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CASTLE COMBE SPORTS & GT CHAMPIONSHIP IN ASSOCIATION WITH PERFORMANCE-CARS.NET

Round 1, Monday 5th April.



Simon Tilling eventually re-assumed the lead at the final corner of the last lap, seizing victory from Josh Fisher.
(Image: Oliver Read.)

With three different race leaders and a final corner pass securing victory, round one of the renamed Castle Combe Sports and GT Championship in association with www.performance-cars.net hinted at a stunningly close-fought season to come. Reigning champion Simon Tilling snatched this victory, but having been denied this time, Josh Fisher will be even more determined to strike back, while Andrew Shanley could just have easily have been celebrating a win.

Qualifying

It was clear from the entry list alone that the new 2000cc limit would actually make for better competition, but it was Shanley who broke clear in qualifying – taking pole by 0.7s in his Radical over the very closely matched Fisher (Quantex ME Mantis) and Tilling (Tilling Motorsport Radical SR3). Darcy Smith was not far behind either in the Thatchway Radical, while returnees Guy Parr (Wayne Poole Racing Nemesis) and Norman Lackford (Radical) were set to pose a growing threat as the season progressed and started on row three for now.

Race

At the start, Shanley and Fisher surged away, as what Tilling admitted was a “diabolical” start dropped him to the lower reaches of the top ten. He had recovered to sixth behind quick-starter Parr, Darcy Smith and Lackford by the end of the lap one, but it already looked like this would be a Shanley versus Fisher contest as the leaders escaped from Parr at around a second per lap.

Fisher hounded Shanley relentlessly at first, getting closer than ever as they ran into traffic. After six absorbing laps of nose to tail tension, the lead was exchanged as they lapped the class C Nissan 370Zs of Luca Lorenzini and Jordan Tresson – the winners of Sony and Nissan’s GT Academy contest who were contesting this race as part of their driver training mission on the way to the eventual prize of a FIA GT4 Cup seat that awaits one of them.

But all was not what it seemed in the lead battle, as having dropped to second Shanley slowed dramatically and then pitted, having developed an apparent engine problem. He rejoined, but would soon retire for good.

With Fisher now 6s clear, the race for the lead looked resolved. However Tilling had picked his way up to second and despite initially thinking his start had cost him any hope of a win, he was swiftly revising his goals as he reeled in the Mantis.

“The back end was sliding a lot,” said Fisher. “I was pushing more and more as I could see him getting closer, but the rear end wasn’t holding on today.”

Tilling gradually chipped away at the lead, at first by a few tenths, then by whole seconds – until with three laps to go the top two emerged from a queue of traffic absolutely together. Fisher wasn’t going to give up easily though, and every time the Radical looked like it was edging alongside, the Mantis managed to brake later or carry more momentum, and somehow stay in front.

Having resisted Tilling on the final run through Avon Rise into Quarry, it looked as though Fisher had got the job done. But Tilling was faster out of Tower and Bobbies, got enough momentum to get alongside at Westway, and then dived past into the last corner of the last lap to take a famous victory in the first race outing for his latest Radical.

“That was the car, not me,” said the gracious but heroic victor. “I thought I’d be happy with third, but then Andrew dropped out and I caught Josh in traffic. Once I could see and smell him I thought I could do it.”

Fisher couldn’t hide his frustration, but was gracious about his last-gasp loss.

“I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t annoyed,” he admitted. “But I left a gap big enough for an orange Radical, and he filled it. Fair play to him.”

Parr fended off Darcy Smith to complete the overall podium, a safe distance ahead of Lackford, who had Mark Funnell’s Lotus for company at first before easing well clear.

As the sole class B finisher, Funnell’s class win was not as satisfying as many of his successes – but sixth overall was still a great result for a production car, and he would later come from the back to win the Open Sports and Saloon race too.

Keith Dunn took seventh, winning class C with a 10s gap back to regular rival and fellow Caterham driver Stuart Dixon, who held off David Jones' Caterham and Josh Smith's 1100cc Bridgwater College Motorsport Radical to the flag.

Pos.	Cl.	Cl. Pos.	Driver	Car	Time	Qual.
1	A	1	Simon Tilling	Radical SR3 RS	16m 47.334	3
2	A	2	Josh Fisher	Mantis Sports Racing	+0.243	2
3	A	3	Guy Parr	Nemesis 02	+13.470	5
4	A	4	Darcy Smith	Radical SR4	+13.814	4
5	A	5	Norman Lackford	Radical Prosport	+36.688	6
6	B	1	Mark Funnell	Lotus Exige	+1m 06.163	7
7	C	1	Keith Dunn	Caterham C400	+1 lap	16
8	C	2	Stuart Dixon	Caterham Superlight	+1 lap	9
9	C	3	David Jones	Caterham 7	+1 lap	10
10	A	6	Josh Smith	Radical Clubsport	+1 lap	11
11	A	7	Des Andrews	Radical SR3	+1 lap	8
12	I	1	Nick Starkey	Caterham Superlight R	+1 lap	12
13	C	4	Tim Woodman	Caterham 7	+1 lap	14
14	A	8	David Smith	Mallock MK34	+2 laps	19
15	I	2	Ron Bush	Radical SR3	+2 laps	15
16	C	5	Luca Lorenzini	Nissan 370Z	+2 laps	18
17	C	6	Jordan Tresson	Nissan 370Z	+2 laps	20
18	A		Andrew Shanley	Radical Prosport	+7 laps	1
19	B		Steve Putt	Mazda RX7	+7 laps	17
20	A		John Avery	Mallock P21	+12 laps	22

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