



Howard's way

(Image: David Webster)

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**Castle Combe Special GT
Championship**

Round 3, May 28 2007

Ian Sowman reports

Howard Spooner dominated an eventful savesometax.co.uk Castle Combe Special GT Championship round to score a first outright victory for a Class A car this season. Perhaps of more significance, though, was that each of the other class points leaders also triumphed to boost their respective advantages and promote a thrilling battle for the title as the season moves into its middle third.

QUALIFYING

The circuit was damp for practice, but these were far from the most treacherous conditions of the day. After a promising start to the season – both at Combe and elsewhere – Simon Tilling (Tilling Motorsport Radical Prosport) set the early pace, with Guy Woodward (Motorvations Limited Jade Trackstar) initially set to join him on the front row. Shane Marshall (Mallock

P21) staked his claim for pole position shortly afterwards, thereby nudging the others back a place apiece.

There were some surprising names just below these on the timing screen as the established stars struggled to acclimatise to the tricky conditions. So at one point Class D leader Duncan Cameron (JHJ Racing Ferrari 360 Challenge lay third, while Nick Williamson put his Class C Ford Escort on fourth. That was but the start for Williamson, who with just a few minutes remaining astonishingly grabbed pole position as he revelled in the conditions. With Marshall driving into the paddock at about the same time, a major surprise was on the cards.

Williamson did do enough to start from the front row, but an enthusiastic late burst from Tilling put him up top immediately before the chequered flags came out (a minute and a half early, as seems to be the norm). His time of 1m16.117s was almost a full second faster than Williamson.

Spooner was another late improver, his last lap elevating him to third on the grid in his Jade Trackstar. That meant that Marshall had lost three positions after leaving the track, but

he would start ahead of Woodward and Simon Freeman (Radical Prosport). Cameron was an outstanding seventh fastest, outgunning an array of Radicals.

Two qualifying sessions later, the Radical Prosport of Louis Davidson appeared among the visiting Sports Racing and GT cars to practise out of session. The round two winner would therefore start right at the back.

RACE

With a slightly mixed up grid, the start of the race could have proved a flashpoint. Fortunately it didn't, and all 29 cars departed the grid intact in much more benign conditions.

Although Williamson made a perfectly respectable start, there was no way that the Escort would be able to hold its own against much more potent machinery, and he was shuffled back to sixth by the end of the first lap. Tilling was also swallowed up when the flag was dropped, with Woodward taking the lead on the run towards Folly only to lose out to Spooner at Quarry corner. Freeman, meanwhile, stalled on the grid and was relieved to have been avoided by the pack.



Friends and rivals Clarke and Tilling battled hard. (Image: David Webster)

Following on from his quite brilliant start at the last meeting, Rob Clarke (MTC Racing Radical Clubsport) did it again, and he ended the opening lap in fourth position – an improvement of 11 places. He was behind Spooner (already a long way clear), Woodward and Tilling but ahead of Marshall, Williamson, Norman Lackford's Radical Prosport and the class C Bristol Motor Company Westfield SE of Tony Michael.

A big battle for third soon developed with Tilling, Clarke and Marshall allowing Woodward to eke out an advantage, although the second place man could do little about Spooner who by lap four was already 5s clear of the field and showing no sign of slowing up. Clarke moved to the front of the gaggle on that lap, but on the next Tilling recovered third at Quarry.

While all of this was going on, the redoubtable Davidson was storming up the order and he took three places – from Christopher Brown (Radical SR3), Lackford and Williamson (who had somehow managed to cling onto sixth) – on lap five. He closed onto the next group with little trouble, but what he really needed was a safety car period...

What some drivers regarded as a good advertisement for the split grid format effectively halted Tilling's bid for a podium position. Coming through Camp for the eighth time, the third place battle caught onto the back of Woodward and they all stumbled over a backmarker. Marshall briefly took Woodward for second on the inside,

but Tilling was more seriously hampered and he would subsequently call into the pits to check that all was still well.

It was under safety car order that Tilling visited the pits, Davidson therefore having his prayers answered. There was some assorted clearing up to do: Jon Dhillon's Ferrari 360 Challenge was off at Folly, while the Dylan Popovic Marlin T5-EXi was stuck at Old Paddock. Most disappointingly, the giant-killing Escort of Williamson had ground to a halt (but out of the way) on Westway.

Three laps later it was all systems go for a four lap dash, but such was the intermingling of leaders and backmarkers behind the safety car the restart wasn't the spectacle it might have been. Spooner was able to virtually rebuild his previous lead in the space of a lap, although Woodward, Marshall and Clarke remained tight for second. Tilling rejoined from the pits, and just avoided going a lap down.

Davidson's 'burn from the stern' was dealt a blow by a misfire that forced him to hobble back to the pits, leaving the main focus back on the battle for second. Marshall re-took the position at Old Paddock on lap 13 and held sway to the end, aided by a rather flat engine note from the Chrysler in the rear of Woodward's car. That would cause him to lose another place, to Clarke, but he had enough in reserve so as not to have to worry about Andy Crockett (Radical Prosport), whose drive was almost as impressive as

EVENT DATA

Result – 15 laps: 1 Howard Spooner (Jade Trackstar) 19m50.639s (83.905mph); 2 Shane Marshall (Mallock P21) +7.712s; 3 Rob Clarke (Radical Clubsport); 4 Guy Woodward (Jade Trackstar); 5 Andy Crockett (Radical Prosport); 6 Norman Lackford (Radical Prosport). Class A: 1 Spooner; 2 Woodward; no other starters. Class B: 1 Marshall; 2 Clarke; 3 Crockett. Class C: 1 Tony Michael (Westfield SE); 2 Derek Parker (Caterham 7); no other finishers. Class D: 1 Duncan Cameron (Ferrari 360); 2 Jon Reeves (Mazda RX7); 3 Keith Sprules (Ferrari 360). Pole position: Simon Tilling 1m16.117s (87.497mph). Fastest lap: Spooner 1m06.094s (100.766mph). Starters: 29.

Standings after round three – Class A: 1 Woodward 9; 2= Marcus Pye & Spooner 6; etc. Class B: 1 Marshall 18; 2= Tilling & Clarke 10; etc. Class C: 1 Michael 18; 2 Mark Funnell 7; 3= Parker & Nick Williamson 5; etc. Class D: 1 Cameron 19; 2 Jon Dhillon 11; 3 Sprules 9; etc.

Next round: June 23.

Davidson's could have been.

So – it had all been simple for Spooner, hadn't it? "Well, the wheel coming off at the end really sharpened my attention towards the end of the race," he said, so perhaps not. "If the race was one more lap I would have had to have parked up."

While Marshall took the class B spoils, Michael secured the class C honours again as he benefitted from Williamson's demise. He was chased over the line by a fascinating Class D lead battle. On track it was a memorable first win for the Atom 290/Wiltshire College Mazda RX7 of Jon Reeves having overcome Cameron at Camp in the second half of the race, but subsequently Reeve was deemed to have picked up an unfair advantage so he was penalised the 2s that swapped the place back again.

Cameron therefore leads the championship by a single point, but with his two (tied) rivals – Marshall and Michael – in different classes, the only thing he can do is keep on winning.



Qually revelation Williamson's pace wasn't matched by reliability.. (Image: David Webster)