

SNETTERTON - Rounds 6 and 7, Saturday/Sunday 27/28 June 2009.

Your writer had been looking forward to this weekend at Snetterton all week, as the forecast was good and Snetterton is at its very best when the sun is shining. This demanding track, which calls for all the elements required of a good racing driver, can be most satisfying when the combination of large globes, skill, and brain power are employed. Allied to this was the anticipation of Ian Crombie's car being fitted with the trial engine and being back-to-backed with a regular grid.

Following the exclusive test session which Jamie had arranged, the Paddock on Friday night resembled the waiting room of a Doctor's surgery, with a variety of "sick cars waiting for attention! Luckily, Doctors Ian Megson and Matt Napper were on duty and wrought their usual miracles throughout the evening to cure the maladies in time for early qualifying on Saturday. Since the last round, there were new additions to the bodywork of Jonty Hair and Marcus Bicknell's cars.

QUALIFYING: Round 6, Saturday

Saturday morning's sun had burnt off the overnight mist by the time the 15 cars left the pit lane at 10.58. From the pit wall, it was obvious from very early on that Barry Webb had lost none of his determination to be the quickest and set pole on lap 6 of his 12, in spite of an increasingly loose rear wing. Paul Gibson's second-place fastest lap was just four-hundredths shy of Barry in a trouble-free run. The improving Jonty Hair, benefiting from yet more car development from the fertile brain of Jim Yardley, was third, set on lap 9 and less than two-tenths off Paul's time. 'Mr Consistent' Paul Freeman in his Ardmore qualified fourth, another two-tenths from Jonty. New boy Alex Champkin was in fifth place in dad's Phantom, having briefly declined to stay on the black stuff at the Esses. Sixth place saw the welcome return of Reece Wood in his re-engineered Mark 27, just seven-tenths off pole despite spongy brakes. Following Reece in seventh spot was Adrian Langridge, with his regular DMD (Dogsbody Mechanic Dad), commenting that he was being overtaken on the straight bits by all and sundry. Pete Richings returned to Snetterton after five years' absence and was pleased with his eighth spot, almost exactly one second from pole, having improved his time from Friday's testing. Mallock Sports driver Nigel Corry followed Pete in ninth position, having failed to improve his time throughout the session because of traffic. Following Nigel, in tenth place, was Des Andrews, being run by Glen Eagling and enjoying his day, back with his Clubmans friends. Marcus Bicknell followed in eleventh place, having obviously spent the previous weeks in the Braun wind tunnel, judging by the F1 style bodywork he was sporting! Brian Jordan was next up in twelfth spot, set on lap seven of his ten laps in session and considerably faster than the previous season, being only two seconds off pole. The ever-cheerful Clive Lester was thirteenth, experiencing engine power loss as it got hotter, plus diff problems which all on the pit wall could hear as he went by. Nevertheless, Clive was happy enough. Returnee Chris Burnham set a splendid fourteenth lap time, experiencing a sticking gear-box and lack of track time after his spell away rearing a future driver to the 2026 Clubmans grid! The qualifying session was missing Adrian Lester, whose battery decided to expire in the collecting area and he failed to get out. However, he was allowed to race because he tested on Friday. Meanwhile, Ian Crombie, in his 'trial-engined' Mark 28B, had set a fastest lap almost 7/10ths quicker than pole, but – as agreed by all the drivers – would start the race with a ten second penalty. Session ended 11.15 a.m. – i.e. 17 minutes' qualifying time.

RACE: Round 6, Saturday

The cars left the assembly area at 14.53 and the drivers' Managers, Personal Trainers, Nutritionists, Psychologists, Team Managers, Mechanics, Doctors, Nasal Hair Removers, and various hangers-on careered across the paddock to the pits, with batteries, tools, tank-tape, and signalling equipment in 80 + degree heat. The red light went out at 14.59 and Barry Webb did his now customary Senna-esque start, being over two seconds quicker than anyone else on his first lap and therefore pulled fifty yards on the chasing Paul Gibson on the first lap. Paul Freeman passed Jonty Hair on the start and set off after Paul Gibson in second place. Jonty then got Paul Freeman back on lap 2 and slotted into third place. Reece Wood had a storming start, picking up two places to gain fifth place ahead of Pete Richings, who followed him through into sixth from his eighth place start.

