

Race Report

Round 1

Brands Hatch

26th / 27th March 2011

Introduction.

After a long winter the 2011 Classic FF1600 series kicked off with the first in a series of the three double header meetings which form the first half of the season at the BARC Truck Meeting at Brands Hatch on the Indy circuit. Trucks may not be everyone's cup of tea but they certainly seemed to draw quite a large crowd to the meeting and this combined with reasonable weather particularly on the Sunday made for a pleasant atmosphere - at least when the HGV enthusiasts were not actually running their engines...

Qualifying.

Two Classic FF1600 Drivers failed to actually make it to qualifying reducing the entry to 13 cars. Alan Fincham was a victim of some very careless driving by a "slicks and wings" merchant during the Friday afternoon test session. A sideswipe on the approach to Druids resulting in his car spinning and making violent contact with the barriers. It went in backwards resulting in severe damage to the rear suspension of his RF80 on both sides and also the gearbox and chassis itself. Alan himself was also a bit knocked about but a frontal impact might have been even worse... Andrew Smith tested his Van Diemen FA73 during the afternoon having missed the Brands Hatch races in 2010. He felt a vibration (not the good sort either) from the clutch which turned out to be a sheared flywheel bolt and decided that withdrawing from the meeting was the only safe option to avoid further possible engine damage.



Of those who did pole position was taken for both races by the 2010 Class A Champion Stuart Kestenbaum. Although he failed to match his testing pace (possibly due to cooler weather?) his 53.020 time was a clear 4/10ths faster than second placed Andy Powell in the distinctive Pink Panther Royale RP26. Continuing his excellent form from the latter half of 2010 David Brise took third place in his slightly older RP24 in front of a large group of his sponsors guests. Steve Pearce was next up with his RF81 which he has worked hard to sort since acquiring it in mid 2010.

In 5th place came the first of the Class B Runners Dave Lowe as ever in his well known and charismatic Lotus 69. Then Colin Williams in his PRS. It was great to see Dave Malpas returning to racing after a years absence in his very smart Van Diemen RF78. In 8th place was the second Class B Runner James Buckton in the Elden. This was James's first race on the Indy circuit having only previously raced on the GP layout - so he was having to get the hang of the tricky Surtees/McLaren left right flick and then the diagonal braking zone for Clearways. Liam McShane in the ex Rory Farrell / Ian McMillan Crossle took 9th place ahead of newcomer Ian Jeary in his smart Yardley liveried Dulon MP15 complete with Hesketh Teddy Bear stickers for the full 1970's look. Having attended to a cracked stub axle Michaels Saunders took 11th place (4th in Class B) with his Hawke DL11. In 12th was Jonathan Greenwood back in his Dulon, after 9 months away from racing he still succeeded in lapping one second faster than on his previous visit to Brands Hatch in 2009.



Finally returning to the series after several years away was Richard Burton in the yellow and blue Royal RP26. This was his first time out since his big accident that hospitalised him for several weeks a few years ago. The RP26 he has just purchased was previously owned and raced by Jeff Palmer.

Race 1

The only retirement from the first race was actually on the warm up lap when Michael Saunders Hawke suffered what I believe was electrical failure trying to leave the grid. Fortunately the Marshalls were able to push the car back through the old pit lane entrance before the remaining 12 cars returned to the Grid for the race start. He would (with assistance from Ken Thorogood and Nick Booth among others) get the car running again for race 2.

As the light turned to green Stuart took an immediate lead and proceeded to drive away to win in a typically efficient manner, dipping below the 53.0 second barrier 3 times (the only Driver to achieve this) and posting a long series of very consistent laptimes particularly in the middle of the race.

Behind him a major battle developed for the remaining top places. Steve Pearce moved up to 3rd place on the opening lap behind Andy Powell and ahead of David Brise. Dave Malpas also moved up a place from his 7th place on the Grid. Andy Powell held on to Stuart over the opening lap or so but by lap 2 the RF79 was pulling away as Andy became embroiled in a battle with David Brise who had passed Steve Pearce at Druids hairpin on lap2. Steve experienced a gradually lengthening and softening brake pedal which eventually also affected his gear downshifts making it difficult for him to defend into braking areas with confidence.



Dave Malpas and Colin Williams began to pressure Dave Lowe for 5th place - Colin was the man on the move here as he passed the two Daves at Druids on successive laps.

As the battle for 4th/5th/6th place continued David Brise could be seen to be closing still further on the Pink Panther. The braking area for Paddock Hill Bend is very much on the crest of a hill and it is all too easy to lose control as the car goes over the bump. On lap 6 Andy Powell did spin here sharply although he recovered the car very quickly and resumed still in 3rd place (!) only about 3 seconds behind David Brise.

Immediately after this incident I noticed Liam McShane pushing his Crossle very hard indeed through Paddock Hill Bend - in race 2 however this famous and challenging corner would get the better of him too !! Ian Jeary received a warning flag for a loose nose cone - He returned to the pits for repairs but exited in rather a hurry - earning a visit to the Clerk of the Course to discuss speed limits in the pit lane.

Two separate battles developed - Colin Williams attacking Steve Pearce for 4th place and Andy Powell closing very quickly back on David Brise for 2nd. Colin managed to pass Steve at Druids and then Andy managed to dive round the outside of David at Paddock Hill Bend so clearly the spin had not put him off too much.

