



Mitsubishi mayhem

(Image: John Gaisford)

**National
MOBILE
WINDSCREENS**

**Castle Combe Saloon Car
Championship**

Round 5, July 15 2007

Josh Barnett reports

Russell Humphrey won round five of the National Mobile Windscreens Castle Combe Special GT Championship, and Will di Claudio maintained his points advantage, but the big story of the meeting was the collision between Robert Ballard and Mark Harrison and its destructive consequences.

QUALIFYING

Humphrey (Interceptor Racing Mitsubishi Evolution) set a blistering pace to grab pole by nearly three seconds. Barry Squibb (Mitsubishi Evo 6) set the early pace with a 1m29.933s, but within two minutes Humphrey was atop the leader board and never looked back, steadily improving his lap times finishing with a 1m26.945s.

Drizzly rain and a wet track greeted the drivers in qualifying with many struggling to find grip in the tricky conditions. Even the superior traction of the four wheel-drive cars didn't help Harrison (Owen Developments

Mitsubishi Evolution), who spun as he tried to better the times of Humphrey and Squibb.

A decent early lap put Harrison third but, try as he might, he could not better his time, leaving him vulnerable to the improving drivers behind him. He would eventually fall to the fourth row of the grid.

First to jump ahead was the returning Gary Prebble (Rover 220 Coupe Turbo), the Southampton man also establishing his best time in the early stages and setting the best time in Class B. Meanwhile, Keith Murray (Audi A4 Quattro) – Prebble's successor as a dominant force in Combe Saloons - stole fourth on the grid with his last lap of the session, having visited the pits early in the session.

Tony Hutchings, Turnpike Racing MG ZR, showed some of the bigger cars the way as he qualified in an incredible fifth place. A close race looked to be on the cards for Class C honours though, as just 0.165s back was John Avery (Titcombe Garages Honda Integra Type R).

Will di Claudio (Turnpike Racing Peugeot 106 XSi) was delighted with his qualifying performance. The man from Chippenham revelled in the testing conditions and ended up only just outside the top 10 in 12th, but seven seconds and 14 places ahead of his nearest Class D challenger, and in front of series front runner Mark Wyatt (Mark Richard Insurance Vauxhall Astra).

RACE

It was at the beginning of the second lap when a high-speed collision between resulted in the Mitsubishis of Ballard and Harrison largely destroying a section of Armco barrier just beyond the Folly kink.

A short way behind the leaders, Harrison had been on the inside of the circuit and trying to relieve Ballard (Norris Designs Evo 7) of his position when the front left of Harrison's car struck the side of Ballard's. Following the impact, both cars went out of control and careered to the outside of the circuit at unabated speed.

Harrison's car thumped the steel barrier twice, with bodywork scattering into the Chippenham Road car park causing damage to at least one motorhome. It was pure good fortune that no spectators or marshals were hurt.



Harrison's car (main image) was the more severely damaged, with the rear completely flattened. Ballard's wasn't much better off. (Image: John Gaisford)



Humphrey won an abbreviated race, but was one of the few 4WD cars left standing. (Image: John Gaisford)

There was severe damage to the barriers and the supporting posts in two places, and so Combe circuit staff as well as marshals and breakdown crew were mobilised to make the barrier safe, under the watchful eye of the MSA steward. The area behind the wrecked barrier was cleared of spectators for the remainder of the meeting.

Both drivers were taken to the medical centre for routine checks, but no significant injuries were reported.

"It is a great shame that after all my technical issues the car seemed to be getting back on the pace," said Ballard. "This has probably put me out of the championship for the rest of this season."

Although faced with even more damage than Ballard, Harrison was able to look back on the incident with a slice of humour. "Not only was the race shortened, I shortened my car too," he said.

Sure enough – after a delay of nearly an hour, which left event organisers with something of a headache – the race was restarted over six laps, half of the original distance. At the first attempt, Squibb had stolen a march on Humphrey over Avon Rise with Murray launching himself into third place. Prebble, meanwhile, pattered around with a misfire that ended his day.

At the second time of asking Humphrey led the pack away but Squibb dived down the inside to seize the advantage at Quarry. From here on in Squibb looked set to win, pulling out an advantage of more than 2s per lap. As it started to spit with rain, yet more drama was around the corner, as with just two laps left, Squibb pulled over on the pit straight with gearbox troubles. Humphrey inherited a comfortable 13s lead, extending that to 16s by the flag.

