

Brands Hatch - 2nd June

Britcar Round 4

After tasting victory at Snetterton we arrived at Brands Hatch in a very positive mood and keen to keep up our good form. A podium finish was an absolute must to maintain our Championship challenge but it was clear that it was going to be very tough at this track. The circuit is definitely not as well suited to our car as Snetterton was, so Friday's test day was absolutely crucial to try and find a balance in the car.



We were greeted with a warm dry morning on Friday which was perfect for doing set-up work with the car. Simon did most of the first session to try and establish what direction to go in-terms of set-up and I took over to do a few quick data laps at the end. The car was tricky to drive at first but we slowly worked our way through the issues. Ironing out handling problems can often involve a lot of head scratching and if you don't know what

your doing can easily result in you going round in circles chasing your tail all day. This is something I am learning a huge amount about this year - working with Simon and our engineer Ed is helping me improve my feedback and understanding of what the car is doing a huge amount and I am starting to feel a lot more useful in the role of developing the car. We had to go through a bit of trial and error on Friday - we only had four 30minute sessions - but by the last session of the day, we had managed to dramatically improve the cars handling - making it both turn into corners better and also making the rear of the car a bit more predictable. This was quite a satisfying feeling and a great bit of problem solving by the team. Our times were very competitive, although as we predicted it was looking super close between us and our other 2 main rivals.

Qualifying

The great British weather kept us on our toes for Saturday mornings qualifying session. Rain showers throughout Friday night meant a damp but drying circuit, making tyre choice very tricky and it also meant our set-up work on Friday had now become irrelevant! Simon again opted to start the session. The plan was for him to assess the conditions on wet tyres and put a couple of fast times in, incase it rained again. However, it was looking likely that it was going to dry up and if anything we would be changing to slick tyres for the final minutes of the session. This is one of those sessions where mistakes could very easily be made so we all had to be on the very top of our game.



The session started and Simon was very quick straight away putting us in provisional P2 in our class. He came in with 15 minutes left to run and we decided it was still too risky to go out on slicks. These drying conditions are where our front wheel drive competitors have a clear advantage as they are able to run with a mix of dry and wet tyres (wets on the rear and slicks on the front), which is

something that would not work in our rear wheel drive Ginetta.

By the time I got onto the track we had dropped to 4th position. My first flying lap was a good one and I bettered our time but traffic was a real issue on the short Brands Hatch Indy circuit and my next 2 attempts were ruined. The track was now mostly dry and we made the decision, with 9 minutes remaining, to pit and switch to slick tyres. This was cutting it very fine, as it was going to take me a few laps to get heat into the tyres in these conditions before I could press on. The team got the tyres changed very quickly and I returned to the track. I gingerly tiptoed round the first lap, trying to stay out the way of the faster cars and also get heat into my ice cold slick tyres. I only made it to the end of the lap when the session was stopped due to cars spinning off!



There was only a few minutes remaining of the session and everyone in the pit lane thought the organisers would bring the session to a close and the results would stand. This was not ideal for us as we were still back in 4th place. However, the team told me to stay in the car as there was a chance they may re-start the session. This was a good call as the pit lane was re-opened with just 3 minutes to go!

I was sent out and told to push as hard as I could. It was pressure time - I had no time to get heat and pressure into the tyres properly, nor did I have much time to judge the grip levels as the track was still slightly damp. It was literally push as hard as you dare! I only had 2 full laps and on my last one I was able to elevate us to 2nd on the grid, which was a good solid result in the circumstances and gave us a bit less to do at the start of the race.



Race

Conditions improved for the race in the afternoon, so we could return to a dry set-up, which was good. We knew this was going to be a particularly difficult race. The short 1.2 mile circuit was going to be very crowded with a big variation in speed between the slowest and fastest cars. This meant it was likely to be a bit manic with very few clear laps. Our competitors were very close in terms of lap times also, so

it was likely that your luck and skill in the traffic would win or lose this race.

As usual I was going to be starting the race. We predicted there was going to be a few safety cars and there was a chance of rain so when I pitted was going to be dependant on these factors. I tightened up my belts and prepared for what was going to be a tough race as we formed up on the grid and began our warm up lap.

I was able to make a good start and got into the lead on lap 2. I managed to make a bit of a buffer for myself by passing a couple of the faster cars in the class above and putting them between myself and our closest rivals. This only helped for a few laps and then when the other drivers in the faster cars gained confidence in their tyres, they were able to drive past me as if I was standing still!

I was now in a tussle with the rival Honda Civic for the lead. We were very close but they were able to play to their cars strengths under braking and get passed me around 15 minutes into the race. I was then immediately forced to get on the brakes to avoid a huge accident with one of the cars in the class above, who decided to try and run me off the road at 100mph on the main straight! This meant we lost ground to the leader, so I really had to get my head down and try and claw it back, which was not going to be easy given how evenly matched we were.

I pushed hard and very slowly started to real the civic back in but the traffic was relentless! Every corner of every lap you would have to be watching your mirrors like a hawk for faster cars coming round to lap you and at the same time be passing slower cars, as well as speaking to the team on the radio. I had never experienced anything like it before but it was certainly a great test of driver skill!

At around the 25 minute mark we had a safety car period to allow marshalls to recover a spun car from the gravel. This was quite a welcomed break as it allowed me to re-compose myself - although, it is only when you slow down, that you realise quite how hard you have been

concentrating! You notice the horrendous heat build up inside the car and you notice the ache in any fatigued muscles.. So in a way it's better just to get on with it again!

The team elected not to bring me into the pits under the safety car, unlike some of the other teams and we held our 2nd place behind the Honda Civic. The safety car returned to the pits after a few laps and we were racing again. We raced for another busy 20 minute period where I was able to really put pressure on the leading car before we had yet another safety car period. This time the Honda pitted but the team elected to leave me out again.



The safety car came in after 5 minutes and we now had a one lap advantage over the Honda but still had our pit-stop to make. The team told me down the radio that I had to keep the Honda behind me to give us enough margin to make the pit-stop and still come out in the lead. I was managing to do this and my pace was good. At around the 55

minute mark I came up to lap a car who decided to make life as difficult as he could for me and eventually when I did manage to get passed him, he decided to tag me and spin me around! I managed to keep the car running and lose a minimal amount of time but it had still cost us 10 seconds and I was now behind the rival Honda again!

I pushed like mad to catch up and after a further 10 minutes I had caught the Honda and re-passed him. We were now approaching the closing stages of the race with only 20 minutes to run and we needed to make our mandatory pit stop and driver change. The team brought me into the pits and we quickly swapped over for Simon to do the final 20 minute stint of the race. This rather unusual strategy, on paper should have bought us enough time to pit and just get out in the lead but unfortunately we had not banked on me being spun around, so when Simon re-joined the circuit, he was now 17 seconds off the lead.

However, during all of this, the leading car had established a minor gear box problem and was lapping slightly slower, So Simon was able to gain on him at quite a significant rate! It was close but unfortunately, there was not quite enough laps and after 90 minutes of racing the Honda Civic beat us by just 3 seconds!



To say it had been an eventful race would be an understatement! I felt a bit disappointed as we had all given it 110% and our race was effectively ruined by another competitor but at the same time it could have been a lot worse and 2nd place was still a very good result and more strong points for the Championship.

We head to Oulton Park in Cheshire next, for round 5 of the series, where we will be hoping to have a slightly less eventful race and a return to the top step of the podium!

As always thank you to my sponsors and team for all your support in what is proving to be a very exciting season.

Kind regards,

Rory

