

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Star Pupil 2006: 25/11/06

You wait around for ages for a bus and then two come at once. After four months without climbing into a kart, I find myself in one twice in six days. After last weeks first round of the Man of Steel championship, I was very keen to get back behind the wheel, but wasn't expecting to be returning so soon. Two days after the race I received an invitation to the annual Buckmore Park Star Pupil shoot out. The top 60 drivers that Buckmore has to offer are selected from the Iron Man, Man of Steel, 1200 GP and Team of Steel championships, and come together in a number of races to find the best of the best.

I had totally dismissed being invited along to this event as I'd only taken part in three races in the Iron Man summer championship, so didn't feel I'd racked up enough track time to be on the shortlist. It was therefore a very welcome surprise when I received the call.

The weather for the day was always going to be challenging, my drive down from Derby on Saturday morning setting the tone. Torrential rain meant visibility was seriously reduced, but at least I had a roof over my head, something the karts obviously lack.

Buckmore was packed to the rafters, and the briefing room was completely full. Despite the high spirits and banter, a one minutes silence for our recently lost friend and racer Adam Goatley was observed with impeccable respect. The event has now been renamed in his honour, something we were unanimous in agreement over.

The racing began with the endurance events, the huge pack being split into two separate races. The split appeared to have the acknowledged sprinters in race one and the enduro guys such as me in race two. The format was a five minute qualifying and then a 45 minute race. My qualifying was a brief four laps, trying to find my wet line around Buckmore as best as I could. The conditions were certainly worse than last week, and the difference was certainly noticeable. Oddly, the first half of the track that I struggled with last week was offering plenty of success this time, but the second half was a real mess.

Given the enormous wealth of recognised talent in my race I was overjoyed to find myself in tenth on the grid. The race got under its slithering way but despite the terrible conditions and low blinding us as we entered the main straight, the opening laps were very clean.

I got stuck into a huge scrap with at least five different karts, swapping places every other corner. The racing was intense but never once dirty. All the drivers were seasoned racers and there was a great deal of respect for each other out there. I had two semi spins during the course of the race, but each time quickly regained any lost places. The race was hugely satisfying, the conditions constantly changing and testing all drivers greatly, and I was delighted to cross the line in 8th place. The drivers in front of me at the end were the eventual first and second in the Star Pupil event, the consistent podium dweller Paul Cox and the Rudd brothers who dominated the Man of Steel championships. There is no disgrace in following those guys closely home, and I was especially heartened to see I'd finished ahead of Darren Pullen, the Iron Man champion who had shown me the way home in all my previous outings.

The event was closed out by a number of sprint races over five laps. I was always going to struggle here as not only had I not competed in a sprint at Buckmore but the karts being used were the more powerful Thunder Karts, which I've never driven. No practice was on offer, so I entered the races totally cold and had to learn quickly. I learned exceptionally quickly though that those karts are simply awesome. The angles they would slide to on the wet track were simply outrageous. It might not have been totally effective, but my god it was fun!

After the racing had finished, the presentations to the top drivers were made and after Tom Clark had gotten the Bronze cup and future mega-star Ollie Varney the Silver, it was Carl Tebbutt who took the overall top prize.

I had a hugely enjoyable day and hope that my performances next year will see me invited back again. My driving seemed to take a huge step forward and I am hungry to be out on the grid for the second round of the Man of Steel.