While the race was not particularly tight up front, there was loads of drama behind. The main battle was for what became second place. After having to be bump started on the grid, Murray's alternator failed leaving him with no power above 5000rpm. In the closing laps he came under immense pressure from the charging Wyatt, who had passed Tony Dolley (Peugeot 206 GTi) on lap four. The Astra had its nose inside the Audi at the Esses and again at Tower but Murray soaked up the pressure.

On the run down to Camp on the final lap Wyatt dived to the outside and the troubled Audi couldn't match the little hatchback's speed out of the corner. "I didn't realise it was the last lap – if I had known I wouldn't have let him past!" rued Murray.

Behind, Dolley came under pressure from a spirited Bill Brockbank (Badger 5 Seat Ibiza Cupra). The Seat driver was recovering from

EVENT DATA

Results – 6 laps: 1 Russell Humphrey (Mitsubishi Evolution) 8m21.060s (79.75mph); 2 Mark Wyatt (Vauxhall Astra) +16.346s; 3 Keith Murray (Audi A4 Quattro); 4 Tony Dolley (Peugeot 206 GTi); 5 Bill Brockbank (Seat Ibiza Cupra); 6 Terry Thorne (Ford Focus RS). Class A: 1 Humphrey; 2 Murray. Class B: 1 Wyatt; 2 Dolley; 3 Brockbank. Class C: 1 Tony Hutchings (MG ZR); 2 Alex Ferguson (Peugeot 205 GTi); 3 John Avery (Honda Integra Type R). Class D: 1 Will di Claudio (Peugeot 106 XSi); 2 Russell Poynter-Brown (Vauxhall Corsa); 3 Peter Weston (MG ZR). Pole position: Humphrey 1m26.945s (76.60mph). Fastest lap: Barry Aquibb (Mitsubishi Evolution) 1m20.523s (82.70mph). Starters: 29.

Overall standings after round five: 1 di Claudio 32; 2 Hutchings 29; 3 Poynter-Brown 28; 4 Wyatt 27; 5 Ferguson 23; 6 Dolley 20; etc. Class A: 1 Humphrey 17; 2= Mark Harrison & Murray 12; etc. Class B: 1 Wyatt 27; 2 Dolley 20; 3 Ian Craig 14; etc. Class C: 1 Hutchings 29; 2 Ferguson; 3 Carleton Williams 18; etc. Class D: 1 di Claudio 32; 2 Poynter-Brown 28; 3 Weston 16; etc.

Next round: August 4.

a disastrous qualifying, in which he managed only 17th position. Dolley held the tighter inside line through Camp on the last lap but managed not to compromise his exit, holding on to second in class by 0.203s as second to sixth were separated by just 1.5s.

After his qualifying heroics, Hutchings had to settle for eighth overall, but still took home the spoils in the Class C battle. Under pressure from Alex Ferguson (Peugeot 205 GTi) he held on to win by half a second.

Di Claudio celebrated his 26th birthday by collecting the Class D silverware with a clear victory over former champion Russell Poynter-Brown (Interceptor Racing Vauxhall Corsa). But while RP-B rose up the order, di Claudio (unsurprisingly) lost a little but of ground to more potent machinery.



Wyatt snatched second from Murray at the very end. (Image: John Gaisford)

In other news

* Tony Dolley endured another long round trip to take in both the latest Combe Saloon round and another meeting in the 750MC Hot Hatch Championship. He travelled to East Anglia on Friday, beat a closing (former Combe star) Ilsa Cox by 0.2s on Saturday lunchtime, and was spotted back at Combe by Saturday evening.

* Gary Prebble made a return in his faithful Rover 220 Turbo, now resprayed to plain white. There had been delays in completing an engine rebuild which kept him out of the season to date, and it looks like a little more attention will be required by the engine builder after the car pattered through Quarry corner and into retirement with a

misfire. It had run well in qualifying, taking the multiple winner to a creditable third on the grid.

* Olly Lewis is in the process of "souping up" his Peugeot 106 so that it will have more power but still be in the confines of the Class D regulations. In order to keep his season on track, he drove Matt Skidmore's Mini (which is for sale) last weekend. Sadly, suspension failure at Quarry on the opening lap brought an end to his Mini adventure.

* A handful of Combe drivers joined the visiting Dunlop Motorsport News Saloons grid. Alex Ferguson was the most successful, winning his class in his Peugeot 205 on each occasion.