

# TOUGH MONKEYS

## **Midland Karting Sprint Race: 26/07/06**

It's amazing how things can happen on the spur of the moment. At 4pm I was sitting at my computer, listening to Derby County being taken apart by Colchester on the radio. After a bit of aimless trawling through the internet I discovered a kart circuit near Lichfield which was having an Open Grand Prix that very evening starting at 6pm.

A brief call to confirm that there were places left available, a quick Rain-X and Fog-X of my visor and I was hot-footing it down the A38 to Midland Karting.

The turnout for this event was 14 competitors, including two young women with their respective partners and a good cross section of ages and, as it turns out, abilities.

Midland Karting run 200cc Biz Karts. Not the fastest chariots (about 45mph) but lots of low end grunt to catch the out amateurs coming out of the corners. The track is a modest 450m, made up of numerous switch backs but plenty of overtaking opportunities.

Four heats for each driver in the usual format of starting from every position on the grid. I'd drawn the short straw by starting from the back of my first heat. It's always the aim to get the best possible result from the first heat to take pressure off of qualifying for the 8 places available in the two semi-finals.

The charge down to the first corner saw me slip up the inside into third position, but it took well into the second lap to fight past second place. There was a measurable gap to first, and the four lap race distance didn't leave a great deal of time to close in. The run into the fast start finish straight was a hairpin followed by a left right chicane. Heading over the line to start the last lap saw me carrying momentum to pull alongside the leader who was holding the tight line in defence. The sight of my nose cone was enough to put him off, and with his running out of brakes and track, I scampered past to take the maximum points available.

The second race had me in pole position. While waiting to be called to the grid, I got chatting to one of the marshals who let it slip that two of his colleagues were also racing tonight, and I'd beaten one of them in that first race. This race passed without any kind of drama. Leading into the first corner I left the three karts behind me squabbling over tarmac real estate and finished over half a lap clear.

Race three saw me in second on the grid. I followed the leader for the first lap, who was driving defensively but fast. Heading down towards turn one of lap two I made a move up the inside, but my competitor didn't see my move until he had turned into me. Having the inside line I was into the lead, but not wishing to gain a black flag I eased off and allowed him through. The next time around I did exactly the same move, and contact was made again as he tried to shut the door. This time however I was already ahead at point of impact so kept the right foot planted and took the race victory again.

My last heat was going to be interesting. Starting from third, I had in fourth position the colleague that the marshal had informed me was the best of those who worked there. Knowing I was already safely through to the semis, I was prepared to come second at the expense of following the experienced line. The race was very close for the first lap. First and second were scrapping for the lead, while I sat close behind with my main rival moving about all over my tail.

Heading into the hot spot of the first corner on the second lap I saw second place prepare to take the outside line while the leader defended tightly. Seeing carnage was about to happen, I tucked into the tight line also and saw nothing but daylight in front of me when the leader gracefully spun on the apex taking both of my other rivals with him. It was a relative cruise to the finish line to take a perfect four from four victories.

I lined up on pole for the first of the semi finals, and once again was able to scamper into the distance with no one to hold my pace back. The extended distance of six laps saw no dramas at all.

The final again saw me line up on pole, and I headed into the first corner in the lead. A cursory glance over my shoulder at the end of the first lap surprised me to see second place tucked up behind me. It rattled me briefly and was aware from this range that I could easily fall victim of a late do-or-die lunge. The final was over eight laps, and I was under pressure for each one of them. I'd put a few kart lengths between us by the last lap, but in total fairness to the guy behind he didn't let temptation get the better of him and there were no kamikaze incidents. Having taken the race, and the event victory, I was the first to shake his hand as he was the only driver I hadn't been able to shake.

It turned out that the three guys in the final with me were all mates, so after hosing them down with cheap champagne, I handed over the bottle for them to finish and I headed off home with my first winners medal of the year. It's been a long time coming.