

Thruxton 20th September

No sooner than I put finger to keyboard for the first round of 2014 King Henry's Taverns Clubmans Championship when here we are writing about the last two rounds at the fast sweeping power circuit of Thruxton.

Qualifying

It was always cloudy with a threat of rain all day which happily did not materialise significantly but with nineteen cars out this was to be the conclusion of the best year in Clubmans racing for a long time with a nail biting finish.

Marcus Bicknell finally managed to get his Mallock Mk35 Honda going to snatch pole with a 1:18.631. As one might expect being a power circuit the next two places were filled by Alan Cook, Mallock Mk20 Classic A class and the similar car of Rob Manson. Power circuit or not, the leading Sports 1600, Mikey Day, Mallock Mk26 was only point eight of a second behind Manson. Joint leader of the Championship Michelle Hayward, Mallock Mk27, was a mere point two adrift with a similar gap to Peter Richings, Mallock Mk30. The other joint Championship leader Howard Payne put his Mallock Mk20 fourth in class just ahead of Chris Pickering's for sale Mallock Mk27. So with just one second separating the top four Sports 1600 cars it was going to be close.

Steve Everson's Mallock MK28 was the second Proto and looked a real handful coming out of the chicane suffering from rear wheel steering from his independent rear suspension. Rod Player brought his Mallock Mk23 out for one of his all too rare appearances was next but only point four of a second head of Clive Wood in his Mallock Mk20 Classic B Sport. Ian Mitchell, IM Mk4, only just beat Chris Hart, Mallock Mk 27, claiming to be having his last race while still in his sixties. Winston Graham driving series sponsor, Phil Weaver's, Mallock Mk28 managed to slot in ahead of Barry Webb, Mallock Mk16 Classic B Sport. Richard Gilmour, Mallock Mk18-25 was followed by Thruxton rookie Liz Kennedy in Martin Goddard's Mallock Mk23. Phillip Allen had fuel problems with his Phantom Proto while poor Jamie Champkin only managed one lap in his immaculate Phantom P94/14 due to seized on brakes. This was a problem which could not be resolved at the circuit, so he was unable to take any further part in the meeting.

Race 1

As the lights went out Alan Cook leapt into the lead chased by Rob Manson. Marcus Bicknell made his usual poor start and came round in third place. Meanwhile out in the country Steve Everson was slightly off line and got caught out by one of the Thruxton bumps and went off at great speed and by all accounts nearly made it to Andover. Mikey Day was the leading Sports 1600 closely followed by Michelle Hayward, Chris Pickering, Howard Payne and Pete Richings. The power of the Honda started to tell and Bicknell passed Manson on the run to the chicane and on the third lap did the same to Cook. Ignoring the BHP advantage of the Classic A class cars, Day closed in on Manson and slipped past on lap four. Further down the field Clive Wood was chasing Rod Player and Winston Graham had his eye on Chris Hart's eleventh place. Barry Webb was hard on the heels of Richard Gilmour, Ian Mitchell and Liz Kennedy.

Lap five at the chicane and a huge gaggle of cars arrived together. Pickering slipped passed Payne and Manson with these three crossing the line side by side. Kennedy

closed in on Gilmour while Webb decided not to get too close and eased back. Lap six saw Manson retake Pickering who then got it all wrong at the chicane allowing Payne to close right in. Graham made up two places overtaking both Hart and Mitchell. Next time round it was Manson who got it wrong in the braking area and running wide and Pickering did not miss the opportunity to make up a place with Payne so nearly putting Manson down another place.

Lap nine and Day had got to within one and a half seconds of Cook while Payne finally put Manson behind him and onto the back of Pickering. Back down the field Kennedy closed right in on Gilmour but next time she was another to get the chicane wrong and spun the car which then stalled and would not restart so the red flag was brought out and the race declared at nine laps.

