

## **EPEC 2011 Rd 1 Whilton Mill 20 Mar 2011**

The new season has now officially started and the new questions are about to be answered. Will the teams of Howard Lucas triumph again ? Will Alpha return to winning ways ? Will the new 7 karts turn the tables ? Will the new Wrights leapfrog both of these ? Will the grids increase ? Will there be more international teams taking part ? Will this Series be as exciting as the last ? Will the competition between the engine builders finally reach an end ?

Teams were on the grid for the last “unofficial” practise for Saturday night. The tension in the air was palpable and nervous laughter permeated the atmosphere. The flag waved and we were off, all of the hopes and dreams for the new season were to be put to the test. At the end of the test session, predictably, some teams were full of smiles and some were not. Final preparations for Sunday’s racing were underway and some teams felt able to start the throat lubrication process quite early while for some a long night was in prospect.

There are approximately 3750 racing miles to be contested before the winning teams become known and approximately 500 drivers attempting to influence the results. The logistics of this mammoth exercise are controlled by Tracy Pope and Angie Hutchinson. The Sporting Rules and Regs are policed by Paul Beatty and Scrutineering by Kelvin Nicholls. Of course, none of this would be possible without the circuit officials re – fuellers and marshals and last but by no means least the man who with Martin Hynes invented the Prokart and has consistently championed low cost, fair motor racing – Bob Pope.

### **Qualifying**

Dull weather conditions but sparks in the pit lane as different qualifying strategies were used. There was the “go straight out and go as fast as you can till the end” or “find a space on the track to develop a rhythm” or “try and slipstream a fast one” or “gently warm the tyres before going for it” or “as long as we are near-ish the front , we have 6hrs to get to the front so save the tyres”.

A number of teams briefly hit the top of the time sheets before qualifying was settled with

|                 |     |            |                       |                   |
|-----------------|-----|------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Pole            | 43  | MS SoCo 1  | Steven Welsh          | 52.63 sec (+1 pt) |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 144 | McDonald,s | Ceilings Tom McDonald | 53.03             |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 7   | SAS        |                       | 53.06             |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> | 8   | Stretton   | Ronnie Rowe           | 53.24             |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> | 75  | AJB        | John Munday           | 53.24             |

In Mar 2010 qualifying was 1<sup>st</sup> 53.30, 2<sup>nd</sup> 53.41, 3<sup>rd</sup> 53.53, 4<sup>th</sup> 53.64 5<sup>th</sup> 53.67 since the weather conditions were about the same, does this mean that this year's karts are quicker ?

### Race start

The 33 starters (up from 26 last year) formed an orderly grid and set off for the parade lap. This was in marked contrast to last week's Super 1 Rotax at Whilton where the back markers could not keep up as the parade lap speed was quicker than their fastest laps.

The bunched grid were away first time and 43 MS SoCo (Steven Welsh) were straight into the lead followed by 7 SAS ( Karl ) and 144 McDonalds (Tom McDonald). Disaster struck for 144 at 12 min when the chainguard detached itself. Also, 98 Baron ( Jeremy Gumbley) came from 7<sup>th</sup> on the grid to challenge for the lead. At 9 seconds down 25 Autotec ( Jeff Johnson) were 3<sup>rd</sup> together with 222 LG ,4<sup>th</sup> . 75 AJB (John Munday) fifth just 10sec adrift. At the bottom 333 Silver Bullet and 2 World First were experiencing difficult mechanical problems.

At the 1hr mark 43 were still leading, still followed by 98 but 443 MS SoCo 2 (Jake Clifford) had caught and passed 222 LG. Another kart on the move was 4 Alpha (Chris Freeman), although 34 sec down on the leaders were in the leading group of 443, 222, 4, 25 and 19 Pro Gem (Daz Sandbach).

