

CASTLE COMBE SPECIAL GT CHAMPIONSHIP **in association with savesomemoney.info** **Rounds four and five – 13-14th June**



Shane Marshall returned to the Castle Combe Special GT Championship in association with savesomemoney.info with the intention of taking on round three winner Josh Fisher - only to find that the Quantexe Racing man wasn't entering after all. That meant Marshall just had to amuse himself with two commanding victories, one from the back and one from the front. *Emma Burns and Ian Sowman report.*

Qualifying

A tricky qualifying session began on a track covered in cement dust following incidents in other categories, and was unusually interrupted by the safety car at one point to allow marshals to safely retrieve some bodywork from Dylan Popovic's Marlin following a spin at Camp.

In between of all that, returnee Shane Marshall picked up where he left off last year by taking a dominant pole position in his Jade, with a comfortable margin over this year's main protagonists, Class B leaders Andrew Shanley and Simon Tilling in their Radicals.

The Mitsubishi's began to show their might in Class C, with usual leader Mark Funnell pushed back to third by Laurence Kilby and Simon Norris, who were just 0.075s apart, while Stuart Dixon led the Caterham crowd in Class D.

Race 1

The chances of a Marshall win seemed to diminish as the field formed up, for the Westbury man's Jade was heading for the pit lane rather than settling into the pole spot. A strange knocking noise had attracted Marshall's attention, so he

wisely pitted for a quick inspection rather than taking any risks.

That gave Shanley a clear view ahead from the front row, and he made the most of it by surging into a clear lead off the line, as Manhal Allos slotted his Sollatek Radical ahead of Tilling's Tilling Motorsport example and Norris' Norris Designs Mitsubishi to take an early second.

Already though Marshall was wasting no time in making progress through the field. Up to 12th within a single lap, he broke into the top ten next time around and continued to slice through the traffic with ease. Tilling took second from Allos on lap four, but already by that time the flying Jade was still to grow in their mirrors, and by half-distance Marshall was in second place and setting his sights on Shanley.

With 2000cc less at his disposal, it was no surprise that Class B man Shanley could not get away from the marauding Class A Jade of Marshall, and by lap eight Marshall was through into a lead that he would not lose.

Afterwards he described his epic back-to-front win as "a bit of fun", while Shanley - who stayed within a creditable 6s of the Jade - was perfectly satisfied with second and maximum class points.

His cause was helped by problems for Tilling, who was unable to chase down his championship rival once free of Allos as a loose front wheel forced him to drive cautiously for the remainder of the race. Allos and Darcy Smith (Thatchway Motorsport Nemesis) completed the top five.

Aside from Marshall's mission, the main entertainment in the race came from two superb lead battles in the Sports and Saloon classes. Kilby and Norris fought for Class C in true Saloon convert style, with a frenetic battle that saw occasional contact between them and Kilby holding a wild slide after ending up on the grass at one point.

The AJEC driver managed to recover from that moment, catch Norris again, and secure the Class C win. Funnell had to settle for an unaccustomed third in class following a spin.

Class D winner Keith Dunn also came from behind to take his victory, hunting down and passing pole-sitter Dixon.

Among the rest of the prototypes, Norman Lackford marked his first appearance of the season with a strong drive from row 11 of the grid through to eighth overall and fourth in Class B, and Martin Baker narrowly beat Des Andrews to ninth outright and fifth in their class.

Race 2

Given that starting right at the back had not stopped Marshall on Saturday, it was little surprise that he was able to dominate from the front on Sunday.

Three seconds per lap faster than his rivals, Marshall had no trouble pulling away to win by over half a minute.

Initially Shanley looked set for another second place and Class B win, as he edged away from the chasing Allos and his usual rival Tilling recovered from being pushed back to sixth at the start.



Shanley leads Allos and Kilby (Image: Steve Jones)

But on lap 10 Shanley's Radical hit trouble and slowed, and although he managed to coax it back into life after parking briefly on the infield, he was forced to retire it for good at the Esses next time around.

That handed second and third to Allos and Tilling, and Class B victory to the latter. It also brought the Class B title fight back to life after Tilling's Spring Bank Holiday incident had allowed Shanley to make a break in the points.

Nemesis pair Smith and Andrews completed the overall top five and Class B top three, with Lackford battling with Andrews in the first half of the race before an unhealthy misfiring noise proved to be the prelude to Lackford having to retire.

Once again, Class C was a thriller. Kilby got into the lead on lap one as Norris made a relatively slow getaway, but the AJEC Mitsubishi became stuck in gear due to a broken clutch fluid pipe and dropped out early on.



*Funnell spins while battling with Norris
(Image: Steve Jones)*

That left Norris' mighty Mitsubishi and Funnell's less powerful but nimble Lotus to stage a classic cat and mouse dice, passing and repassing each other several times before the Exige spun at Quarry and the Lancer was able to escape and clinch the class win by 6s.

Norris finished sixth overall, just ahead of Class B man Martin Baker's Radical, with Funnell recovering for eighth.

Class D duellists Dunn and Dixon completed the overall top ten after staging yet another superb dice for the Production Sports and Saloons division victory. Never more than a few tenths apart, Dunn ultimately squeezed across the line ahead of Dixon, with George Douglas' Martin BM9/10 shadowing them at the finish.

***All images courtesy of Steve Jones
(call 01905 424944 for more
information)***

News in brief

* A slightly new name for the championship this week, as sponsor savesometax.co.uk rebranded to become savesomemoney.info.

* Shane Marshall wasn't the only man to have a troubled warm-up lap on Saturday. Tim Woodman failed to make the start at all after his Caterham shed a wheel at Old Paddock on its way to the grid.

* Marshall's return was mainly motivated by a desire to take on Josh Fisher, who had won the previous round in the new Quantex Juno. But with Fisher not entering this one, Marshall had an easy run to a pair of victories, and will have to wait for his head to head.

* Class C was plenty thrilling enough as the two Mitsubishis and Funnell took each other on, but could have been even better had Nick Williamson not been forced to pull out following a qualifying gearbox failure.

* Manhal Allos' team did a remarkable job to prepare his Radical SR8 for the race. The car was virtually destroyed and required a new chassis following a large crash at Brands Hatch, but was rebuilt in an astounding five days ready for this weekend's Combe action.

* Norman Lackford made his first appearance of 2009 at this meeting, just a day after celebrating his 65th birthday.

* Commentator David George gained a new appreciation for what it takes to star in the Combe Special GT Championship at a track day on the Friday prior to the event, as he enjoyed a passenger ride around the circuit with Class C ace Mark Funnell in the Trowbridge man's Lotus Exige.