

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Elite Championship Round 2: 05/04/09

Between us Barry, Mig and myself have enjoyed considerable success behind the wheel of a kart over the last couple of years. This is why we'll refer to round two of the Elite Championship as a disaster. I think we'd all agree that it was one of the most disappointing experiences of our racing careers.

Buckmore was bathed in early morning April sunshine and the GP Toughmonkeys entourage consisted today of the three drivers plus Bianca, TC and Pappa Miggins...or "Bevy of attractive persons" as race director Alan put it in his own race report. The practice session opened with Barry and Mig doing the opening stints, both of them reporting back that the kart was underpowered on the straight but very quick through the corners. It was decided that one offset the other and we should keep the kart so I went out for my practice laps which led straight into the qualifying window. While the kart did indeed enjoy very poised cornering it was severely handicapped by lack of outright grunt down the straight. On one lap I was passed by three karts heading down the start finish straight which was deeply concerning, but I was catching them back up through the infield section so hoped that I could still remain competitive.

I didn't. Pulling up on the dummy grid after the session was completed Barry came over and said we'd qualified 17th out of 18 teams. I seriously thought he was joking at first and sat there waiting for the punch line that never came. By some way this was the worse qualifying session I've ever been involved in. There were some long faces in the team as I'd gotten all that I could out of the kart at that point yet we were almost a second off of the pole time, and that's a very long time in karting. We knew already that we were fighting for scraps and that this would be a long day.

The race went green and I was at the wheel for the first 13 minutes of the action, and I was very cheesed off. I'd pass a kart at one of the hairpins or up at Garda, then get passed by two karts going down the main straight. I seemed to be going backwards as much as I was going forward. After what was a lot of hard work for little reward I ended the stint in 14th position and handed over to Barry before slumping onto a tyre wall to generally be miserable and absorb some sympathy for TC in between taunts of "loser". Thank you honey. Mig and I discussed swapping the kart but were advised that the process of doing so would cost approximately 10 minutes while the mechanics tested the kart to diagnose the problem, at the end of which we might end up with the same kart and the same problem. So we left Barry out there circulating and doing a very consistent job lapping in the mid to low 47 seconds, once dipping into the 46s while the lead karts were all low 46s. As the pit strategies came into play Barry came in at the end of his single long stint in a respectable 4th place although that became 11th by the time I was back in the kart and heading out onto the track.

I noticed an immediate difference in the kart, certain that it had a bit of extra oomph kicking it out of the corners. The top end pace was still missing in action but I felt a bit happier with how responsive the kart was. With a head of steam under me I was actually starting to overtake a few people and stay in front of them. The lap times were now consistently in the 46s, although still somewhat off of the leader's pace. Looking back at the lap times our fastest lap of the race was the fourth slowest recorded out of all the teams, which doesn't make good reading. Nevertheless, just as Barry had done I finished my stint in 4th place. It took some frantic

waving from the pit crew to alert me to my pit stop window though as I'd become very focused on the back of the lead kart of Steve Brown Jnr who I was able to keep up with surprisingly.

It was then Mig's turn to take to the track, but the gremlins of round one were to strike again as the kart refused to fire up on the re-start. This lost us a minute as we waited for the pusher kart to arrive, and incredibly it happened again at the final splash and dash fuel stop which lost a further 70 seconds. Mig was quick and consistent out on the track lapping several times into the 46s, but the damage was done in the pit lane and we coasted home a very lowly 14th. It was a depressing end to an already disappointing race. After two rounds we've had an 8th and a 14th so barring any further disasters that's our two dropped rounds used up already. If nothing else the result of this race has fired my desire to get back to the front of the grid where we belong. The leading teams, with the exception of Cool, Flash and Minty who are already running away with the title, are all teams we've beaten regularly so to be so far adrift has ensured that I'll be back fully committed to getting fit at the gym so I'll be in the best possible shape to help get GP Toughmonkeys up on the podium. Roll on May's action at Round Three.