

Race Report

Round 10 & 11

Oulton Park Park

September 24th 2011

We aimed for 20 cars at Oulton, and we almost got it. 19 entries, making it the most frequented CFF1600 meeting of the season. Until Ollie Robinson blew his engine whilst testing on the Friday...poor Ollie had to endure the long drive home to Bournemouth before the weekend had even begun. Bad luck matey.

Even so, 18 was a decent enough entry, and shows that we are alive and kicking. The aim for 2012 will be to field regular grids at these (or higher) numbers. Rest assured that this is what our principle aim will be over the coming winter.

Joining the regulars this weekend were Ian Wood, out again in his Royale RP33 in the so called 'Invitation Class' which technically does not exist, but, in order to help our grid stats, we are happy to go along with. Also back out for another meeting was teenager Callum Grant, in his dad's Merlyn Mk20, Andrew Bartosiak, Martyn McGrillen, Mike Saunders and, for the first and last time this season, Andy Hodson.

Qualifying : We had a 20 minute session today, courtesy of a more relaxed timetable all round from BARC, although a red flag after 8 minutes interrupted things somewhat, as 10 minutes were spent sitting in the pits whilst Dave Lowe was recovered from a spin and off at Druids, fortunately without any damage. Up until the red flag, it was Stuart on provisional pole with a 55.6, then Cadwell victor Andy Powell on a 56.8, Alan Fincham going very well on a 57.5 and then James Buckton (aiming for a full 26 points this weekend to keep up the pressure in Class B) just two hundredths adrift.



The red flag is thrown in qualifying



Ian Jeary's broken water pipe

Sadly Mike Saunders was an early casualty, with a damaged left rear, following a coming together with Andrew Bartosiak at the Knickerbrook chicane. Mike was left to watch the remainder of the session from the Armco, whilst Andrew got back to the pits to retire. A full morning's work beckoned for Mike and Fat Nick, to get the car repaired in time for race 1, which they succeeded in doing.

Callum Grant was also having problems, a gearbox issue rendering him stuck in third. He crawled round for a couple of laps to register a time.

With the circuit clear, the cars were let out for the remaining time – despite the stop, we got our full 20 minutes on track. Immediately, Stuart went quicker still, on a 55.4, with Colin Williams and Steve Pearce both now getting up to speed on a 56.4 apiece. Colin then went quickest on a 55.1, only for Stuart to trounce it with a 54.1 on the next lap, which nobody else could get near, although James showed his intentions by joining him on the front row, the only other driver in the 54s. Colin would line up 3rd, with Andy Powell getting down to a 56.0 on his last lap to take 4th, outqualifying Steve by 5 hundredths. Andrew Smith was 6th on a 56.6, then Liam doing a fine job on his long circuit debut on a 57.0. Alan didn't register a time following the restart, but took 8th on his 57.5, with Ian Wood showing his local knowledge on a 58.1, Dave Malpas on a 58.6, Dave Lowe on a 59.1 being the last man under 2 minutes.

Martyn was pleased with the improvements to the handling of his car, on 2 minutes dead. Andy Hodson stopped out on track, having forgotten the Steve Pearce Rule : fuel the car for the whole session, not just some of it...Mike Whitehead was the final car still running, down in 14th, with Mike Saunders, Andrew Bart and Callum making up the final grid order. Ian Jeary – back from his almighty shunt at Cadwell, with a hastily prepared Dulon, had a water pipe fail on his first qualifying lap, so that was it from him. He was granted the final place on the grid by being given the opportunity to qualify with the FF2000s.

Race 1 : Running up towards the start, and it was wet. Not desperately so, but wet nevertheless. Two green flag laps allowed some acclimatisation, and the 18 cars all lined up on the grid. As the lights went out, Stuart led away, and Colin passed James in the early part of the lap. Andy Powell's race ended within a third of a lap, when he stopped at Island. Steve overshot the Knickerbrook chicane in a late braking attempt, and returned to the track still in 3rd. Andrew Smith spun at Druids, and resumed last.

By the end of lap one, there was already a gap opening up between Steve and Liam, who had been delayed as Dave Malpas spun exiting Cascades, and Alan spun out too in avoidance. Both resumed, albeit towards the tail of the field. Behind Liam in 4th was James (who must also have had a delay as he slipped back from 2nd to 5th over the lap), then Dave Lowe, Callum, then Andy Hodson, benefitting from those falling off ahead of him – up from 13th to 8th.



