

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Thunder 60 Round 4: 17/06/07

Summer is upon us, but the weather in the days preceding round 4 promised a washout, so I made sure the waterproofs were in the kit bag. It was natural then that I arrived at Buckmore bathed in glorious sunshine and spent the hour before briefing padding around in shorts and t-shirt.

Almost all of the usual crew were to be found milling around the club house, the notable exception to this being Andrew Mollinson who had finished round 3 in second place in the championship behind run-away leader Si Rudd. The briefing was indeed brief, but once more Alan reminded the 33 drivers assembled before him that he expected behaviour out on track to be more befitting of Buckmore's blue ribbon event. After the battle royale of the previous round, I was keen to see if this would be the case.

The heavies went out for their qualifying first, while the calorie frightened amongst us remained in the club house. Watching the timing board it was clear that the track wasn't offering up quick lap times, no one troubling the sub 50 second barrier. Once their time in the spot light was over, the lightweights hit the track with me feeding out towards the rear of the field. The first couple of sighting laps went by while the kart got up to speed, and I picked off a couple of guys before bedding in for some hot laps. The thing was that no lap I put in felt particularly hot. The kart felt twitchy under braking and a bit of a handful in the turns, but only marginally more than normal, however it felt like it had a reasonable top end. I just didn't appear able to extract the most out of the kart. I did consider changing kart, but I was sure that the problem lay with the driver so gave the little guy the benefit of the doubt and stayed out.

Both of the hairpins were causing me grief, possibly because of the twitchiness under heavy braking, as I was struggling to get the anchors on and apex correctly. Symes was unusually difficult too, somewhere that I feel I can normally gain an advantage. I was sliding about a little too much for my liking, which is saying something. Normally I encourage the rear to step out coming around Symes in order to keep to the right and take a good line for the left at Pullmans, but I didn't feel as though I was really in control tonight so found myself lifting off the throttle and losing precious time.

Expecting a disaster, I was perhaps a little surprised to be only as far down as 16th. As always, I was hoping and indeed expecting much better prior to the event, but felt that it was respectable considering my distracted performance. Si was in pole position, and scampered away into the clear space in front of him as the lights went green.

The first few laps slipped by with little excitement. From my lowly position I didn't see any notable incidents, trading places with numerous people but not really making any progress. In fact, I didn't make any progress until Adam Michaelis was unceremoniously dumped into the tyre wall on the exit to HP2 on lap 11. I was able to sneak past three karts in the ensuing chaos, and suddenly had a clear track to aim at.

The next thirty laps passed with little talking point. Adam had recovered to duel it out with the kart directly behind me, but in so doing ended up tripping up over each other in a manner that had them dropping back from me at a large chunk each lap. Adam later told me that in the earlier impact his seat had slipped backwards and he would end up driving the rest of the race on tip-toes trying to reach the pedals.

Entering lap 40 I'd closed what had been a big gap down to eleventh, and surprised him with a successful lunge into turn one. I felt him breathing down my neck for the next lap, but pulled away

slowly to give me breathing space. It came as something of a shock when 18 laps later he came past me into HP1. I was taken completely by surprise as I was convinced he was several seconds behind me, so had basically left the door wide open. It woke me up as I was drifting along in no-man's land until then, unable to close in on the scrap further up the road. Between us, we set about reducing that margin until with only a few laps to go we were both within striking distance. Seeing that the clock was counting down to less than three minutes, I had noticed that Si was closing in behind me and would likely be lapping me before the end. The two karts in front of me were having difficulty with a backmarker, the loss of speed bringing Si right up behind me on what would be the final lap. Heading into HP2 I left the door wide open for him to slip through, but was hit from behind by an unseen kart. The force of the impact gave me the same problem as Adam, pushing my seat all the way back, and at the same time pushing me into the kart in front. The confusion of everyone bouncing in different directions allowed me to sneak past one kart, but I was unable to take the second. As the chequered flag fell, our three karts were separated by fractions of a second.

So, 11th was the finishing position overall, but enough of the heavies had been in front to promote me to 7th in class. I was mildly disappointed to be as low as that, but had no complaints to level at anyone but myself. The kart was acceptable, the standard of driving was much improved and my fitness was where it should have been. I simply failed to adapt to the kart and the track conditions as the guys up front had done. Amazingly, I leave the event for the next four weeks still in 4th place in the championship, with my closest rival Adam finishing the race back in 16th. Nevertheless, the teacher's report will simply read, "Must do better".