

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Team of Steel Summer Round 5: 12/07/08

It's been a while since I wrote a race report so here I am making an effort to do one for a change. Apologies to my army of fans who tune in to read the latest thrilling instalment of my racing, I trust you're both well.

So, this was round 5 of the summer Team of Steel championship and a lot has happened this season. It had started promisingly with Team GP getting off the mark with one team taking race victory in the opening round. Since then though we've endured a difficult time of things having to deal with a few asthmatic karts in our bid to win back to back winter and summer series. We've not been doing badly, but by the high standards we've set ourselves it's just not been where we've wanted to be. Tonight would see a return to form.

The other important news since the last round was the loss of one of Team GP's founder members, Ian Charles. He's taken on a role of race director at Buckmore Park and because of issues of conflict of interest he's no longer allowed to compete in championship events. This left us with the decision to either run a single three man team, knowing that this isn't the most efficient set up, or to run one kart with one driver doing the whole two hour session on his own. It was the latter that we ran with and in the build up to the race it was Miguel who was set to take the lone seat, however in the wake of my efforts at Le Mans and because I was feeling fruity I volunteered to do the stint myself. As such, Miguel would drive with Barry in GP86 leaving GP07 in my hands.

Our main rivals in the championship are Cool and Flash, however Flash (Jack Harding to you) was off sunning himself on holiday somewhere so it was a lone Cool (Steve Brown Jnr) that would take the fight to the GP boys. Gee Force and ACM were back in action only a week after being bosom buddies over in France, and there was plenty of playful banter and reminiscing going on in the club house. Corner Cutters, the team I guest drove for alongside Jack down at Lydd in May were also back in the series after a small break. The younger of the father and son pairing, Paul Rook, made good on a suggestion I'd put up on the forum about his famous pie shop and brought me a big bag of pies and pasties for me to gorge on. My restraint kept me from eating them prior to the race, much to his chagrin.

Lloyd's Motor Club and HWB, two teams who are always knocking on our door, were present and correct but my concerns were raised over this month's representatives of BAR Humbug. This team has become something of a proving ground for graduates of the junior club and seem to be constantly producing very fast young drivers to whom this type of enduro racing is not as familiar as sprint racing. This month, I knew that the two drivers were very quick indeed, possibly two of the fastest drivers in the entire club. Ollie Varney and Darryl Evans are both Rotax drivers and were sure to be giving both the GP teams and Cool a damn good challenge tonight.

The qualifying session began and I was the first kart out onto track, and boy did it feel odd being back in a Thunder. I'd pounded some 500 laps around Le Mans in a Pro Kart last weekend and you learn to feel a kart and forget everything else in that time. It took a few laps to get the kart even half way comfortable, and I was feeling happy after the first five minutes. I'd only been passed by one kart, but I was sure I was well off of the pace so came in to the pits with the thought of changing. Being on my own tonight I was void of the usual pit signals

so I had no idea of my position, so I left the kart in the pit lane and wandered back into the paddock to check the score board. Sure enough I was in the wrong end of the top ten, some half a second off of the lead pace. I thought about it for a short while and decided that half a second wasn't the end of the world and that I could drive around this early lack of pace.

As it happened, it was very fortunate that I did come into the pits as one of the guys I was speaking to thought he could smell petrol and on closer investigation it turned out to be me. I was covered in fuel so trudged back to the pit lane to ask one of the mechanics to have a look. It was simply a rubber seal under the fuel cap that had split, so that was soon replaced. I looked at the clock and there was still just over four minutes left of the session so I jumped back in the kart and took to the track again. On my last lap as the flag fell I stole my way back up to 5th on the grid which I was quite pleased with, and Barry would start the race sitting right behind me in 7th place. There were a few odd positions on the grid, not least Cool who was way back in the pack.

The lights went green and two hours of racing was underway. The run around the first corner was clean as the karts in front defended and blocked I was able to sneak into 3rd and begin crawling over the back of 2nd. Barry had made an equally good start and was chipping away at my back bumper, and would come alongside me every lap between HP1 and HP2. Unable initially to get past 2nd place I conceded the place to Barry as the leader was starting to clear off into the distance. Barry soon put a move up the inside of 2nd place and eased him to the outside of the corner's exit which gave me opportunity to nip past both of them. I was faced with a near empty track, save for BAR Humbug disappearing around corners well in front. I set off in pursuit but was making little impression into the gap and soon we were into the backmarkers. In my urgency to pass two karts I went for a gap that disappeared and I was forced onto the anchors through Pullmans and suffered a half spin losing me several seconds and allowing Barry back through.

I allowed myself a few choice words, calmed down and set off once more in hot pursuit. I was surprised to catch Barry in a few laps and even more surprised that we'd both caught up with the leader. For several laps I sat behind them both as they traded positions until Barry pitted for GP86's first stop. I then got caught up with a second backmarker that was to cause me even more hassle than the first encounter. Having seen BAR having trouble getting through cleanly I made a move and was disappointed to find myself guided onto the grass at Garda. This was repeated for several laps, finally getting cleanly past at HP1....only to be retaken with a lunging move at HP2. As I saw BAR clearing off into the distance I was now animatedly trying to point out that I was lapping this guy and all he was doing was slowing us both down. I ended up resorting to a very odd move at Garda where I went through on the inside and deliberately drove out to the far edge of the circuit and skipped across the grass-crete to prevent him from lunging up the inside of me again. I was finally through, but had lost so much time and my concentration so shot I decided to head into the pits for my fuel stop.

After the fuel stop was out of the way I immediately came back into the pits for my run-around stop and headed back out onto the track with a solid hour and ten minutes left till the flag. I was now well out of position and had no idea what karts were backmarkers or for position so I just overtook everyone with the same level of prejudice and got on with it. Just after the hour mark I came up behind Miguel, who was scrapping with BAR for what I realised must be the lead. They were slowing each other down as they battled for the position and I came quickly up to the rear bumper of Mig, getting an immediate run up the side between the two hairpins. Mig saw me and waved me through and immediately I was on the back bumper of BAR. I was there for less than a lap as coming up to café we came up quickly on a backmarker and the leader jinked left as the track swept left onto the main straight.

The lapped kart saw the nose of the kart and moved left in a bid to push the attacker to the side of the track, which left a lovely kart sized gap for me to carry my momentum through into Conways and into the lead.

Ahead, with an hour to go, I settled into a very nice rhythm and began to pull away from the karts behind and with the aid of some pit signals from Barry I realised that I was pulling away comprehensively. My race was relatively uneventful after that, save for getting dazzled by the setting sun and getting the early signs of a migraine that left me partially blinded in my right eye. It made the last twenty minutes go very slowly but I continued to extend my lead until I took the chequered flag by a healthy 27 seconds from eventual 2nd placed Steve Brown Jnr. A late spin from Mig as I came up to lap him dropped GP86 down to 4th sadly, but the result keeps us in a strong position in the championship with only three rounds left.

After becoming known as the race starter I've never been the guy to take the flag at the end of a race that Team GP have won, so it was very satisfying to finally get to do the lap of honour around Buckmore. The rota has been revised for next month and I'm due to be doing another two hour stint after this one proved so successful. I can't wait!!