

# TOUGH MONKEYS

## **Buckmore Park Thunder 60 Round 1: 18/03/07**

After two indoor races it was down to the serious stuff once more as the summer championships kicked off at Buckmore Park. First up this weekend was to be the first round of the Thunder 60, formerly the Man of Steel. This is the premier championship at Buckmore and is not an event to be entered for the hell of it. Even though I'm now into my second year at Buckmore I'm still considered to be relatively inexperienced when compared to the top guys, and tonight would see most of the celebrities of Buckmore taking to the track.

Sold out for a couple of months now, this event has been eagerly anticipated with it marking the debut of the new fleet of Thunderkarts. Speculation had been rife as to how they would compare to the outgoing fleet of Thunders, but given that my experience of the old Thunders consisted solely of a handful of laps in last year's Star Pupil I would be heading into the series in virgin territory.

I was fortunate that one of the regulars Grant Wright had let me know on the club forum that there would be a 30 minute practice session prior to the race and I decided to seize the opportunity with both gloved hands and try to acclimatise to the karts prior to the qualifying session.

I have to admit to feeling a little fatigued heading to Buckmore as the race had also coincided with Mothers day, my mum's birthday and the first race of the F1 season in Australia. As such I was all over the country attending various events and arrived at Buckmore with a solid 3 hours sleep since Saturday morning.

The practice session was such a benefit to me and I was delighted to post the second quickest time, even if there were only ten karts competing. The actual time available at full pace was severely limited by a couple of red flag inducing crashes which totalled at least one of the new Thunders. I did experience some discomfort holding the steering wheel however, which I found to be quite slippery. I had picked up a small blister by the time I returned to the pits, where I was greeted by the rest of the field for tonight's race who had by now arrived in mass and were fully kitted and ready for the Alan Wood's first briefing of the new season.

Looking around the gathered faces I could reel off many future stars of motorsport looking back. Matt and Simon Rudd, two of the best drivers at the circuit are early favourites for the title, along with Jack Harding, Steve Brown Jnr and Andrew Mollison. The heavyweight heavyweights were also accounted for, with Mark Figes, Gerrard Hubbert and John Mahoney leading the charge. In such exalted company with such inexperience I had decided that a finish in the top 20 would be good target to aim for.

It was us lightweights that took to the track for qualifying first, and I was very chuffed to find myself picking off drivers and moving onto the shoulder of Matt Rudd. However, he was just getting into his stride and he soon moved away. I was happy though to watch his driving from such close range and take away some pointers to improve my own lines. It was maybe this that gave me a fantastic starting position of 10<sup>th</sup> on the grid, surrounded by plenty of guys who I rarely mix with on the track. Adam Michaelis and Miguel Morland sat in front of me with Steve Brown Jnr beside me. The Rudd brothers locked out the front row, but they were not of any concern to me. The race began cleanly and the new season was underway. I picked up a place at the first hairpin, but for the next twenty laps was involved in a duelling train of cars that I was amazed to be able not only to keep up with but to compete for position with.

Having started so well my pace began to slip when I overtook a backmarker heading into Conways on lap 20, who wasn't happy about this and tried to retake me at the hairpin and

knocked me wide under braking. Miguel, who had been sat behind me for the last 10 laps sneaked through and I lost my rhythm for a few laps. I slipped down to 14<sup>th</sup>, and had also begun to feel the blister on my right hand beginning to annoy me as I could no longer grip the wheel how I would have liked. As I was starting to be distracted by this and wonder if I would be able to last the final 35 minutes something happened that made it all irrelevant. Heading up to Garda I felt a sudden loss of power and the kart slewed to a crawl. Pulling immediately off of the racing line I was quickly passed by several karts as I made my slow way back to the pits.

Arriving in the pits I spoke to the mechanic guy who was sorry to say that there were no more spare karts available for me to jump into. The toll of the practice crashes and a few failures earlier in the race had robbed me of a spare car and I was stuck with the stricken kart I was in. The mechanic suggested I try the kart again but I was back in the pits by the end of the next lap. Once last effort by the mechanic having removed the air filter and I attempted to rejoin the race, but the kart barely had the power to get up the hill at Garda and I coasted back to the pits and into retirement.

It was a disappointed end to a promising race, especially since the rain that had been promised all day arrived while I was stood on the balcony of the club house watching. It was great fun however to watch the ballet of spinning karts below, as the sudden change in conditions caught everyone cold.

With 5 minutes to go I got a call from Alan to say that they had managed to prepare a kart for me to go out and finish the race in, so I put my helmet and gloves back on and headed out into the downpour for a few laps of tail sliding fun.

The race was eventually won by Simon Rudd, taking full advantage of a late incident involving a backmarker and his brother. I will be shown to be classified as 36<sup>th</sup>, but I will take many positives from the evening. I had shown that I could run with the top drivers in the top kart in the top series. I head back to Buckmore in one week for the first round of the Pro 60 championship. I'll be back in the good old Club Pro karts, and with the competitions perhaps not being as great as the Thunder 60 I go into it with quiet optimism.