Adrian Langridge followed, having discovered a punctured tyre immediately before the race and having to use his well-worn set. However, he held onto seventh, followed by Des Andrews who, along with the others, had dropped young Alex on the start, who languished in ninth position by the end of lap one. Nigel Corry followed Alex, less than eight-tenths away across the line, chased by the fast-starting Adrian Lester, who had gained six places on lap one, in spite of his continuing electrical problems, and he and Nigel had a close dice. Marcus Bicknell followed, with the also fast-starting Clive Lester and Brian Jordan just one-tenth behind and Chris Burnham still keeping the penalised Ian Crombie with his extra horse-power behind him.

By lap 3, Paul Freeman had dropped to fifth, having been passed by Reece and Jonty, whilst Alex Champkin regained two places and Ian Crombie worked his way through the field into eleventh, ahead of Des Andrews. As the race progressed and enough places changed to keep F1 aficionados happy for the rest of the season, Barry sailed off, some seven seconds ahead of the chasing pack! Amongst the many scraps behind Barry was Paul Freeman, Adrian Langridge, and Alex Champkin, having, in Paul's words' an epic battle, which was "very good, very close, and very clean. Then Paul Gibson, who'd held a steady second place, had yet another breakage of his Gem which eliminated him from second place on lap seven when he went straight on at the Bomb Hole. This allowed Jonty into second place which he held to the finish, followed by Reece Wood in third place, having passed Paul Freeman.

On lap 4, Des Andrews was forced onto a service road by an altercation with Marcus Bicknell, which – following another coming together with Marcus at Cadwell – was sufficient to cause Des to abandon not only the race, but sadly Clubmans and Glen Eagling Motorsport altogether.

Another DNF was Brian Jordan, who 'lost all power' on lap 4 (having suffered a similar problem in qualifying) and was forced to retire. Meanwhile, Alex Champkin held onto sixth place.

On lap 12, Adrian Langridge spun from fifth to sixth, being passed by Alex Champkin and which also allowed Nigel Corry to pass on lap 13. Adrian's spin caused Pete Richings to take avoiding action, which unfortunately damaged his nosecone and slowed him down for the remainder of the race. Pete was also suffering from jumping out of second gear throughout the whole race, eventually finishing in tenth place out of twelve finisher, ahead of Chris Burnham, followed by the unfortunate Clive Lester, who had been experiencing an engine mis-fire yet again from Lap eleven, but in his usual determined and cheerful manner chugged across the line to finish his race a lap down.

Throughout the race, Ian Crombie sailed through the field to within four seconds of Barry and set a fastest lap almost a second quicker than Adrian Lester's 1.14.779, an average speed of 93.97 mph.

All in all, this was the best race of the season so far, with a super-competitive grid, close and changing places throughout the race, and lots of smiling faces in parc ferme.

Rainwater Harvesting Driver of the Day was awarded to Chris Burnham for his competitive return to the field following his absence on paternal duties.

ROUND 7 – Sunday, 27th June 2009

QUALIFYING: Round 7, Sunday

The cars were released from the Collection Area at 9.22 on Sunday morning on another gloriously sunny day, with – as usual – Barry, the Pauls Freeman and Gibson, and Adrian Langridge visibly quicker. However (!) Adrian Lester, who had been seen stepping out of his motorhome that morning shouting 'I'm up for it today', was setting a stunning pace, consistently two to three-tenths quicker than anyone else. On Lap 6, he set his pole position time of 1.14.057, some eight tenths quicker than his previous day's race fastest lap. Alex Champkin was swapping second place with Barry, both also in the low '14s, followed by Jonty Hair, gradually working his way down from high '14s.

