

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Winter Man of Steel Round 1: 19/11/06

I've had to take several looks at the calendar to believe it, but this is my first race in a kart in four months. I've been seriously slacking! Well, that's not entirely true. I've been putting in a lot of intensive training at the gym over the last few months to bring myself back up to full fitness after a summer of, well, burgers and chips I guess.

I'd booked in for this series a long time ago and have been looking forward to it with great anticipation. Up until now my involvement at Buckmore has been in the Ironman series which is really a feeder class to the premier Man of Steel championship. The karts in the "MOS" are slightly quicker, but the competition is a great deal stiffer. The club's top drivers are found in this event, all guys who given the right funding and guidance could quite easily make it a very long way in the sport. Lads who have age and weight on their sides yet have vastly more track experience than most of us.

However, my enthusiasm for the event was dealt a massive blow exactly one week prior to the race. While competing in an owner/driver event run by another company yet coincidentally at Buckmore, highly respected and universally liked fellow Buckmore regular Adam Goatley was tragically killed in a racing accident. This came as a shock to all Buckmore regulars and brought us together to show our support for Adam's family at this terrible time. We've all read the fine print that tells us that motorsport is a dangerous activity, and we all understand the dangers. Rarely though do we perhaps appreciate that something like this could happen to us.

Understandably, the briefing for round one was a subdued affair. Because of the time of the year the race is run in darkness save for the floodlights. Although rain rarely threatened, the track was damp which put me at a three way disadvantage right from the start. First race in the MOS, first race at Buckers in the dark and first race at Buckers in the wet.

Qualifying was certainly going to be interesting for me. Race director Alan had booted me right in at the deep end, sending me out in qualifying session one with the big names of Buckmore. I had ten minutes with which to find my water wings, which in the dark and at speed is something of a challenge. Racing lines change utterly in the wet as the rubber laid down which gives the grip in the dry has the same effect of trying to turn on oil. Even just getting a kart to turn is a challenge, bearing in mind we're riding on slicks. Approaching a corner is a leap of faith, requiring a sharp jab on the brakes to load up the front end and loosen the back, a yank of lock on the steering and then boot the throttle to

bring the back end around. Then balance the kart on the throttle and opposite lock as required to feed you out onto the straight. It's certainly fun!

From a grid of 34 I'd qualified 15th which I was really quite happy with. I was surrounded by regular names on the grid, so I felt I'd made a good fist of things so far. The race started and all 34 drivers headed for the same bit of tarmac. Inevitably there were plenty of shunts throughout the field, one of which resulted in buddy of mine Adam Michaelis dropping to the back of the pack from a decent 11th on the grid.

Despite plenty of rough stuff early on I'd managed to steer clear of too much trouble. I had a couple of minor spins by mid distance but was quickly growing in confidence and finding some decent lines through the slightly drying corners. I rarely got the 180° Conways correct, something I will have to work on in the coming races. In fact, the one time I felt happy with the corner I came out with so much speed I overshot my braking into the first hairpin and slid gracefully wide.

The race was won by the usual who's who of Buckmore, guys who I take my hat off to. I crossed the line an eventual 13th place which was better than my goal of reaching the top 20. I know where I can go faster, and I know I have to work on my consistency.

At the end of a difficult week for Buckmore and its patrons it was great to get back out on track and do what we all love doing. The wet conditions might be tricky but it's awesome fun.

Roll on the next round.