


Swift Hall edges out Jensen



(Image: Ollie Read)



MELTON
CONCRETE PRODUCTS

**Castle Combe FF1600
Championship**

Round 8, August 27 2007

Josh Barnett reports

Robert Hall became the fourth different winner of the season on a bizarre afternoon when two drivers – Steven Jensen and Ed Moore – wrapped up their respective class title despite only finishing second. The overall championship will go down to the wire in mid-September.

QUALIFYING

Moore (motorsport-events.com Van Diemen RF00) took pole position for the afternoon's action with a blistering lap in near perfect conditions – warm enough for the tyres to work, but cool enough not to hinder engine performance. His lap of 1m12.009s put him a sixth of a second ahead of Steven Jensen (A1 Tyres Bath/Jensen Racing Swift SC92).

Jensen started the session slowly as he found himself in traffic while bedding in

new brakes, but with just over ten minutes to go the Swift driver jumped to third with a lap of 1m12.547s. Further improvement followed to propel him onto the front row, before a broken clutch terminated his session early.

Robert Hall (Swift Cooper Swift SC92) looked the most likely driver to take pole position, setting the bar at 1m12.282s. However after making the early running the teenager couldn't improve further and eventually finished fourth, to line up alongside the ever-improving Ben Norton (Wiltshire College Spectrum 011).

Andrew Jones (Coachstyle Limited/NFP Property Developments/Wired Developments Ray GRS07) qualified well to line up at the head of row three, finishing as the final driver to dip under the 1m13s barrier with a best time of 1m12.502s on his tenth lap, the top five therefore covered by a slender half a second.

Alan Hamilton showed a welcome return to form, claiming sixth in the Hamilton Motorsport Swift SC92 from the Rygor Commercial Limited Van Diemen RF01 of Stephen Gibbins.

The unrelated Jim Hamilton (Van Diemen RF89) just beat Alan Slater (Swift Cooper Swift FB89) to Class C pole by a mere 0.072s. The pair were running as high as fourth and fifth overall before having to

settle for eighth and ninth respectively. Fellow class contender Adam Higgins (RIADRO Racing with Bob Higgins Van Diemen RF89) was a few places further back in 12th.

Oliver Roberts – driving the sole Wayne Poole Racing Mygale SJ01 in the absence of Josh Fisher, who was looking after brother Felix in BARC Formula Renault at Brands – completed the top ten with a fastest lap of 1m13.8s, a very respectable performance considering he had not taken part in Thursday testing.

Meanwhile, there was early trouble for three drivers. Michael Bradley's weekend was curtailed prematurely after his motorsport-events.com Van Diemen RF00 was hit by a spinning car on his first flying lap, taking a corner off the car. Gary Marsh (Excel Solutions Limited Spectrum 011) and Glen Finn (Swift SC92) also failed to set a time.

Oil on the racing line all around the circuit meant that the majority of runners ended their session early, opting to enter the pits rather than risk damage with no prospect of improving their times. As a result, the chequered flag was shown several minutes early.

RACE

The race didn't follow the pattern of



Another defeat for Moore, this time at the hands of Jones; Davies (inset) was one of the stars of the race. (Image: Ollie Read)

qualifying at all, with Hall and Jensen involved in a thrilling shoot-out for victory.

With pole-sitter Moore once again hampered by engine difficulties it was Jensen who took the initiative and led for all but one of the ten laps. Unfortunately for him, the one that he failed to lead was the very last one.

Jensen led into Quarry but Alan Hamilton made an ambitious attempt around the outside having surged through from row three of the grid.

Hall made it up to third on the exit of Quarry, passing the struggling Moore. Norton was the next to pass the ailing Van Diemen, the Spectrum driver setting his sights firmly on the gearbox of Hall and taking third position before the end of the opening lap.

Norton looked more than capable of staying with, and maybe challenging the leaders, but a mistake as he challenged Hamilton on the approach to Bobbies on lap two deranged a corner and sent him spinning onto the infield.

This now left Hall to pursue Jensen and Hamilton. On lap three Hall got a good run over Avon Rise in Hamilton's slipstream and he sealed the move, down the inside, into Quarry.

Hall had just Jensen between him and a hard-fought maiden victory. However Jensen was not going to just roll over. Lap after lap Hall constantly attempted the outside into Quarry but to no avail. The Class B points leader – who needed just a fourth in class to seal that particular title - soaked up the pressure without a single mistake.

