

TOUGH MONKEYS

Kartsport Endurance: 22/01/04

What a race this turned out to be. It was the foundation for what was to become Tough Monkeys Racing, yet it could have all been so different.

Over the New Year I'd been very ill with flu and I'd spent two weeks in bed. I'd returned to work, only to come down with a cold which knocked me back off my feet. My first day back at work after that, I'd gotten a phone call from Ian Smith the kart captain making sure I was racing that night. I hadn't even realised it was the night of the annual Milbank Karting Challenge in Caxton near Cambridge. I initially told him that I was in no condition to drive, and he went off to find a replacement. The phone rang again saying that he'd found one, but someone else had pulled out. Would I go along as a stand in if needs be? I agreed, saying that I was only there as cover.

Well, best laid plans and all that! The two and a half hour race format meant a number of driver changes, split so that we'd all get two stints of 15 minutes. While out on my first stint, I felt that I was out longer than I should have been. This turned out to be correct, as team manager Ian had noted that I was the fastest kart out there and I was flying through the field and wanted me to make as much progress as possible.

The rest of the team went through their stints and by the time I got back into the kart with 50 minutes to go we were in 3rd place but a few laps down. I didn't know what was going on around me, but my team mates were watching as while the other teams changed drivers had caught and gone past second, and was hunting down first place. I was being left out to gain as much ground as possible. When the leaders (Milbank's No.1 team) came in for their final driver change, I had sneaked into the lead.

Still unaware of both my current position or what my team were thinking, I just got on with the job. By this time I'd set what would be the fastest lap of the night, but I was beginning to tire. The manager made the decision to leave me out on track till the end as a driver change now would lose the lead.

In the last few minutes there was a yellow flag caution which resulted in everyone bunching up. As I passed the start line, my team mates were waving and frantically pointing behind me. I looked around to see the No.1 Milbank kart sat right behind me. This pumped a litre of adrenaline into my blood stream and on the green flags being shown I was off. It took an age before the chequered flag was waved, but when I finally crossed the line it was the culmination of one of the finest personal achievements of my life.

I was completely drained and so exhausted that I needed help to climb out of the kart. It was the first time that Milbank had been beaten in their own challenge, and was a very sweet taste indeed.