

# TOUGH MONKEYS

## **Buckmore Park Winter Team of Steel Round 4: 02/02/08**

A crisp early February evening saw the fourth and final round of the winter Team of Steel championship, with Team GP heading into the final two hours of racing leading both the Thunder and Pro classes. While the Thunder title was all but sown up the Pro class was a much closer affair with five teams potentially vying for the top prize. And it would be in the Pros that I was due to be racing in tonight alongside Ian, while Barry and Miguel would contest the Thunders.

I say I was due to be driving in the Pros, but sadly I had to take the gutting decision to pull out of the race following an extreme sleeping disaster. I had woken on Friday morning with a tremendous pain in my neck that was severely restricting my movement, and despite much Deep Heat, Nurofen and scalding hot baths I felt little better on Saturday. Given the extreme forces on the neck during a kart race I had to concede that there was no way I could drive in the evening and took the decision not to race. This left me with the problem of filling my place at very short notice. I wondered if Ian would want to drive the whole two hours on his own but without being able to talk to him in advance I thought that would be a big assumption to make.

It was time to call upon my extended Buckmore family and pull in a favour of a fellow driver. I had a few names in my mind, but the one that made most sense was the guy who is proven to be the top Pro driver in the club, reigning Iron Man champion Steve Brown Jnr. Certainly one of the best drivers in the club, and someone who I've had many a great battle with over the last couple of years, not least in my previous race in the Man of Steel. I also could vouch for his ability to race as part of a team as we drove together in a 6hr event last summer. I was therefore delighted when his dad rang me having read my begging email and said he was available. This made the annoyance of giving up my drive a bit more palatable knowing that I was standing aside for a better driver.

Although not racing I couldn't bring myself to miss this nail biting end to the season, so headed down to Buckers with my dad, who was keen to see what the fuss was with this team racing business.

The night was cold but the track was dry so there would be none of the slippery fun and games from the previous round. Not having the adrenaline of racing to warm me up I was wearing virtually all the clothes in my wardrobe. I'd left my OMP neck brace behind however, even though it's been serving as a very good stand in surgical collar while I've been out of the public eye!

Qualifying got underway and for the first few laps both of the GP teams were a little off of the pace. Miguel had started quietly in the Thunder and was outside of the top three while the only team that could mathematically catch us in the championship, Gee Force & John, were knocking on the door of pole. It was critical that they were kept from claiming pole as missing out on the bonus point for that would hand the title automatically to GP86. I need not have worried, however, as Mig threw in a lap that was almost half a second quicker than any other team would achieve for the rest of the session and grabbed pole and with it the Thunder championship. Barry showed he was well on the pace too, setting lap times only fractions off of what Mig had posted.

In the Pros it wasn't going so well. Ian had gone out first and was over a second off of the pace, and we knew the kart was off colour when Steve could go no quicker as he began his stint. We made the decision to call Steve into the pits and we changed karts, then he headed back out onto track with enough time for six laps. The times began to tumble immediately and as the session drew to a close the Pro order was changing by the second. In his last tour of the track Steve claimed 2<sup>nd</sup> in class behind The Wombles. Importantly for us, the team closest in the championship, The Woodfordes, would start two places further back.

Racing began and immediately Mig was mugged of first and then second. Steve went the other direction and took the class lead straight away. After the initial jostling had settled down Mig reclaimed second and set about retaking the lead. For 6 laps he trailed Me 'n' Im, but on lap 7 he made a move stick up to Garda and now had a clear track in front of him. He certainly didn't have it all his own way though, as for many laps he was pursued closely and kept honest the whole way. On lap 24 the challenging team pitted for a driver change and Mig could relax and get on with his business, with Gee Force now some 8 seconds behind in second.

Back in the Pros Steve was driving a stunning race. He was not only now well clear of the second best Pro he was fighting for positions with the faster Thunder karts. He soon made the top ten overall and as other teams began to pit for fuel or driver changes he climbed further up the rankings. Amazingly, on lap 48 he was actually in 2<sup>nd</sup> place overall and on the same lap as Mig. The scoreboard now read 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> overall for Team GP, and we were going rightfully nuts in the paddock, a picture quickly taken of the leader board to show the grand children in years to come.

On lap 53 things suddenly got very interesting. An incident at Senna had prompted a full course yellow and the team reacted immediately. We called Steve in for his fuel stop and the timing was perfect. While everyone was touring around the track slowly we were able to minimise the penalty of time lost in the fuel bay. And on the very next lap we brought Mig in for the "Run Around" compulsory driver change. It all worked fantastically and racing resumed with the teams in 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> overall.

Steve eventually pitted on lap 72 to hand over to Ian, while Mig came in on lap 78 to hand over to Barry and take on fuel. Ian was almost a full lap ahead when he rejoined, while Barry came out just three seconds ahead of Gee Force, however we knew they still had a driver change to make. It was now a game of conserving the karts to the finish and avoiding incident. Ian pumped in consistently fast times, and eventually put a lap between him and the second placed kart. Barry had extended the lead to over ten seconds by the time Grant had been replaced in the Gee Force kart by Gerrard. The lead continued to grow until the second hour came to a close and the chequered flag was waved to Barry, a comfortable 43 seconds clear of Gee Force. Third and Fourth followed very closely behind, while we waited for Ian to appear around the Café turn and take the Pro win. He swung into view, posing for the cameras already, and it was left to him and a jubilant Barry to take the victory tour of the circuit before returning to the paddock to celebrate with the rest of the team.

It had been an awesome race for me to watch, which made up for not being able to be actually in the thick of the action. The team has performed fantastically over the four races, and let me take this opportunity to thank Steve for his magnificent drive at such short notice and his dad for giving up his evening to bring him down. It was much appreciated by the whole team, and especially me who would have been on the end of a kicking if we'd ended losing the championship just because I was attacked by a duvet.

We will bask in the glow of smugness for the next few days, but the summer series begins in one month and Team GP will be back in what will be a Thunder only series looking for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the championship. I hope my neck is much better by then....it was a bugger trying to reverse park in Sainsbury's today! Guys, it's been fantastic driving with you. See you next month.