

# TOUGH MONKEYS

## **Buckmore Park Winter Man of Steel Round 3: 21/01/07**

It's the morning after the race and I'm shuffling around like a constipated 90 year old. After three consecutive wet races at Buckmore it was a completely dry evening in Kent and it never ceases to amaze me how much more brutal an assault on the body a dry race can be. Cornering speeds are so much higher resulting in greater fatigue on the arms, neck, ribs and legs. In a wet race the karts slide about making the steering light, but a dry track gives much more resistance and feedback and boy do I know it today.

Since the last MOS in December Buckmore have spent some serious money and resurfaced a number of corners and this was clearly noticeable in everyone's lap times as we were all able to carry frankly outrageous speeds across the new tarmac.

I entered this race on a bit of a downer after the last visit to Buckmore. The kart had been a pig and left me scrapping at the back of the field and it's natural to ask questions about your own ability after a disappointing result. Thankfully, tonight would be a renaissance that was long overdue.

The heavies went out for their practice/qualifying laps while us bulimics sat in the café discussing the new tarmac. Myself, Adam and Miguel, the two guys I chat to most off track, had drawn kart numbers 14, 7 and 17 respectively which would prove key during the race. After the calorie enhanced guys had come in, we were off out onto the track for the first time of the evening. The lap times for the heavies were impressive, a couple of whom had dipped under 50 seconds. I've personally never gone under that barrier at Buckmore and it's frankly become something of a thorn in my side.

Once I'd got the tyres up to racing temperature, it soon became apparent that kart 14 was significantly better than the ovine beast I'd been lumbered with last month out. No one went past me during qualifying, and in fact I was all over the karts in front. I came up behind Adam, pole sitter from the last race, and was all chipping away at his rear bumper. I decided not to pull off any moves on him at this stage, thinking that if I could keep on his tail then I'd be up near the sharp end for once.

And so it proved to be, clinching 5<sup>th</sup> place on the grid for my highest ever position. Adam was sat right behind me, while I myself sat behind regular front runner Jack Harding. Miguel had backed up his recent form and lined up second on the grid. Being so far up the track gave me time to get out of the kart on the grid and mingle with the other front runners. I'd only noticed recently that I no longer suffer any nerves before a race and such was the same this race night. I used to get knots in my stomach in the days leading up to a race, now I fail to see why I should be worried and just itch to get into the seat.

The lights turned to green and the pack surged forward towards the first right hander at Conways. Jack's machine appeared sluggish off of the line and held me up briefly and Adam was nudging from behind. A space appeared beside me and I braved an outside line around Conways hoping the tyres would stick. In the minutes sat waiting on the grid the tyres lose a lot of grip and the kart

slewed around the corner with Jack a nose in front. This kept me wide heading around HP1 but on the inside into HP2. I stuck my kart up inside of Jack's and I was into 4<sup>th</sup>. I held position for a lap but while lining up 3<sup>rd</sup> place I left a gap open for a couple of karts to out-brake me into Garda. I slipped a few positions over the next few laps down to the bottom end of the top ten but was still on the pace.

The kart felt really good, but I was having difficulty getting a rhythm going. Heading down the main straight after ten laps or so I had my first scare of the evening when the air pipe came free of the engine, resulting in a loud noise and a kick of extra speed. While the extra speed is good, it's seen as an unfair advantage and results in a black flag to come into the pits and get it fixed. Not wanting to lose time through no fault of my own I reached back and reattached it as best I could. It would happen several more times during the race, the most annoying time when heading into the white knuckle ride that it Symes Sweep. Heading into there at full tilt while driving one handed, looking behind you and hanging off the side of the kart is an experience I don't really want to repeat.

At quarter distance (lap 26) there was a yellow flag incident which bunched us all up again, however I was to fall foul of the recovering karts. When a kart is stationary on track, you make a split second decision as to which way around it you go. Coming out of HP2 there was one such kart in the middle of the track. I went to the inside, but the spinner had decided to get going again and left me to stand on the brakes to avoid a collision. I lost a couple more places during this melee, dropping me to tenth for a couple of laps. I had a run of four poor laps while my concentration was shot, but after asking a few questions of myself I smacked in three quick laps and picked up ninth.

There then followed a mass walk out of my brain cells for a moment of complete stupidity. On lap 29 the air pipe popped out again, but was quickly reattached. However, as I crossed the line to start lap 30 the grid marshal hung a penalty over the tyres at me. I only caught a quick glimpse of it and thought it said 14. What it actually said was 17, and was a penalty for Miguel who himself was suffering air pipe problems. I didn't realise this until I came into the pits for a stop and go, only to find the two pit marshals looking blankly at me.

In total, I lost about twenty seconds because of my blonde moment. It dropped me to 16<sup>th</sup> and well off the back of 15<sup>th</sup>. There then followed 21 consecutive sub 50 second laps as I marched up behind 15<sup>th</sup> and continued picking drivers off until I was up to 11<sup>th</sup> and right up behind Adam and Bananaman (Paul Rook). My rate of progress stalled somewhat at this point. Adam and Paul were circulating in the low 50's and were climbing all over the back of each other. I spent the remaining laps trying to find a way past, and for one lap I did get ahead of Paul having surprised him on the run up to Garda. However, I made a silly lunge on Adam into Paddock on the next lap and Paul repassed me at the same point. Paul and Adam are both aggressive drivers and I really expected one to take the other out over the last couple of laps.

However, this never quite materialised. Both traded bumper plastic, but never too rough. I ended up following Adam over the line, actually passing him 5 yards after the chequered flag fell.

After my mid race charge I was disappointed to finish in 11<sup>th</sup>, but after consulting the lapaliser on the Buckmore website I have a great many reasons to be cheerful. I had set the second fastest lap of the night, a mere 0.008 seconds behind the top lap of Miguel's. What was even more satisfying was that I was only 0.011 seconds off of the all time 390 Pro lap record set last April by supreme lightweight and Buckmore Junior Star Pupil Ollie Varney. A lap of 48.89 is quick in anyone's book.

Further consultation of the lapaliser showed that if I'd taken out the mid race blunder from my lap chart, my average time would have seen me come home clear in fourth place and just a few seconds off of a first podium at Buckmore. While I could beat myself up about my error, I instead have chosen to look at the major positives from the race, not least that I've hacked well over a

second off of my fastest lap, and that my average lap for the entire race was faster than my fastest lap previously. I found improved lines through the corners, better braking points and generally had a more subtle handling of the kart. My challenges at overtaking were more aggressive, thought out and clinical than ever before, and I feel that provided I have a competitive kart under me I can look forward to running at the sharp end more often.

A top five finish is the next target I've set myself. The next round will be the last one of the winter series, myself and Adam heading into it tied on points in the championship. After that, the new Thunder Karts arrive for our driving pleasure, and I'm itching to get into those bad boys. After all these wet races, it was fantastic to be back on a dry track. I'll be keeping my fingers crossed for a patch of blue sky over Buckmore next month. And also for a decent kart of course.

Right, time for a long soak in the bath, and then to hose myself down in deep heat. Until next month.