Following closely behind was Paul Freeman, benefiting from “a tweak”, which enabled him to improve on Saturday’s time. He and Jonty were the only drivers to complete 12 laps in the session, thereby showing their consistent lappery. Paul Gibson was having a less than happy time with his repaired Gem (having experienced yet another suspension failure in Saturday’s race) with a gear-box jumping out of second and terminal understeer. Nigel Corry followed, considerably quicker than the previous day, on a 1.15.023. Reece Wood followed Nigel, still unhappy with his car ‘rolling’ in the slow corners. Adrian Langridge had started off quickly but started to suffer from a loose exhaust and slipped down the grid to tenth on a 1.15.861, followed by Marcus Bicknell in his multi-coloured and sidepod “F1’d” Mark 26 SG, slightly slower than the previous day. Brian Jordan was also slower

than Saturday in 12th spot, followed by Chris Burnham, one of the select few to be quicker than his Saturday’s times, pipping Clive Lester, who was at last happy with his car following the tribulations of the previous day. Last, but not least, was Pete Richings, having a bad weekend – only completing three laps of qualifying after his gearbox decided it didn’t want to play! As your writer watched the lap times settle down, with – by this time – Adrian Lester having set his pole, Alex Champkin had jumped Barry Webb into second place by two-thousandths of a second, but, as the chequered flag was shown, Jonty Hair popped in a time equalling Adrian Lester’s pole of 1.14.057, attributing his sudden turn of speed to a loss of brakes! Throughout this session, Ian Crombie had pounded round with the new engine, finishing with a 1.12.997, whilst avoiding interfering with other drivers’ lap times.

The session finished at 9.39.

RACE: Round 7, Sunday

Your writer joined Ian Titchmarsh in the commentary box for the race and, as the red lights went out, saw Jonty Hair overly anticipate the start, causing him to hesitate before applying maximum Henries to the right-hand pedal. Barry Webb then serenely passed both Jonty and the slower Adrian Lester, to drop them both off the line from the second row. Paul Freeman had made a cracking start from the third row to go side by side into the first corner with Jonty, following Barry and Adrian. The following pack compressed itself onto the racing line and Alex, who for once had made a good start and was aware of a closing Nigel Corry, tapped Jonty, who had been forced to cross in front of Alex as he had been unable to take the exit racing line because of Paul Freeman’s cracking start alongside him. This resulted in Jonty spinning on the exit of the corner, taking out not only himself, but Alex and the luckless Clive Lester, with varying degrees of damage to their cars. As the surviving cars went down the straight, and to add to the depletion of the grid, Reece Wood’s clutch blew. A safety car ensued until lap 6 whilst the damaged cars were removed. Barry held the lead from Adrian Lester, Paul Freeman, Nigel Corry, Adrian Langridge, Paul Gibson, Marcus Bicknell, Brian Jordan, and Chris Burnham. On lap 7, Adrian Lester did a Damon Hill pass on Barry into the chicane. With Barry aware that Adrian’s pass was probably too optimistic, he let Adrian go through and spin on his own off the track. Then Adrian, desperate not to get in the way of other cars failed to see the closely following Paul Freeman and T-boned him whilst returning to the tarmac, with immediate retirement for both of them. This left Nigel Corry in second, Adrian Langridge in third, followed by Paul Gibson, Marcus Bicknell, Brian Jordan and Chris Burnham, who then suffered a failed battery on lap 8 and retired from the race. On lap 12, Paul Gibson squeezed by Adrian Langridge to take third place, leaving Barry to win his seventh race out of seven, but leaving an unhappy commentator, your writer, and no doubt the many spectators because of the diminished grid and too many DNFs. The subsequent Clerk-of-the-Course report for the first lap incident, taking Marshal and video evidence, was a “racing incident”. This was all in sharp contrast to the previous day’s best race of the year.

Paul Gibson’s gritty drive into third, with a mis-handling Gem, was a satisfying end to his weekend prior to his eagerly awaited, re-engineered car at the next round at Croft. The happiest part of the day for your writer was an ecstatic Nigel Corry, who had finished in second. Meanwhile, Barry Webb emulated Roger Federer with a sublime show of skill, and knowledge of his fellow competitors, to continue his whitewash of this season.

Fastest lap went to Paul Gibson on 1.15.472. There was no Driver of the Day award.

Yet again, the trial-engined Ian Crombie had a trouble-free run through the field from his 10 second penalty, to finish first across the line with a fastest lap of 1.13.892. Race ended at 14.57.

Next round: Croft, double-header, 25/26th July

Karen & Chris Hart