

TOUGH MONKEYS

F1 Karting Midlands Sprint: 05/01/06

This was to be my first competitive race outside of corporate racing, and I was looking forward to it to gauge myself against better quality drivers. It was also my first sprint race and I'd set myself the modest challenge of reaching the A-Final.

Out racing that night were a couple of guys from PF International, one of whom was dressed like The Stig, and a friend of my dad who up until recently raced Rotax Max beasts. The talent was going to be much better than anything I'd raced against before, but I was looking forward to it. My dad had also taken the opportunity to have a drive, along with another mate of his, Jeff, swelling the total turnout to 26 drivers.

The format would be six qualifying heats with each driver starting from each of the six places on the grid, followed by two semi-finals and a final. My first heat was a nervous affair as I took to the grid, but my fears were soon lifted when I scampered away to my first victory.

In the second race I was up against Gary, the Rotax guy. He'd start from behind me on the grid, but I had been lumbered with an absolute pig of a kart and finished down in fourth. The remaining four races netted me two more wins and a second. I'd finished just one point behind Gary after the qualifying heats, and second overall. The Stig was in third place, and was drawn alongside me on the grid for the semi final with Jeff down in fourth.

It was the first time in the evening that I'd been up against The Stig, and was expecting a thumping. However, after getting to the first corner in the lead I was able to hold a defensive line and sneak out a bit of a lead. When I'd crossed the line to take the race victory, and returned to the pits I was pleasantly surprised to see Jeff sitting in the kart behind me. Apparently, Stiggy had gotten out of shape and was "assisted" into the barrier and hadn't finished in the top three, ensuring that his evening had come to a premature end.

In the second semi, Gary had an easy time of things and romped home well clear of the field. Unfortunately, my dad was unable to make the top three and we were robbed of the possibility of both Tough Monkeys, racer and pit support, racing against each other for the first time.

Because of having a superior qualifying score, Gary held pole position for the final while I lined up alongside him. This turned out to be pivotal point of the evening. Unknown to us until pulling onto the back straight for the first time, Gary had been drawn with the same kart I was in when he beat me heat two. Although he had reached the first series of corners ahead, his kart didn't have any top end grunt and I sailed past down the straight.

Gary was left to fight of the four karts now lining up behind him, but lumbered with a dog of a kart was mugged for second also, but somehow held on for third place. I had been able to scamper away in the lead to finish half a lap clear. Jeff finished outside of the podium, but had a great time getting to the final.

It was a shame that we were robbed of what would have been a dogfight to the finish, and we'll never know if Rotax veteran would have beaten hire-kart junior if the karts had been on a level playing field.