Going into the last lap the order looked

certain but in FF1600 racing nothing is certain until the chequer. Jensen left a gap small enough for a Swift SC92 on the inside going into Quarry. Hall didn't need to be told twice, diving through the gap, braking insanely late but holding the line. For the final mile and a half they were nose to tail with Swift Cooper taking their first outright win this year by a mere 0.165s.

"That's not bad, to be honest. For it to come the way it did I couldn't fault it," Hall said with an ear to ear grin. "I could see Andy (Jones) getting closer and I just thought 'I've got to go for it!'"

It was Jones that took the final podium spot after fighting through from fifth on the grid. Jones passed a fading Hamilton on lap five (Hamilton having just lost out to Moore) before, selling Moore a perfect dummy on lap seven. The Ray ducked to the outside for Quarry but then dived inside into the Esses. Moore conceded the place without a fight, knowing that consistent finishes were important for him as long as the championship remained undecided.

Hamilton held onto fifth position, with Matt McKillop (Swift SC95) bearing down on him having started way back on row six. McKillop's place, in turn, was under threat. After starting 15th on the grid, Mark Davies (PA Motorsport Jamun M96) drove stunningly to fight his way through the field. Up to seventh by lap four, the man from Banbury has shown consistent pace at Combe this year having been able to string together several races for the first time. With this sort of improvement Davies could be one to challenge the front runners next season.

Behind Gibbins, in eighth, there was a long gap back to the stupendous Class C fight.

EVENT DATA

Results – round eight: 1 Robert Hall (Swift SC92) 10 laps in 12m20.589s (89.928mph); 2 Steven Jensen (Swift SC92) +0.165s; 3 Andrew Jones (Ray GR507); 4 Ed Moore (Van Diemen RF00); 5 Alan Hamilton (Swift SC92); 6 Matt McKillop (Swift SC95). Class A: 1 Jones; 2 Moore; 3 Mark Davies (Jamun M96). Team Schemes Class B: 1 Hall; 2 Jensen; 3 Hamilton. Sarik Vacform Class C: 1 Adam Higgins (Van Diemen RF89); 2 Alan Slater (Swift FB89); 3 Nick Lay (Reynard 89FF). Pole position: Moore 1m12.009s (92.488mph). Fastest lap: Hall 1m12.360s (92.040mph). Starters: 31.

Overall points after eight rounds: 1 Moore 190 (minimum possible 190/maximum possible 221); 2 Jensen 179 (200/210); 3 Hall 168 (168/199); 4 Jones 154 (154/185); 5 Ben Norton 124 (124/155); 6 Adam Higgins 115 (121/146); etc. Class A: 1 Moore 98 (102/114 – champion); 2 Jones 77 (77/93); 3 Norton 57 (57/73); etc. Class B: 1 Jensen 98 (108/114 – champion); 2 Hall 88 (88/104); 3 McKillop 55 (55/71); etc. Class C: 1 Higgins 89 (95/105); 2 Jim Hamilton 88 (94/104); 3 Slater 85 (85/101); etc.

Next round: September 15.

Yet again, it was boiled down to a battle between Higgins and Slater with their title rival Jim Hamilton having spun after a collision with Roberts late on. Jim Hamilton led the class initially, but Higgins surged to the front just before half distance, diving through on the inside of Hamilton at Camp.

Higgins' advantage was briefly threatened by championship returnee and sometime British Formula Ford racer Nick Lay (Reynard 89FF) but he eventually slotted in behind Slater on the run over the line, the top three Pre 1990 cars separated by less than 1.5s. Hamilton was fifth in class.

CHAMPIONSHIP

Despite missing out on his first race win by the smallest of margins, Steve Jensen can head into the final round with his chin held high after his second place sealed the Team Schemes Class B championship for 2007. Jensen will now have his sights firmly set on becoming the overall champion come September 15.

He's up against FF1600 superstar Ed Moore, though – although the 2004 champion is on the back foot. Moore needs to gather at least 10 points from the final round to stand a chance of taking the title – the equivalent of a 16th place finish. On the other hand, providing Moore finishes at least sixth, the title will be his. Anything in between and the abacus will be out to determine whether it is Moore (who is now untouchable in Class A) or Jensen that wins the title.

It is even more exciting in Class C, with Adam Higgins just a single point ahead of Jim Hamilton and with the momentum in his favour approaching the end of his rookie season. But if both slip up, step forward Alan Slater...