



Marshall lays down the law

(Image: bc-photographic.co.uk)

pace-setters in their class.

RACE

Richardson made the best start, leaping into the lead as the field approached Folly.

After the first lap only 4s covered the top six runners, however by lap three Richardson and Davidson had pulled a slight advantage over the chasing field - and over the next 10 laps Richardson pulled his finger out to leave the pack trailing in his wake.

But as Richardson went through Tower for the 14th time he came upon a group of backmarkers. As he pulled alongside on the run to Bobbies, Richardson could feel something was wrong.

"I had this sort of sixth sense that he was going to turn in on me," he said. Faced with a choice of leaning on and possibly spinning the backmarker ("it wasn't my style") or steering away, he chose the second option. Unfortunately, this led to disaster as the leader crashed into the directional marker on the entry to the chicane, breaking the front-right wishbones, steering arm and the nose section.

Meanwhile Davidson had pulled away slightly from the chasing Marshall but the Mallock's superior straight-line

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Castle Combe Special GT Championship

Round 1, April 9 2007

Josh Barnett reports

Shane Marshall collected his first winner's trophy in the Castle Combe Special GT Championship on Easter Monday. The Mallock driver had looked set for a podium place until long time leader Thomas Richardson crashed at Bobbies with two laps to go.

QUALIFYING

Thomas Richardson (Bristol Motor Company Nemesis RME02-Vauxhall) took pole position with what was, on paper, a crushing performance in qualifying. He finished the session over two seconds ahead of his nearest challenger, Shane Marshall in the Mallock P21.

However, Richardson was himself 0.7s adrift of Howard Spooner, whose pole position time would only count if two drivers officially withdrew after qualifying. Nobody did, so the Mark Bailey Racing Jade-Nissan would only be on the back of the grid in the event

of a late non-starter.

Richard Fearn's Revolution Racing Juno-Nissan had set the early pace, however he was soon ousted by Spooner and then soon afterwards Richardson, as the times gradually tumbled below the 1m10s mark.

Spooner then reclaimed the advantage with a 1m05.463s lap, which remained the benchmark until the end. Richardson soon improved to a 1m07.877s to take the provisional second, while Fearn was next to better his time as the drivers eventually got to grips with the track.

Marshall was sneaking up on rails as he put in a 1m10.135s to move into fifth, knocking Autosport National Editor-at-large Marcus Pye down to sixth in the works Jade-Chrysler. Next time around he knocked a full two seconds off to record a 1m07.906s and progress further up the leaderboard to third.

Louis Davidson moved his Radical Prosport-Suzuki into fourth on his last lap. The session was curtailed a couple of minutes early after Fearn spun and stalled on the exit of Camp - leave his car hanging onto the circuit.

Aside from Richardson and Fearn, Mark Funnell (Lotus Exige-Honda) and Duncan Cameron (Ferrari 360) were



Richardson led until a very late off (Image: bc-photographic.co.uk)

speed and a series of fast laps put Marshall right on the Radical's rear-wing.

Davidson looked to have the situation under control as he countered Marshall's every move, but at Tower on the penultimate lap Marshall went through. Davidson tried to fight back at Camp, but the new leader managed to create a gap at Avon Rise and by the Esses any further chances of a fight-back were thwarted when Davidson pulled off with technical issues. This left Marshall to take an unexpected win by more than 8s.

Pye had to battle hard with Simon Tilling (Radical Prosport-Suzuki) for what became second place. The journalist made a lightning start to jump from eighth to fourth, slicing in

between the two front row men. However, throughout the distance he was kept in line by an eager Tilling, who never got the place but did achieve the final step on the podium.

Rob Clarke (Radical Clubsport-Suzuki) was a commendable, if lonely, fourth, while Guy Parr (Radical SR8-Suzuki) had David Krayem bearing down on him at the end. Krayem wasn't in the ex-Bob Light Stealth, instead opting for the Radical Prosport-Suzuki for Combe. He sliced past the giant-killing Funnell at Camp, amid backmarkers on lap seven.

Funnell, like Pye, took a class win, but the most intense battle for category honours was in the production-based sports car class. Three Ferrari 360s battled for honours, with reigning

champion Keith Sprules leading until he was mugged by Duncan Cameron and Jon Dillon at Folly on lap three. Dillon took the class lead at Camp two laps later, and clung on to the end. "I made an average start, but otherwise it was great," said the elated Dillon.



Champ Sprules was second in the Ferrari battle. (Image: bc-photographic.co.uk)

News in brief

One change to the Special GT championship this year is that rolling starts are abandoned in favour of the standing variety. This came about at the request of the drivers after a number of ragged starts in 2006 left drivers further down the order with too much to do.

Regular Special GT race winner and lap record holder Tony Sinclair was in the paddock on race day, along with the Jade team. Sinclair badly injured his legs in a crash at a Sports Car Challenge race in Monza when the Jade he was driving hit the barriers at the high speed Lesmo turn. Sinclair was seen getting around the paddock on crutches instead of the wheel chair he was originally bound to.

Meanwhile, veteran journalist and commentator Marcus Pye took the works Jade to a class A win while regular driver Guy Woodward was holidaying. "It was most unexpected," he said. "I made a great start and just hung on in there. I would like to thank Tony Sinclair for the chance to do this."

The Wiltshire College-run Mazda RX-7, driven by Jon Reeves, suffered a turbulent debut after only being finished the day before the meeting. Reeves had a promising qualifying session, finishing fourth (out of 12) in Class D. However, come the afternoon, Reeves had to pull the car into the pits after only two laps of racing.

Richard Fearn's race finished before it

had even begun when he retired on the warm-up lap. However, his demise left just 29 cars on the grid which meant that fastest man in qualifying Howard Spooner should have been able to start the race. It took the please of team boss Mark Bailey for the Jade to be allowed out, albeit nearly two laps late. Nonetheless the Jade driver set the fastest lap before retiring with a burst brake seal on lap nine.

The GT Championship is the success story of the season-opener. In qualifying, 60% more drivers set a time than at the equivalent meeting last year, and five more drivers entered but did not show. Last year two drivers entered the Production-based class – this year, 11 did so! Split grids, anyone?

EVENT DATA

Result – 15 laps: 1 Shane Marshall (Mallock P21) 18m12.962s (91.403mph); 2 Marcus Pye (Jade Trackstar) +8.410s; 3 Simon Tilling (Radical Prosport); 4 Rob Clarke (Radical Clubsport); 5 Guy Parr (Radical SR8); 6 David Krayem (Radical Prosport). Class A: 1 Pye; 2 Parr; no other finishers. Class B: 1 Marshall; 2 Tilling; 3 Clarke. Class C: 1 Mark Funnell (Lotus Exige); 2 Tony Michael (Westfield SE); 3 Nick Williamson (Ford Escort Cosworth). Class D: 1 John Dillon (Ferrari 360); 2 Keith Sprules (Ferrari 360); 3 Duncan Cameron (Ferrari 360). Pole position: Thomas Richardson (Nemesis RME02) 1m05.548s (101.65mph). Fastest lap: Spooner 1m04.589s (102.684mph). Starters: 30.

Standings after round one – Class A: 1 Pye 4; 2 Parr 3; 3 Spooner 1. Class B: 1 Marshall 6; 2 Tilling 5; 3 Clarke 4; etc. Class C: 1 Funnell 5; 2 Michael 3; 3 Williamson 2; etc. Class D: 1 Dillon 6; 2= Sprules 5; 2= Cameron 5; etc.

Next round: May 7.