
RACEREPORT



Rounds 1, 2 & 3 - Brands Hatch

8th -9th April 2017

With a new format for the 2017 Fiesta Championship it was straight into qualifying on Saturday morning to decide grid positions for the first race, with no practice session before hand as there had been in previous years. With 34 cars taking to the track, the maximum grid capacity for Brands Hatch Indy, it was set to be an extremely busy session where getting in a banker lap was going to be vital. Sure enough after just a hand full of laps the Code 60 flags came out due to a car going off into the barriers at turn one. Code 60 flags tell drivers that they must slow down to 60kph and stay behind the car in front meaning that there is no chance of improving your lap time. After a few laps we were back up to full speed and trying once again to find some space on the circuit, when this time the red flags came out bringing the session to a halt because of another car in the gravel. With only a short amount of time remaining in the session I managed to get a couple of clear laps in and set a lap time close to my personal best which I hoped would put me towards the sharp end of the grid. Once I got back to the paddock and exited the car I found out that I had qualified 2nd in class and was only beaten to Pole position on the very last lap of the session! I was very happy with 2nd in my first qualifying session in the car and would be right in the mix for race one.

Race one took place just after lunch in the same hot conditions as qualifying and so I was confident of a strong result. After avoiding a crash involving 3 cars at the first corner I frantically defended my position over the first lap before the Code 60 flag came back out in order for the marshals to deal with the stationary cars. Jamie White was first in Class D and had managed to get a few Class C cars in between himself and me and therefore had a significant gap while we were slowly circulating as the clear up took place. Although the first lap drama had left a gap to first place, it had also left me with a significant gap to the car behind leaving me in a comfortable second place. I knew it would be very difficult to catch first place and so I decided to hang onto the back of the 3 way Class C battle that was happening immediately in front of me. Without any pressure from behind it was an ideal race for me to bring the car home in second and secure my first podium finish of the season. It was great to be able to get a strong result in front of my partners and guests.

Race two was a much tougher but more exciting affair. The first lap turned out to be a bit of a nightmare as I got boxed in on the first few corners and lost quite a few places and so the rest of the race was about recovering as many of the lost positions as possible. I quickly ticked off one position as I made a late lunge on the brakes going down to Graham Hill bend and then set straight off after the car ahead. It took a little longer to get past Stuart Robbins as, although he was struggling for pace, he did not want to give up his class position. In the end I had to make the pass with two wheels on the grass after I got a much better run along the Cooper straight and, seeing me coming, Robbins continued to squeeze me towards the edge of the circuit. Thankfully I was able to get good traction on the grass and managed to complete the pass going into Surtees. I then had a huge gap to the next two cars ahead of me but due to them fighting each other I was able to close the gap quickly over the next few laps. I then spent a lap or two accessing where I could get past Andrews before managing to make a bit of space on the inside when going through Paddock Hill bend. We ran up the hill towards Druids door handle to door handle and being on the inside line I was able to make the move stick. I came close to gaining another place after closing down Jack Youhill who was the next car, but unfortunately just ran out of laps before I was able to find a way past and therefore just missed out on the podium.

After the disastrous opening lap in Race Two I was determined to maintain my position in Race Three. Unfortunately this didn't happen after nearly being squeezed into the gravel approaching the first corner which allowed a couple of cars to slip through. With another Code 60 taking place I was able to regroup and work out what I needed to do during the remainder of the race.

I had dropped back to forth in class but thankfully we were all nose to tail while waiting for the restart. It didn't take long to make up a place as John Cooper had an electrical problem as we got back up to racing speed along the start/finish line, allowing me to slide past into third and into a podium place. Robbins was once again the car ahead and so I knew I should have the pace to catch him. I did so fairly quickly and this time he didn't make it as difficult as he had in Race Two. I managed to hold a tighter line exiting the final corner which gave me the inside line along the pit straight and into turn one. I set off after Jamie White who was once again leading the class but realised fairly quickly that I wouldn't be able to close the gap before the end of the race. While still pushing on I made sure that I that I didn't make any mistakes to ensure that I brought the car home in another good 2nd place.

The weekend went far better then I could have expected when looking at the experience of most of the other drivers within the class and so I was ecstatic to finish with two trips to the podium and (I think) second place in the championship. It was also brilliant to be able to have the most successful weekend of my career with so many people there to support me. The next round of the championship is at Cadwell Park (6th/7th May) which is a circuit I have never been to before and so I am expecting a tougher weekend but will be going all out to pick up some more trophies!

