

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Pro 60 Round 1: 25/03/07

You know, doing the maths going into this race there wasn't much reason to suspect that I wouldn't achieve my best result at Buckmore. The majority of the A-listers weren't here tonight, save for Ollie Varney, Ian Charles and Steve Brown Jnr, so it gave drivers like myself and Adam Michaelis opportunity to push for podium places. I was looking forward to this, and was optimistic of a good result.

Race director Alan had excused "the suits" from the pre race briefing, so the handful of regulars who were racing tonight kicked about in the café while Alan did his routine to the new guys. Once we were called to the grid, we climbed aboard the Club 360's and hit the track. Unlike the Thunder 60 race, the entire grid is on the track at once time during qualifying so it's very difficult to put in a quick time. You tend to spend a lot of time tripping over people, so you do your best to make yourself some space to put a clean lap in. When I did get such an opportunity I found that the kart really wasn't performing as I'd hoped, and I was experiencing not only low top end speed, but also massive amount of understeer coupled with some questionable brakes. I tried my best in the kart, but decided to do what I should have done in many other races before and I came into the pits to change kart.

I headed back out into the traffic, but I hadn't even got the tyres up to temperature before the session was over. I was going into the race not really knowing how competent the kart was. I had qualified a disappointing 14th on the grid, but few of the other regulars had done much better. For the second weekend running I was sat next to Steve Brown Jnr, while Adam was sitting way back in 22nd.

The race began and I had a great start getting good traction away from the line. I went around the outside of several karts through the first corner and headed into HP1 several places up from where I'd started. Sadly, the pack was all over the place under braking and I was pushed very wide and lost countless places stuck out on the rumble strip. Approaching HP2 I was now on the inside and decided to sacrifice speed for a tight line. It paid off as the diving and shoving of the pack continued and I was able to sneak past many karts. Adam had benefited from the shuffling and had followed me through. He said after the race that I normally keep out of trouble at the start so decided to shadow me.

That theory was sadly blown apart on lap two as I headed at high speed through the Symes Sweep/Pullmans complex. A kart behind caught my left rear corner and sent me into a dramatic 360° spin. It was a buttock clenching experience seeing everyone from 15th to 33rd steaming towards me as I briefly faced the wrong way. I let the kart complete its graceful spin amazingly without being hit, and continued on my way, albeit now in 19th place. I'd picked myself up to 17th before a full course yellow for a shunt at Paddock backed everyone up. The caution lasted nearly five laps, but on the restart I felt the kart was beginning to come back to me and I enjoyed a great series of laps. I climbed back up to my starting position of 14th, and was really feeling settled. I was flying up to a pack of drivers tripping over each other, and caught them at HP1. I was delighted to see all five of them take each other out, and I slipped up the inside of the lot of them. I was just beginning to feel smug as I braked for HP2 when I got a huge whack up the rear and spun around to once more face the oncoming pack. I had to sit motionless as an endless stream of karts went passed before I could spin around and rejoin the race. I was fuming inside my helmet as I saw my good work over the last twenty laps totally undone.

Only two laps later saw an incident happen right in front of me which brought out the full course yellow once more. Heading at full tilt into the first corner there was a kart facing the wrong direction still finishing a spin. In these moments you have to decide quickly which way to go around them. I chose to head to the inside while the kart in front of me went to the outside. That was a flawed plan, and he and another kart speared straight into the tyre wall at a very high speed.

Another 5 laps under caution and the race was on again. This time though, the kart felt completely out of sorts. The backmarker I was behind on the restart was slow to get running again and in an effort to get past him I was pushed wide onto the grass and had a clenched backside moment as the kart got seriously sideways. I mopped it up, but what seemed like the whole field slipped past. I spent half a lap trying to get back onto the racing line, but I was floundering for a great many laps. I was suffering extreme understeer and the kart had no top end speed. I'd slipped back down the order to 19th and was feeling at a low ebb.

Despite this, as the darkness drew in around this corner of Kent I closed out the race with some consistent laps and recovered to 15th by the time I went over the line for the last time. Shortly before the end of the race I was lapped by Adam. I tried to keep up with him but he was really flying, and with good reason. He took the chequered flag for not only his first podium in the senior classes but also for his maiden win. I followed him around his warm down lap and behind a delighted Alan was the first to shake his hand and congratulate him. It's been on the cards for a while now, so he thoroughly deserved it. Other than Alan though, the rest of us "suits" were off the pace tonight.

The clubhouse afterwards had a great atmosphere as Adam was given the heroes welcome. The rest of us chatted about what had gone wrong during the race, but despite what I consider a disappointing race I had a great evening of entertainment. It brought to a close my most hectic ever month of karting, and I now have nearly three weeks to the second round of the Thunder 60's. I have yet to decide whether I'll do the second round of the Pro 60, as oddly enough I feel I have a better chance of doing well in the Thunders. The standard of racing is so much higher, with all the drivers being of a standard that do or die lunges are highly unlikely. Plus, despite what happened at the last race, the karts are of a more even performance. I'm looking forward to the race already. I bet Adam will be too.