

# TOUGH MONKEYS

## **Buckmore Park Team of Steel Round 1: 08/03/08**

Just one month after Team GP secured both the Pro and Thunder titles in the winter Team of Steel championship it was time for the curtain to raise on the summer season and a new challenge of doing the double. After the wonderful success enjoyed by the team there was no hesitation in retaining the same driver line up so once again it was Barry Cooper, Miguel Morland, Ian Charles and myself entering two karts under the guise of GP86 and GP07. As before we will rotate the team rosters so we all get to drive with each other and the first goal will of course be to secure the prestigious summer title and the second goal would be to take second as well. That would be the wildest dream scenario, but hey it happened in the winter!

Round one saw Ian and I team in GP86 with Barry and Mig in GP07. The summer series is likely to be just as fiercely fought as the winter and there are a number of teams comprising of some of Buckmore's young guns so we know we've got our work cut out. Age and weight are against us, but what we lack there we make up in, erm, deep voices. Given that the super lightweights have an advantage in the dry it came as something of a welcome sight for us and our rivals from the winter series, Gee Force and ACM when we arrived at a very wet Buckmore. Tonight was going to be a very soggy affair.

There were 26 karts on track tonight, all in Thunders, and I'd say roughly half of those were either newbies or inexperienced teams. They were to make the 2 hours in the damp and the darkness a fraught experience at times, but generally the racing was to be clean from what I saw. Qualifying saw me take to the track first and after a few exploratory laps to sort out a wet line around the circuit I began to bed myself in. I only got four quick laps in before I handed over to Ian, however at that time we were lying 2<sup>nd</sup> on the grid. Lloyd's Motor Club were a second and a half ahead and weren't to be beaten for pole, however a little battle broke out between the two GP teams. Mig snatched 2<sup>nd</sup> with a minute to go of the session but Ian was to wrestle it back as he finished his final flying lap. The team were pretty content to be in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> on the grid in these conditions, and Adrian and Carl Matthews (ACM) would be in 4<sup>th</sup>, Spot On in 5<sup>th</sup> and Gee Force a little off the pace in 6<sup>th</sup>.

I took to the kart for the first hour of the race and had the rare opportunity to sit on the front row of the grid. Alongside me Lloyd's were obviously quick but I fancied my chances on the run to the first corner as I was on the outside and so already set up for the wet line. I've recently taken to singing Frank Sinatra songs to myself on the grid while waiting for races to begin, and tonight I'd gone with Come Fly With Me. I'd just about started the final chorus when the lights went green and the hills of Kent lit up to the mighty sound of the Thunders in full cry. Bouncing up and down in a bid to get traction I reached the first turn dead level with Lloyd's and drifted into a controlled wet slide around the outside and fed the power in delicately and was happy to find myself heading for HP1 in the lead. I braced myself for the force of 25 karts sliding into me but I was clean into the corner before the melee arrived and set about stretching the lead.

In all honesty I was struggling with Symes and Pullmans, two corners where I'm usually so quick. My wet line was sloppy at best, however I appeared quick enough elsewhere to be stretching away from the karts behind. The only place I got to see behind me was at HP1 and I could see I

had a few seconds on Lloyd's, and assumed they were in second place. I was surprised then when Carl Matthews passed me on the run up to Garda on lap 11. It really did shock me as I thought I was pulling away from everyone, however it later learned that he'd been close by all the way. Carl is an excellent wet weather driver, certainly better than myself, so I settled in behind him and learned a better way though Symes that shaved time off of my laps and I stuck with him for a while.

We soon got into the thick of the back markers and while Carl benefited from the element of surprise I got stuck with people suddenly going defensive and tripping me up. I lost a lot of time in traffic, but I seemed able to pull back time in the open. When I came to end my stint and hand over to Ian we were some 20 seconds behind but well clear of third. Our pit was merely a driver change and Ian set off for the final hour.

Ian took the lead when Carl pitted for a fuel stop and handed over to his dad Adrian, but we soon dropped back to second when Ian pitted for our fuel stop. Over the next ten laps Ian began to whittle away the gap which stood at just over ten seconds, but that disappeared when ACM pitted for their run-around stop and we inherited the lead. From there Ian was consistently quicker and the lead grew to over ten seconds until one lap when the gap jumped out to over twenty seconds. Wondering what had happened it turned out that Adrian had suffered a spin and now had Lloyd's breathing down his neck. It wasn't long before there was a new resident of second, some thirty seconds off of Ian.

As I prepared the pit boards for Ian to give him gap updates it concerned me that he was dropping up three seconds a lap to Lloyd's, so I gave him the hurry up and the lead stabilised. The battle a little lower down the order was quite intense with GP07 down in 7<sup>th</sup> due to a black flag in the opening stages due to a new marshal getting a bit enthusiastic and calling in three contact warnings in quick succession, effectively ending our hopes of a 1-2 finish tonight. Barry and Mig were to finish the night one place behind great rivals Gee Force who took sixth.

The clock ticked down to zero and the chequered flag dropped in front of Ian as he took the win by some 17 seconds from Lloyd's, with ACM the last kart on the lead lap and Spot On in 4<sup>th</sup>. It was another great victory for Team GP and my second alongside Ian. Lloyd's took bonus points for pole and for fastest lap so we share the lead at the top of the championship, heading it only because of the count back rule on race wins. The four of us celebrated in our customary bouncing around the paddock style and happily collected the first trophies of the new season. I'm hoping they won't be the last, but with the team around me that I have I'm confident they won't be.