So Marcus Bicknell took first overall and first Proto while Alan Cook had probably the best ever race to win the Classic A class, having already sewn up the class Championship. Mikey Day was an amazing third and first Sports 1600 home only four seconds behind Cook. Michelle Hayward, Chris Pickering and Howard Payne filled the next places, all in Sports 1600 while Rob Manson was the second Classic A class in seventh overall. Peter Richings was eighth and fifth in class and he was followed by Rod Player a little way behind. Clive Wood followed Player across the line to win the Classic B class while Winston Graham, Ian Mitchell, Chris Hart and Richard Gilmour were the next Sports 1600 cars in. Having decided to drop back Barry Webb had a relatively lonely run to be second Classic B Sport home having already won the class Championship. Philip Allen was pleased to at least finish a race with the engine now behaving following the problems he had at Snetterton.

Race 2

So now Michelle Hayward had a four point lead over Howard Payne but with the results from the first race being used to form the grid there was clearly a lot of work to be done by both parties to secure the Championship.

At the lights Bicknell did not make his usual poor start he made a terrible start, dropping to tenth by the Complex. Cook did not miss the opportunity to take the lead but behind him Hayward and Payne both made phenomenal starts to lead the class by the first corner. Out in the country Payne passed Hayward but the positions were reversed as they braked for the Chicane. Pickering was close behind but he had Day on his tail. Bicknell had made it up to sixth having taken Richings on the run up the hill.

By lap three Bicknell had cleared the Sports 1600 battle and was closing on Cook. Less than two seconds separated the top Sports 1600 cars but Hayward was clearly having some brake problems locking up on the entry to the Chicane. Day came through with a big slide but held it well while Everson pitted to retire. Next time round Hayward braked a little bit later, locked up and slid wide and had to cut the corner. Hayward and Payne so nearly came together as she rejoined, but now Payne led and the loss of inertia allowed Day and Pickering past as well. Down the field Mitchell was defending from Webb who in turn had Gilmour and Kennedy in close company.

Alan Cook was having the race of his life fending off Bicknell but was overshadowed by the battle behind. As they approached the line Hayward pulled alongside Pickering and held on the inside line for the next corner and made the pass stick. Next lap Bicknell used the Honda power up the hill to take the race lead but Cook stuck to his

tail and even had to take avoiding action when Bicknell missed a gear so close was he able to stay to the back of the Mk35. Webb sneaked past Mitchell who then had to defend from the Gilmour, Kennedy pair.

Lap 10 and Hayward overtook Day to be less than two seconds behind Payne and in the melee Manson also got ahead of Day. The tension was rising as Cook was tantalisingly sitting only a couple of tenths behind Bicknell and Hayward was trying everything in the book to catch Payne. Ian Mitchell got the Chicane all wrong and Webb pounced to take the place back. Kennedy dropped back leaving Gilmour to keep the pressure on the two ahead. Bicknell and Cook crossed the line a tenth of a second apart but Hayward had dropped a fraction on Payne. Manson pitted with engine maladies moving the rest up one place.

Alan Cook kept the pressure on but at the flag Marcus Bicknell only just held on to take the win. Howard Payne won the Sports 1600 class ahead of Michelle Hayward who was only three seconds behind. There were similar gaps between Mikey Day, Chris Pickering and Pete Richings. Rod Player was next ahead of Clive Wood both had relatively quiet races as did Winston Graham. Barry Webb won the battle over Ian Mitchell but only by a tenth of a second with Richard Gilmour only a second and a half further back. Liz Kennedy must have had a moment somewhere but had the satisfaction of not being lapped while Chris Hart only just headed Philip Allen across the finish line.

Adding the points for this race brought the two protagonists back to level in the Championship but there is a point for the fastest lap and on checking the time sheets it was Howard who achieved it. So we came to the end of what must have been the most exciting and tense Clubmans race ever. Both deserved to win but a winner there has to be.

So we now look forward to 2015. This year has been the best for a long time for Clubmans racing in terms of the standard of racing and the number of cars on the grid. With your support may it continue to be so.

This is your scribe, signing off.