Stuart led from start to finish



The closest CFF gets to Indycar...

Stuart and Colin began to pull clear of Steve, who was then caught and passed by a recovering James at Old Hall. Colin drove similar laps, both in the 2 mins 16-17 bracket, until Stuart pulled out another couple of seconds on the final tours to win by 8 seconds, and take the Class A Championship for the fourth time (watch out Dave, he's catching you up !) Colin, yet again, was the bridesmaid, still waiting for that elusive first CFF win, but cementing his 2nd place in the title hunt.

James was the only other driver matching the front runners' pace, putting in the third fastest lap of the race to take 3rd overall, and the Class B win, and 13 points thank you very much. The plan was working – just to do it all again later in the day.

Steve drove a conservative race to claim 4th, and 3rd in Class, to maintain the pressure on Colin for 2nd in the Championship. Dave Lowe was on Steve's gearbox as they crossed the line, taking 2nd in Class B to maintain his lead at the top of the table. Liam was a few seconds adrift, driving carefully to take yet another 4th in Class (the trophy will come to you eventually Liam, don't worry..). Callum made a monstrous start, climbing from 17th on the grid to 7th at the end of lap 1. He made it up to 6th by lap 5, only to spin at Cascades. Nevertheless, he then held 7th to the flag in only his fourth race.

Andrew Smith recovered from his first lap error to climb back up to 8th overall, and take valuable points in his Class B challenge. Alan Fincham too made it back from 15th on lap 1 to 9th by race end. Andy Hodson also spun at Druids mid race, dropping back to 10th.

Andrew Bartosiak succeeded in hauling his RP26 round to take the finish in 11th, with a cautious Ian Wood in 12th and Mike Whitehead in 13th. Mike Saunders endured the conditions to finish lapped in 14th, with Dave Malpas uncharacteristically out of sorts in 15th. Martyn retired to the pits after 2 laps, not liking the conditions (not surprising quite frankly as this was his first wet weather experience), and Ian Jeary continued his weekend of woe with another early retirement with a rough sounding engine.



Race 2 starts at dusk...



The two Andys early on

Race 2 : This one was dry. The grid, as usual, was formed from the 2nd fastest lap in qualify. No great surprises, with only a couple of minor order changes to grid 1. This time Stuart had Colin and James fighting it out from the start – and they would finish in that order after 10 more frantic laps, only 2.6 seconds apart at the flag. With James again taking fastest lap, he succeeded in

going home with a maximum 26 points, and moving up to within a point of Andrew and just 2 points of Dave.

Again, Steve held station in 4th/3rd Class A to take the battle for 2nd in Class A down to the wire at Mallory. This time, no mistakes from Andrew Smith, who kept it together to take 5th and 2nd in Class B. Dave Lowe followed him home a distant 6th to maintain his lead in Class B by just one point. It will be a fascinating race at Mallory, where Dave, Andrew and a charging James battle it out for Class B honours.



James went home a happy man



Oh bugger.....

Liam and Alan had a coming together coming up the hill after Lodge on lap 7, eliminating both of them on the spot. This elevated Dave Malpas to 6th, which he lost to Dave Lowe on lap 9. Ian Wood circulated just off the back of this gaggle for most of the race, well clear of those behind. He would finish 8th. Callum struggled with brake balance issues to 9th, Andy Hodson came home 10th again, Martyn being happier in the dry in 11th, with Ian taking the finish despite being in some pain following his Cadwell shunt. The two Mikes brought up the rear – Messrs Whitehead and Saunders.

Andy Powell had the misfortune to retire at pretty much the same point as in race 1, albeit a few laps into the race. And Andrew Bartosiak retired to the pits on lap 4 with issues unknown.

So – an exciting day out on the ‘proper’ circuit here at Oulton, the first time in a while for many. Stuart went home Class A Champ yet again, with the battle for second going down to Mallory. Hopefully Alan can fix his car in time, as he has Andy Powell in his sights to claim 4th, but with Dave Malpas and Liam snapping on his heels, anything can happen.

Class B of course is where the attention will lie. With 2 points between the top 3, pit signals will be the order of the day I suspect. Good luck gentlemen, start your engines....

ADH