

TOUGH MONKEYS

Buckmore Park Star Pupil 2008: 30/11/08

As tradition has it the end of the summer season sees the staging of the annual Buckmore Park Star Pupil event where entry is by invitation only to the drivers who performed the best throughout their chosen championship. This was my third invitation to the event which so far I've been invited to every year I've been at the club. Naturally, if I had an invite then surely the rest of the Team GP clan would find the letter on their doorstep too, and indeed they did. Mig however was not available on the day of the competition so it was just Barry that would be joining me to take on the great and the good of Buckmore's hire kart elite.

The format as ever was first the endurance race with the drivers split into one of two heats, and then a series of sprint races with each driver taking part in two of them. At all times drivers were being assessed by two independent judges as to who would be crowned the Star Pupil. At the end of the endurance and sprint races the top eight drivers would be called in to a single sprint race for a final assessment before the top driver was named.

As is almost always the case the weather was particularly inclement and the first event up was the endurance in the Pro karts which I don't particularly like and hadn't driven since the last Star Pupil event. I took an instant dislike to my chosen chariot for the race but maybe it was just personal. I've always thought it a shame that the enduro racing that I'm associated with should have me in a kart I so dislike. Nevertheless I got on with the racing which sees everyone start from allocated places on the grid. I didn't have a particularly good race, tramping round in the lower order of the top ten and having two spins in the damp conditions that are particularly out of character for me. I'm trying to think back and I can only remember one spin all year and that was in a qualifying session when someone locked up in front of me so to have two in a single race was surprising. I've never really taken to the handling of the Pro karts and in the wet I do like to hang the tail out of a kart and drive in a hovercraft fashion. The short wheelbase on a Pro doesn't allow this very much and they soon snap around with little chance to bring it back. I trudged home in relatively lowly position knowing full well that the two spins would have erased any chance of being a star in the eyes of the judges.

Barry, on the other hand, was showing that at least one of the GP stable had bothered to turn up with some talent today. In his race he was having a storming race and came home in a fantastic second place, beaten only by Steve Brown Jnr who it should be mentioned was the Iron man champion last year in these very karts, plus is one of the finest wet weather drivers in the club. Barry was flying and I tip my cap in a respectful manner towards him.

Onto the sprint races and momentarily at least my talent had arrived. Starting towards the lower reaches of the grid I was in the same race as both Steve and Jack Harding who was my personal favourite to win the entire event given his performances of the last year. Steve and Jack are the partnership that stopped Team GP winning the Team of Steel this year and I'd suggest that right now they're in the top 3 drivers at the club along with Si Rudd. It was with great delight then that after dealing with the karts in front of me I found myself reeling in the pair of them as they battled for the lead. As we entered the final lap I was right on the back bumper of Steve who in turn was welded to Jack's bumper. I had the merest of opportunity to overtake at HP2 but pulled out of the move as there was no way of getting through without contacting one or the other. The chequered flag dropped with the three of us side by side but

still in the same positions as the start of the lap, and a thoroughly enjoyable race it was to be a part of.

In the second of the sprint heats Barry went one better than me, matching his 2nd in the enduro and taking 2nd in the sprint. He was utterly on fire today. Our remaining heats were a little less stellar so we waited for the judges' verdict to see who would be in the final race. Unsurprisingly I had missed out on the final, which I had made last year but at no point looked like achieving this year. Barry however was in there, and well deserved it was too. He'd driven superbly all day and the only surprise to me was that he wasn't awarded a better grid slot. He was always going to be playing catch up from the lower orders and came home in a still worthy of thunderous applause 6th place. All eyes however were on the front of the race as the lead changed hands several times in the gloom of the darkening Buckmore evening. Dave Tebbutt was defying his heavyweight status and was always in contention for the win, but it was Jack, Steve and Dan Shilling that fought for the lead position. In an utterly nail biting final two laps Jack led Steve home across the line to take the victory, and with it take the prize of Star Pupil 2008. I've raced with him and against him on numerous occasions and there's no driver in the club I have more respect for than Jack so I was extremely pleased to see him take the crown. As for me, well back to the drawing board!