After the first fuel stop the order had been maintained and 43 MS So Co 1 ( Jamie Stubbs) had increased their lead to 32 sec over 98 Baron ( Tom Champion) with a lap over the rest of the field 443, 222, 4, 19, 25. Kart 8 Team Stretton ( Charlie ) were 22 sec behind 25 Autotec but 26 sec in front of 21 GC Racing. In tenth place was 77 Offline Racing (who in a former existence were called Snatch Motorsport) holding off the challenge of the Portuguese team 15 NKT – Transitex.

There was a new leader after the 2<sup>nd</sup> fuel stop because 43 MS SoCo 1 had ran out of fuel on the circuit. It was most amusing to see the vastly experienced Jamie Stubbs pushing the kart into the fuel bay to hand over to Stephen White.

98 Baron ( Jeremy Gumbley) now had a 20 sec lead over 43 , a further 11 sec to 4 Alpha who had a 13 sec gap on 443 MS SoCo 2 ( Adam Nicholls). 75 AJB ( Simon Bayliss) had started well , 5<sup>th</sup>, but then tumbled down the leader board to 28<sup>th</sup> at the half hour point. They had begun the slow road back and had climbed to 16<sup>th</sup> after 3.5hr. The next group on the track were 118 H2R Racing, 56 Blue Lizard, 66 Lambo and 1 Team Banzai .

275 laps in of the 400 lap race distance 43 MS SoCo 1 (Stephen White) were back in the lead with a 32 sec advantage over a new second place 4 Alpha (Austin Munday). 8 Stretton ( Ronnie Rowe) had risen to 6<sup>th</sup> and 144 McDonald's Ceilings were up to 9<sup>th</sup> after falling to 28<sup>th</sup> in the first session. The order was 43, 4, 98, 443, 222, 8, 25, 19, 144 and 15.

Endurance racing can be very cruel when the kart has a problem which can't be satisfactorily cured. 17 APEX Eng were last at 125 laps and would eventually withdraw. 46 Grass Roots at 53 laps were now using the event as a protracted test session . 5 ACS at 25 laps however they did show during the race that they had the pace to make big, big improvements and be much further up the leaderboard in the future.

As the race headed into the final session and the different fuel strategies unfolded we could see that 43 had a comfortable 33 sec lead over 98 and 2 laps over 443 and 4 with 25 , 222 and 8 a further lap away.

There was an interesting battle which had been race long but was now coming to a head. The Portuguese team ( 15 NKT), first time on circuit, new kart ( to them) and very little practise were contesting the Clubman Championship from 21 GC Racing and 71 Rogue Racing. To further complicate the situation the transponder from 15 was beginning to die and fail to register their laps. Tracy Pope was propelled into the action to manually add laps as 15 passed the line every circuit. Then ! in the last 5 min both 71 Rogue Racing and 21 GC racing began to splutter as they ran out of fuel and a splash and dash was called for, leaving 15 in second Clubman.

So,

Will the MS teams of Howard Lucas triumph again ? They did at Whilton but Clay Pigeon is a "bogey" circuit for them

Will Alpha return to winning ways ? Not just yet but the signs are promising.

Will the new 7 karts turn the tables ? Not just yet, but 2<sup>nd</sup> is not far away.

Will the new Wrights leapfrog both of these ? Not just yet but 5<sup>th</sup> is a good solid start.

Will the grids increase ? Yes

Will there be more international teams taking part ? Yes, Portuguese, Dutch, American, German, Scots, Welsh and Geordie teams signed up for the series.

Will this Series be as exciting as the last ? Yes

Will the competition between the engine builders finally reach an end ? Jury still out.

Race results

1<sup>st</sup> 43 MS SoCo 1 (P), 2<sup>nd</sup> 98 Baron (P), 3<sup>rd</sup> 443 MS SoCo 2 (P)

4<sup>th</sup> 4 ALPHA (P) 5<sup>th</sup> 25 Autotec (P) 6<sup>th</sup> 222 LG (P)

7<sup>th</sup> 8 Stretton (C) 8<sup>th</sup> 19 ProGem (P) 9<sup>th</sup> 144 McDonald's (P)

10<sup>th</sup> 75 AJB (P)

We can't wait till Clay Pigeon 24<sup>th</sup> April 2011