

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Elite Championship Round 6: 09/07/09

Having missed the last round through tonsillitis I was very keen to get back behind the wheel of Kart No.2 for the 6th round of the Elite. The season is already a write off but we still have pride to race for. Sadly my pride was to take a pounding in this race.

There were 19 entrants for this round and the weather was glorious over Buckmore. Talk earlier in the week of a monsoon had proved unfounded and if anything the early practice times would suggest the track conditions might have been too grippy as karts were bogging down and the times weren't good to start with. The event had already started badly for us before we'd even left the pit lane as myself and Mig were virtually run over by the kart behind as we pushed Barry away. I had my Alpinestars boots to thank for protecting my ankle as the kart ran into me while Mig did a spectacular commando roll out of the way off in the direction of the car park.

While we were chatting about the incident we almost missed Barry coming into the pits to accept a black flag for making contact with someone on the out lap. The rules state that this should normally mean starting from the back of the grid however Alan had decreed that we should be let off as it was so early on. That would be about the last of our good fortune.

I'd been handed the job of qualifying and I felt happy with the kart as I wound up to speed on my practice laps before the lights went green. We were lacking a bit of top end grunt down the main straight but everywhere else it felt excellent. I was therefore a little disappointed to only qualify 9th on the grid after what I felt was a strong session. No one was gaining on me yet I was gaining on the karts in front. However having since consulted the time sheets I've perked up a little as the lap time I did set would have put us on pole for every round except one this season. Just over half a second had separated the entire grid. 6th to 15th was separated by two tenths which shows just what an incredibly close series this is.

Rolling up laps completed and the lights went green and we were off and running with me still in the seat. Last month's race had apparently been a battle royal at the start but this time out from my position it was a very clean yet competitive start. I was sat at the back of a train of karts but without the top end I was finding it difficult to get an opportunity to make my way up the order. I bided my time and capitalised on minor mistakes from others. By the time my stint had ended I was up to 6th position and handed over to Mig. Sadly we lost a good ten seconds on the pit stop as we had a great deal of difficulty get the fuel cap back on, much in the same way Jack, Steve and I did at Bayford Meadows a couple of months back. It seemed an eternity sat in the pits and although it wasn't as long as I'd thought it had been enough to drop us down to 16th by the time we hit the track again. It's a bit difficult to gauge at that moment where we were relative as the fuel window was only just open so we were an early stopper, but by the time the first window had shut we were still only 12th. Mig was having a cracking scrap though with Roy from Dogz, trading places seemingly every lap.

It was then my turn to get back in the kart and immediately it felt sharper than before and I nestled down and got on with banging in consistent laps in the low 46 range. I was reeling in my Le Mans team mate Graham Gillham at a fair lick each lap and I was quickly on the back of him. I spent a lap behind him without him knowing I was there and then I saw an opportunity to pass him as he ran a little wide at Paddock and I got a good run up the hill. The

run from Paddock to Garda has always been my favourite spot to pass and I committed early to going for it, staying right on the approach to the turn. I realised however, too late, that the kart didn't quite have the puff to get me fully alongside before the turn and contact would be inevitable. I backed out of the move and attempted to swing back to take the racing line but I was just too late and as Graham swung across to take the corner I clipped his kart with the most extreme tip of my kart and spun him around. Now on his outside I was pushed up against the tyre wall with no where to go by Grahams kart as it corrected itself. I felt a total tit as it was entirely my fault with not a hint of blame on Graham's part at all. He didn't even know I was there. I apologised immediately via a handshake at the trackside which he graciously accepted (I'd have been picking the kart up and throwing at anyone who had done that to me) and we awaited the arrival of the pusher karts to get us going.

If losing a lap while we waited wasn't punishment enough I was black flagged for the contact, rightly enough, and had to take a 20 second stop/go penalty in the pits. It took all my reserve after that to prevent the red mist coming down, instead focusing on doing some fast laps to close out my stint. I was sat behind Dave Waters, no slouch, for the entirety of the run. He was flying and I was tucked up behind him the entire time. I made the decision early on not to challenge him as he was several laps ahead and I couldn't risk taking him out too! My average lap time for those lap when I weren't sitting in a tyre wall or in the pits were the best I've ever done though in an Elite so I've got that to be happy with I suppose.

Barry was up next and he was left really fighting for nothing. The fuel cap issue reared its head again and we lost more time but it had little or no effect on the result. Again Barry put in a stellar and consistent display, lapping in the mid 46 all the way. He dragged the kart home in 14th place and we hammered another nail into the coffin of the 2009 season.

The September round will be without Barry as he's off on holiday. It'll be myself and Mig with my stand-in for last month Stewart Carlyle re-joining us to help us out. I'll be looking to put right my big wrong of this race. It was the first time I've ever had a black flag and the first time I've tipped anyone else out so once in four years isn't too bad I suppose, but I'm the person most critical of my own performances and it shouldn't have happened at all. Let's make up for it by getting a podium next time hey?