the green light the engines roared and we all headed towards Conways for the first time. Speaking of first times, it was my debut on the inside of the track on the grid. I've always found myself on the outside heading down to the first corner, and often found myself swamped.

On this occasion however, I was able to hug the inside and make a few places in the normal melee that occurs heading into the first braking point at HP1. The first lap was a trade between various places, ending two places better off than I'd started. It was clear however that the kart was handling like a pig, but given the early congestion the pace deficit wasn't obvious. In fact, after the first eleven laps or so I was enjoying some very competitive tussles with several karts. However, I was overtaken by a kart which was a little enthusiastic in his line into Paddock and I was given a huge side swipe. I was

pushed off of the track momentarily, but by the time I rejoined I had been dropped by the group I was in and was never to make the gap up.

Throughout the rest of the race, I wrestled with an uncompetitive kart, stuck inside the dilemma of staying out in a slow kart or coming in to change for another machine that would be cold and untested. I stayed out, and carried on plodding around for the rest of the race. The kart suffered badly from understeer and had a reluctance to pick up speed, but there's not much to do except grin and bear it.

The remaining laps were not to be without incident though. The early contact had provided a unique side effect that Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake might refer to a "wardrobe malfunction". The impact had caused a plastic popper on my crash helmet's visor cap to shear off, resulting in my visor coming clean out of its housing and flapping about. As it was no longer on its ratchet the visor would keep shutting completely causing it to fog up in these conditions. I spent much of the race driving one handed trying to keep my visor open so I could see where I was going.

The penultimate lap of the race saw a three way battle for the lead come up right behind me. Not having anything whatsoever to fight for I leapt clean out of the way and took the best seat in the house to watch a battle royale over the last lap play itself out. The race was won by Steve Brown Jnr followed closely by Jack Harding. Along with the two Rudd brothers and Ollie Varney those names represent a fantastic wealth of talent at Buckmore Park.

Sadly for Adam he wasn't involved in that scrap, having been taken clean out while in 7th place and spending a couple of laps sitting fuming in the infield up by Garda. He ended up finishing one place behind me, 17th being where I eventually crossed the line.

So, the second round draws to a close. It was on the whole a disappointing weekend of racing, especially after so much optimism. The replacement parts for my helmet have been ordered and with the exception of the inevitable Christmas inspired weight gain, I should be raring to go by round 3. Let's hope it's a much better outcome.