

TOUGH MONKEYS

Corporate Event – F1 Karting, Loughborough: 01/03/09

I stopped doing the old ringer appearances a long time ago but as the Elite Series starts next weekend and I haven't sat in a kart since last year I thought I'd accept an invitation to drive in a corporate event at F1 Karting in Loughborough. It's an old stomping ground of mine and has given me much success before I went off to find fame and fortune at Buckmore. You're always onto a loser with these events as you turn up in your race overalls and you're the centre of attention. If you win people say of course you were going to win. If you lose you're just going to get laughed at, so you pretty much have to win don't you? You also become a target for people as you're high profile and there's always someone wanting to take you down a peg or two or prove that they're better.

I was in a three man team today, so I was in familiar territory. Normally I sit back and let someone else make the tactical decisions but thought I'd pull the strings and insist on starting the race. Practice had shown that the kart was a good little runner and I was over half a second quicker than anyone else could manage, but I knew the track whereas I imagine most others were new to the track and learning their way. I expected to be reigned in during the race so would need to get on with it early on.

The race began in the traditional F1 Karting Le Mans style start, with them blaring out The Chain by Fleetwood Mac and dropping a chequered flag to start a run across the track to the waiting karts. Again, I knew the process and when the flag would be dropped so was able to leap into the kart and be on the throttle before I was seated. Our kart was lined up in 4th in staggered formation and I'd swept around two karts before the first corner and slotted in behind the early leader and waited for my chance to pass. Before the opening lap was over I had slipped up the inside into the hairpin following a good run off of the bridge, and from that moment was never trouble for position again. The kart felt quick and I just set about throwing in consistent lap times whenever I had a clear track, and dealing with backmarkers as cleanly as possible. By the time I finished my first stint I handed over the kart with a comfy 3 lap lead and let the other two lads get on with things. My best lap was well over about eight tenths quicker than anyone else had managed so I felt quite happy for now. The guys did a sterling job, during their stints, exchanging fastest laps with the kart in second place and driving cleanly.

My second and last stint was a little more adventurous than the first as soon into it I was spun around by a kart I'd passed moments earlier. There were a couple of teams that were apparently banger racers and boy did it show. They were easy to spot with their motocross style helmets, and their aggressive driving techniques. All of them would look over their shoulder and weave to prevent a pass. Several times I'd been pushed into the barriers and was getting a little cheesed off with them but kept my racing clean at all times. It was one of these guys that tipped me into a spin at the chicane as he caught my inside rear bumper and spun me round. I was able to react enough to bring the kart to a halt pointing in the right direction so only lost a few seconds which I made up within a couple of laps. This time I shut the door firmly in his face as I went past and didn't see him again.

Coming back into the pits, my day's driving over, I was very pleased to see my lap times were now over a second faster than anyone else leading to a call of "phenomenal lap times" by the bloke on the tannoy. We were now a good 6 laps ahead and the guys drove solidly to bring

the kart home a clear victor. I know it wasn't against the calibre of driver I'm accustomed to but it's still satisfying to win a race. Next will however will be a much sterner test.