

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Winter Man of Steel Round 4: 18/02/07

When will I learn? If the kart doesn't feel good in qualifying then get it changed.

I'll be kicking myself about this race for some time. The time sheets will record that I was actually going quickly, but the reality is that I was struggling for speed throughout the race and my head dropped because of it.

I went into this race on a huge high after last month's heroics, and was looking forward to finishing the winter series in fine form before the significant test that will be the Thunder 60 championship starting in March. I'd be racing with the new kit added to the equipment bag, but preparations took an early setback on the way down to Buckmore when the M1 became a parking lot through the Luton road widening. It took three quarters of an hour to struggle through it and we only just slid into the Buckmore complex with a few minutes to spare before briefing.

The conditions for racing tonight were superb with the track and air dry with the temperature being much more clement than last month. It meant that the karts were able to run in full de-restricted mode which would be a first since the track had received its new tarmac. It was to prove a fast track for almost everyone tonight.

As last month, the heavies took to the track for qualifying first which allowed the calorie challenged lads to discuss strategies in the café before hitting the tarmac themselves. Initially I felt happy with the kart. I was in a group of the top boys and was chipping away at the bumper of the kart in front. However, this only proved to be the case while we were warming the karts up, and once I'd backed off to create some space for some flying laps I found that I just wasn't as quick as I felt I could have been. The kart carried plenty of speed through the corners but was noticeably slower on acceleration and top end grunt. Seeing the timer was counting down from 15 minutes I thought I'd give it till half way before coming in for a change. Sadly, we weren't out for 15 minutes and I was surprised when the chequered flag was being waved at us. I'd missed the opportunity to change and I was going to have to live with it.

The result of qualifying meant that I'd be starting way back in 21st, not the position I was hoping for and certainly not after last month. A couple of other luminaries had suffered the same fate, such as heavy weight series front runner Mark Figs. I was further concerned about the well being of my kart as ominous clouds of black smoke were coming out of the back end, but in fairness it held together okay. The race began and the rush to the first corner began.

The problem with being towards the back is you're in with the less experienced drivers, the guys that want to win the race on the first lap. This was evident tonight as I was bashed all over the place down the pit straight and was lucky to emerge facing in the right direction when I was punted into the barriers on the inside of turn one. Not somewhere you really wish to be at 50mph surrounded by 34 other karts. Regardless, I had a stroke of fortune when a tangle at HP2 gave me back the positions I'd lost. As it turned out, one of the victims was my sparring partner Adam who ended the first lap well adrift of the pack but would return to stampede through the field.

My race was a bit of a damp squib really. I was epic through Symes Sweep and the bottom of the circuit but top speed defects were preventing me from clambering up the field as I would have hoped. I was wrestling with myself whether to come in and change or not, knowing that any change will end your quest for a decent position regardless of how good the kart is you change to.

Through the course of the hour I picked up a few positions but ending the race in 18th I was generally disappointed, especially given the conditions lent themselves to faster running. As I mentioned, the lap charts show that I ran at a decent pace, which further adds to my disappointment as with a more competitive kart I could have been so much quicker. To further underline this point, the lap record was beaten during the course of the race. A lap record that only last month I had been seven hundredths of a second off of taking myself.

Nevermind though, it brought the curtain on the winter series and heralds the new summer championship with the incoming fleet of Thunders. I'll already be at a disadvantage in the first race as I have only had ten laps in the old fleet of Thunders and they drive so very differently to the Club 390's that I have been racing in recently. Plus, those of the front runners who have been having a winter break will also be back. It'll be a demanding first race, and I think I'd be happy with 18th!