Dave Lowe was now being pushed for the Class B lead by James Buckton in his Elden. As Dave caught the increasingly brakeless Steve Pearce James was able to close in further but Dave is vastly experienced and catching him is one thing and getting past quite another.

Despite having a bit of a slide on the oil at the entry to Surtees David Brise then managed to retake 2nd place at Clearways but in the ensuing laps he appeared to start suffering from a slight lack of straight line speed - some onlookers felt his engine sounded a bit flat with possibly a loose exhaust or a timing issue. Eventually Andy passed him again also at Clearways and that is how the order for 2nd and 3rd remained for the rest of the race.

Dave Lowe managed to put Steve Pearce between him and James at Druids only for James to get past Steve as well at the same place a lap later. However Dave held on for the Class B win while James should be pleased at making up two places and finishing just 2/10ths of a second behind the 13 times Class B champion who has achieved outright victory at this circuit in the past. He also achieved fastest lap in Class B at 53.3 seconds - just 0.5 seconds off Stuart Kestenbaums best lap of 52.8 seconds.

Two seconds behind the Class B lead battle Steve Pearce finished 7th ahead of Dave Malpas in 8th place. The last man on the lead lap was Liam McShane in a slightly lonely 9th place. Ian Jeary finished 10th a lap down on the leaders but a lap up on Jonathan Greenwood and Richard Burton. The last 3 all drove cleanly and I noticed that when they were caught by the leaders all made excellent efforts not to block the faster cars. Richard also managed to go more than 2 seconds faster than he managed in qualifying which is good progress.

Race 2

Race 2 saw a similar grid to race 1 with just Ian Jeary and Liam McShane swapping places for 9th and 10th. Michael Saunders making a return to the grid as well, hoping the electrical Gremlins had been defeated. Unfortunately Richard Burton was unable to start the second race as he felt his car needed checking due to its poor handling. Hopefully this will be sorted in time for Snetterton in May.

At the start Stuart once again got away cleanly with Andy Powell in second place again. Although the commentators appeared to think that Andy was closing in on Stuart slightly towards the end of the first lap I think this must have been a trick of the light as Stuart just motored away again to win by 14 seconds (breaking the 53 second mark on 5 of his laps). The other front running Classic FF1600 Drivers are going to have to raise their game sharply or Stuart is facing a boring if successful year !!



Colin Williams (who had fitted a couple of newer tyres to the left hand side of his PRS) drove an excellent opening lap to move from 6th on the grid to 4th place behind Andy Powell and David Brise. Liam McShane finally went over the limit at Paddock Hill bend on lap 2 spinning into the Gravel with no damage but a lot of hoovering and cleaning to do on the Crossle when he got it back home.

Colin and David had a close fight for 3rd place over the first few laps of the race. At one point Colin passed David into Paddock Hill Bend only for David to immediately hit back at Druids. Then remarkably Steve Pearce managed to pass them both in one move approaching Paddock Hill Bend ! Clearly with help from his Brother Steve had fixed his brake problems ! Colin subsequently falling behind Dave Lowe as well on lap 4. Dave was having no pressure from James for the Class win this time as James was about 7 seconds behind him at this point.

Continuing his excellent form into Paddock Hill Bend Steve Pearce managed to drive round the outside of Andy Powell for second place. A minor disaster then struck Andy as a misunderstanding when lapping one of the slower cars lead him to slip from 3rd to 5th along Brabham Straight on lap 7-8. It was then David Brises' turn to lose out in a big way as both Colin Williams and Andy Powell jumped him at Druids Bend.

Steve, Colin, Andy, and David were now running very close for 2nd/3rd/4th /5th. David passed Andy round the outside at Paddock only for Andy to do the same back to him on the following lap. This exchange probably contributed to the 4 way battle splitting up very slightly with Steve and Colin moving slightly ahead (by about 1 second) of Andy and David. Colin eventually passing Steve for 2nd place - a very impressive drive as he had started in 6th place on the grid.

Dave Lowe took 6th place and 1st in Class B and this time he did make the fastest lap giving him a healthy Class B points lead as he heads off to Dijon next weekend. Dave Malpas managed another



steady run to 7th place after a long lay off. Behind him was James Buckton-scoring another 9 points in Class B although he was not able to push Dave as hard in race 2. Despite spinning at Clearways Ian Jeary managed to avoid being lapped this time while finishing 9th in the Yardley Dulon while Michael Saunders managed to lap a second faster than his qualifying time to take 10th place and 4th in Class B. Finally Jonathan Greenwood finished again - happy with the performance and reliability of the car but feeling a bit rusty with a couple of missed gear changes, having not had much time in the car at all during the previous 18 months.

Summary

We saw 2 excellent races. A strong demonstration of pace and consistency by the winner. A close fought battle behind conducted in a sporting way with no contact, and lots of great overtaking moves and good progress being made by the less experienced Drivers as well.

Hopefully some of the Crowd will have gone away with a new appreciation of what FF1600 racing can be like. All the Drivers can be very proud of the way things went at this races.

As a spectator this time I was hugely impressed - for what that's worth !!

Next up is another double header at the newly revised Snetterton Circuit and hopefully 2/3 Drivers at least who could not make it to Brands Hatch will be there to add to the grid numbers.

As well as that we should hopefully be seeing the first round of the new Pre 90 Pilot Series in action as well and those who feel the need for some extra practice can even enter these races as well. Be warned however - as well as his 1979 Van Diemen Mr Kestenbaum also has a Reynard FF89.....

