



Mint start for Murray

(Image: bc-photographic.co.uk)

**National
MOBILE
WINDSCREENS**

**Castle Combe Saloon Car
Championship**

Round 1, April 9 2007

Ian Sowman reports

Keith Murray opened his account in the 2007 National Mobile Windscreens Saloon Car Championship with a convincing victory, while fellow class champions Tony Hutchings and Russell Poynter-Brown also made triumphant starts to the year. Perhaps the most heroic performance came from Tony Dolley – the Class B driver with the highest 2006 placing attending this meeting – who really took the fight to the 4WD machinery, netting an outright podium after a qualifying mishap.

QUALIFYING

With an impressive 35 cars taking to

the track for the opening session of the season – comparing favourably with the 29 of this time last year – traffic was always likely to be a headache. And so it proved for Murray (Audi A4), who as one of the last cars to leave assembly had to pass most of the field during qualifying.

Nevertheless, he was the first to strike pole as most drivers began to hit their straps after six months off. Moments later, Barry Squibb (Mitsubishi Evo 6) – who has rather perfected the art of being fast in a single lap of Combe thanks to sprint experience – moved ahead, and his time of 1m16.912s stood as the best recorded throughout the remaining ten minutes or so.

The one driver really on the move was Dolley (Peugeot 206 GTi). After a modest early effort, the Bridgwater man stole up the timing screens in the later stages. He went third, behind Mark Harrison (Mitsubishi Evo) with a time just a seventh of a second off pole on what proved to be his final flying lap. He should have had one more dash, but that was terminated early when a wheel stud sheared and he lost his front left wheel at Bobbies,

within sight of the chequered flag.

Carleton Williams (Vauxhall Corsa) was seventh overall and on class C pole, just two-tenths clear of Hutchings' MG ZR. Meanwhile, a spirited Olly Lewis (Peugeot 106) edged Poynter-Brown out of class D pole by an even smaller margin, just 0.016s.

There was just one casualty from qualifying, with Rob Ballard's Evo 7 ruled out of further action after an off.

RACE

The least surprising element of the start was that Dolley's (repaired) 2WD machine was swamped by the three 4WD cars that shared the front two rows with him. Having not shown his true pace in qualifying, Murray slipped into the lead by the time he reached Avon Rise, and by the end of the opening lap he had already opened up a gap to Harrison. Squibb, meanwhile, dropped to third initially but lost even that place when Dolley moved ahead at Tower before the first lap was done.



Harrison was pushed hard by Dolley. (Image: bc-photographic.co.uk)

EVENT DATA

Result – 12 laps: 1 Keith Murray (Audi A4) 16m58.603s (78.460mph); 2 Mark Harrison (Mitsubishi Evo 6) + 7.754s; 3 Tony Dolley (Peugeot 206); 4 Barry Squibb (Mitsubishi Evo 6); 5 Ian Craig (BMW M3); 6 David Urquhart (Peugeot 205). Class A: 1 Murray; 2 Harrison; 3 Squibb. Class B: 1 Craig; 2 Urquhart; 3 Bill Brockbank (Seat Ibiza). Class C: 1 Tony Hutchings (MG ZR); 2 Carleton Williams (Vauxhall Corsa); 3 Alex Ferguson (Peugeot 205). Class D: 1 Russell Poynter-Brown (Vauxhall Corsa); 2 Will di Claudio (Peugeot 106); 3 Peter Weston (MG ZR). Pole position: Squibb 1m16.912s (86.592mph). Fastest lap: Murray: 1m16.833s (86.682mph). Starters: 34.

Standings after round one – Class A: 1 Murray 4; 2 Harrison 2; 3 Squibb 1. Class B: 1 Craig 7; 2 Urquhart 5; 3 Brockbank 4; etc. Class C: 1 Hutchings 7; 2 Williams 5; 3 Ferguson 4; etc. Class D: 1= Poynter-Brown 6; 1= di Claudio 6; 3 Weston 4; etc.

Next round: May 7.

The pattern for the race was set. The top four broke clear, and Murray in particular edged away from the chasing pack. Harrison had something of a nondescript race – not showing the pace to match Murray, his best lap time was slower than the two that followed him as well.

As Squibb dropped out of contention – initially with a slipping clutch, then when the wastegate blew off leaving the engine “as flat as a fart” – Dolley was able to turn his attention to the yellow Evo ever more. From lap four on the two cars ran together, with the Peugeot regaining contact even when backmarkers apparently conspired against him. Perhaps wisely, he left his big move until the end. But he locked up at Bobbies on the final lap as he pushed for the place, and eventually finished 1.2s behind Harrison, and 8.9s behind winner Murray.

Bill Brockbank (Seat Ibiza) was best of

the rest at first, holding his starting position of fifth but gradually trickling down the order. Ian Craig (BMW M3) was chief aggressor, but it took him until the ninth lap to get through. By that time the top four were well gone, with even the ailing Squibb too far up the road.

Sadly, Brockbank lost more places before the race was out, with Hutchings and David Urquhart (205) both passing him on the 11th lap after he had lost most of his boost for reasons that could not readily be identified. In a thrilling drive into the top six from 10th on the grid, Urquhart edged out Hutchings in the final few corners, his delight only tempered by the sight of son Ben’s similar car parked trackside after blowing up before half distance.

Despite losing out to Urquhart, Hutchings was comfortable in class C, Williams having lost out at the start

and later having to defend frantically from Alex Ferguson’s 205. Class D proved to be every bit as close in the end, with Poynter-Brown’s mirrors filled by the Peugeot 106 of Will di Claudio in the later stages. Earlier, Lewis had given way to RP-B before getting drawn into a scrap with di Claudio. He went off at Tower, a result of getting “a bit excited”, and he won’t be out for round two, the 100th Combe Saloon race.



RP-B, Gardner, King and di Claudio do battle in the midfield. (Image: bc-photographic.co.uk)

News in brief

Tony Dolley is the most successful Combe Saloon driver of the year so far. Not only has he had a class win in the series opener in Wiltshire, he has also been triumphant on the national stage – winning the first three rounds of the Demon Tweaks/Yokohama Hot Hatch Championship. He followed up a double victory in a couple of thrilling races at Donington Park last month with the long trek to Snetterton on Good Friday, where he was rewarded with another win and the championship lead. It was back to Bridgwater on Friday evening,

before instructing at Combe on Saturday and then competing on Monday!

Dolley is not the only Combe ‘name’ to be competing in Hot Hatch. Brian and Ilsa Cox have both been front-runners in the season’s early races, although they have elected not to compete at Combe this year to avoid having to change their 206s to meet the relevant regulations between each event. Mark Wyatt went well in his Astra at Donington, and only missed out on racing in the Combe opener due to illness.

Rallycross legend Barry Squibb

returned to racing for the first time since 1998 – when he last competed in that branch of motorsport – in the Combe Saloon opener. He is racing the car that he has most recently sprinted (with some success) in the ASWMC championship.

Will di Claudio matched his best class result of second place in Monday’s opener, and he was one of half a dozen cars to start in the up to 1400cc division – more than in any 2006 round. Paul D’Angelo was a newcomer in his Peugeot 106 Rallye, while Peter Weston had exchanged his Metro for a smart MG ZR.