

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Ironman Round 3: 14/05/06

This was a big day for Tough Monkey Racing. It was the first time we have really played with the big boys of the sport. The only tiers higher than hire-kart championship driving at Buckmore are the rental championships like Easykart or expensive owner-driver racing.

After proving that I have the pace to consistently beat the single race amateurs, I decided that it was time to hit the road and go off in search of a bigger challenge. And that challenge came in the form of a 350 mile round trip to Buckmore Park in Kent to take part in what would be Round 3 of the annually run Ironman series. A one hour endurance race that is essentially a feeder series for the Man of Steel event also held at Buckmore. These races are a world away from what I've been used to. Grids up to 36 karts, faster vehicles, professional circuit and quality talent on show.

I knew that this was going to be my greatest challenge, and I'd set myself the goal of finishing in the top 20, which I felt to be a sensible aim.

Not only was I competing against these guys for the first time, I was also going around the circuit for the first time too. My first wheels turned in anger on track were in the qualifying session, which lasts ten minutes. Ten minutes in which to learn the track, adapt myself to different karts with much greater top speeds (about 70mph), and set a qualifying time.

To my complete amazement, I qualified for my inaugural race in 8th position on the grid which was a tremendous achievement. But lining up on the grid was a claustrophobic experience, with all 36 karts lined up nose to tail.

When the green lights shone, the race was on and the noise is incredible as myself and the 35 other karters headed for turn one. I'd started from the left side of the track, meaning I was on the outside heading into that turn one, or Conways as it's otherwise known. I was still on the outside heading into Hairpin One, but had found the line before Hairpin Two. The first lap was just a sensory overload, and just as I was starting to bed in, I was pushed wide at Paddock and was mugged by several karts. I slipped into a double figure place, but was on the pace quite happily.

I was on my best behaviour though, as I didn't want to create a bad reputation for myself at this early stage of my Buckmore career. I found myself backing out of overtaking opportunities I might normally seize for fear of contact, which commendably Buckmore are very sharp on ruling out. In so doing though, I left myself open to the guys behind and slipped by places on a number of occasions.

The first half of the hour was taken up with me basically involved in continuous dog fights, trying to get clear track. By the time I had made space for myself, the next guy up the road was along way away. It took a long time to reel him in, but just as the chequered flag was waived I retook what was 8th position to finish my first Ironman race in the same position I'd started in. I was delighted with my performance against such talented guys, although I knew that I could have done perhaps a little better if I'd been more decisive in my overtaking.

Fear not though, as I really have the bug now and will return next month to attempt to go a few places better.