



Humphrey leaves it late

(Image: David Webster)



Castle Combe Saloon Car Championship

Round 3, May 28 2007

Matt Beer reports

After 11 and a half laps of thrilling door-to-door combat, Russell Humphrey overcame Mark Harrison to snatch victory a last gasp victory in round three of the National Mobile Windscreens Castle Combe Saloon Car Championship on Spring Bank Holiday Monday.

QUALIFYING

For the second race in a row, the Saloon field was greeted by a damp track in qualifying after a series of morning showers.

Russell Humphrey (Interceptor Racing Mitsubishi Lancer) coped best with the conditions and quickly set the

1m26.288s lap that would stand as pole position. At the time he was over three seconds clear of the competition, and even when Barry Squibb (Mitsubishi Lancer) closed in and grabbed second, the ex-Rallycross star was still 2.154s adrift. Not that his comfortable margin stopped Humphrey pushing – as a wild spin out of Camp and deep into the infield foliage proved. His four wheel drive came in handy as Humphrey calmly accelerated back out onto the track at the approach to Folly...

Squibb remained second, ahead of Adam Beachgood (Interpro Ford Focus), who starred with third on the grid and class B pole on his first appearance of 2007. He was a second clear of Mark Wyatt (Mark Richard Insurance Vauxhall Astra), with Bill Brockbank continuing his strong recent form with fifth in the Badger 5 SEAT Ibiza.

John Avery's savesometax/Titcombes Garages Honda Integre took class C pole in 12th, while this time it was Will Di Claudio's turn to dominate class D, beating Olly Lewis to pole by 4.5s and nine positions.

RACE

Another short, sharp shower just before the start meant the drivers had to tread carefully in the opening laps – and gave the four-wheel drive contingent an even bigger advantage off the line. Sure enough, it was a total traction quartet who led into Quarry, with Squibb jumping to the front and Mark Harrison (Owen Developments Mitsubishi) bursting through from seventh to second ahead of polesitter Humphrey and Keith Murray (Audi A4 Quattro).

Brockbank got ahead of Beachgood and Wyatt to run fifth overall and first in class B, but only for a single lap before smoke started pouring from the SEAT as he accelerated through Old Paddock. A sort-out in his wake allowed Terry Thorne (Ford Focus) to jump ahead of Wyatt and Beachgood and move from fourth in class to first within a lap.

The class A cars were already getting away at the front, with Harrison easing past Squibb and into the race lead at Quarry on lap two. Humphrey was anxious to prevent Harrison escaping, and crowded Squibb for a



Damian Gray's slightly remodelled Vento finished inside the top half of the field. (Image: David Webster)

EVENT DATA

Result – 12 laps: 1 Russell Humphrey (Mitsubishi Evo) 15m51.529s (83.991mph); 2 Mark Harrison (Mitsubishi Evo) +0.363s; 3 Mark Wyatt (Vauxhall Astra); 4 Terry Thorne (Ford Focus); 5 Ian Craig (BMW M3); 6 Adam Beachgood (Ford Focus). Class A: 1 Humphrey; 2 Harrison; no other finishers. Class B: 1 Wyatt; 2 Thorne; 3 Craig. Class C: 1 Carleton Williams (Vauxhall Corsa GSi); 2 John Avery (Honda Integra Type R); 3 Simon Spearing (Peugeot 205). Class D: Will di Claudio (Peugeot 106 XSi); 2 Russell Poynter-Brown (Vauxhall Corsa); 3 Olly Lewis (Peugeot 106XSi). Pole position: Humphrey 1m26.288s (77.183mph). Fastest lap: Humphrey 1m17.105s (86.376mph). Starters: 36.

Standings after round three – Class A: 1 Humphrey 11; 2= Keith Murray & Harrison 8; etc. Class B: 1=Wyatt & Craig 14; 3 Tony Dolley 13; etc. Class C: 1 Tony Hutchings 16; 2 Williams 14; 3= Ferguson & Avery 12; etc. Class D: 1= Poynter-Brown & di Claudio 18; 3 Peter Weston 9; etc.

Next round: June 23.

lap before slipping down the inside at Tower.

Just as he did so, Squibb's Mitsubishi's engine note turned unhealthily flat, forcing him to pull up at Bobbies and complete a hat-trick of frustrating retirements. A few yards behind, Murray was also in mechanical trouble and heading for the pits.

Suddenly the four-car lead train was down to a twosome. It took Humphrey less than a lap to close right onto Harrison's tail – despite taking to the grass on the exit of Quarry – and he immediately attacked into Tower.

But getting past proved to be a much tougher prospect than closing in on Harrison. Humphrey had the edge into the turns and on corner exit speed, but by the end of the straights Harrison's greater power made all the difference. Humphrey constantly got alongside Harrison and appeared to have the momentum to make a move into the next corner, only for the yellow Mitsubishi to accelerate back ahead of the white one and sweep into the turn still in front.

Their dice went on and on as they ducked in and out of the traffic on the now dry track. On lap 10 they managed to take Bobbies side by side, with Harrison still clinging on to the lead. He even edged away a little through the next lap, but Humphrey was simply preparing himself for one last attack – and he launched it as they powered out of the Esses for the final time. Harrison was forced to hug the inside all the way down to Tower,

and consequently ran wide out of the corner. Humphrey surged down the inside into Bobbies, and this time Harrison was unable to resist him, being beaten into second by 0.363s.

"That was cracking – a really amazing race," said Humphrey as he collected his winner's trophy. "The brakes went with three laps to go, but I sussed that if I pumped them five times before the corner, I could stay with him. Then when he understeered wide, I managed to sneak the car in front of him."

Wyatt completed the podium and took the class B honours after passing Thorne on the third lap and quickly pulling away. Thorne then came under pressure from Ian Craig (Ultimate Cars BMW M3) and Beachgood for many laps before the trio gradually spread out. Tim Maddocks (Spoon Sports BTC Kirby Honda Civic) might have been amongst them having qualified eighth, but engine problems made him a non-starter.

In the final laps, Beachgood's mirrors began to fill with orange as Tony Dolley (Peugeot 206 GTi) closed in. A tyre miscue in qualifying had left him 21st on the grid, but he made rapid progress once the race began. By lap seven he was amongst David Urquhart and Angus Dawe's battle for seventh, despatching both within a lap and then chasing down Beachgood, who was only 1.6s clear at the flag. Urquhart beat Dawe to eighth overall and sixth in class, as a late spurt from Nick Mizen (Rover 220) brought him onto Dawe's tail by the final lap.

Having started only 23rd thanks to a qualifying shunt, champion Tony Hutchings (MG ZR) made up eight places on lap one then hunted down and passed class C leader Avery. He looked assured of the division win until spinning on the oily approach to Tower on the final lap. As Hutchings struggled to restart the stalled MG, Avery also lost it at the same spot, slewing across the infield and allowing Carleton Williams (Vauxhall Corsa) to slip through and take a shock last gasp class win from 24th on the grid. Hutchings had to settle for a frustrated fourth, behind Avery and Simon Spearing.

In class D, Di Claudio maintained his qualifying advantage throughout and took a dominant victory over Russell Poynter-Brown – a result that made him arguably even more jubilant than Humphrey.

"We've been waiting for this for a long, long time," said Di Claudio. "I'm as happy as happy can be!"



Wyatt defeated Thorne on a good day for Foci. (Image: David Webster)