

# TOUGH MONKEYS

## F1 Karting Midlands Sprint: 01/03/07

This was to be a return to a circuit I've enjoyed a lot of success at over the years, but it's been over a year since I last put rubber on track here. The reason behind the return was to prepare for the Milbank Challenge in a couple of weeks by getting some practice in on an indoor circuit. I've been racing almost exclusively outdoors for the last year and there is a distinct difference in the approach to racing these two conditions.

When booking the event I was told that there was already 16 other drivers down for the sprint event. Again, sprinting isn't something I do very often but the last time I did such an event at Midland Karting I won every race so I was quietly confident of coming back with some silverware. However, 15 of the other 16 drivers failed to turn up for the event. This left myself and a guy who was doing the event as a birthday treat and had never been in a kart before. Not the challenge I was hoping for.

Happily though, having been offered some free vouchers to come again, the guys at F1 karting were complete stars about something that was out of their hands and gave us two half hour runs in which they threw out a handful of the employees of the circuit. As with most circuits, quite often the best drivers seem to work there. After all, they do know the karts and the track better than anyone else. It turned out then that I was to perhaps have a more competitive challenge than I'd expected.

While it was never to be regarded as a race, the guys from the circuit and myself gave it the full beans and certainly weren't hanging about. The first half hour went by with one of the other guys chipping away at my rear end for the entire stint but was never able to get past. This was great practice for me, knowing that I had a good driver right on my tail waiting to exploit any slight mistake. Pleasingly, I never gave away an opportunity. Gathering in the pits afterwards to talk to the guys I asked about where I could pick up time and they all seemed to think my lines were good and couldn't suggest much improvement. Regardless, my fastest lap was half a second down on their fastest laps, a 24.23 to their 23.76. They suggested we swap karts to see if the difference was the kart or the driver.

Delightfully, the answer was the kart. While the first kart handled better, it didn't appear to have the grunt (kind of like the Club 390 at the last Buckmore meeting I drove), and once I'd learned to control the more tail happy tendency of the second kart I could feel that the lap times were better. Having comfortably caught up, passed and pulled away from the other guys we returned to the pits to compare time sheets. I was heartened to find that only 6 out of the 71 laps in that second stint were slower than my previous fastest laps, setting the 17 fastest laps of the night culminating in a 23.256.

So as it turned out, the lack of other drivers being present gave me a unique opportunity to drive many more laps than I would otherwise have done, and against possibly a better class of opposition. Doing so allowed me to fine tune my technique, develop my indoor lines and crucially for me work on my consistency. I look forward now to the Milbank Challenge.