

CASTLE COMBE SPECIAL GT CHAMPIONSHIP
in association with savesomemoney.info
Round eight – 31st August 2009



After pole for the last two events had turned into heartache in the races, Manhal Allos finally translated his speed into a Castle Combe Special GT Championship in association with savesomemoney.info victory in round eight on August Bank Holiday Monday.

Qualifying

The weather forecast promised changeable conditions on bank holiday Monday – but most of the fluctuations were compacted into Special GT qualifying.

Although a swift shower as the cars came out was sufficient to create some spray, it didn't last long enough to stop the track drying again by the chequered flag.

That led to a flurry of late changes with long-time provisional pole-sitter Manhal Allos (Sollatek Radical) deposed by title chaser Simon Tilling

(Tilling Radical), but only for a few moments he claimed the place back again, clinching a third straight pole.

"We went from slicks to wets to slicks again," smiled Allos. "It keeps you on your toes, this place..."

Behind Andrew Shanley – who completed an all-Radical top three – Simon Norris just pipped Laurence Kilby as the Mitsubishis ruled Class C, while Keith Sprules took a comfortable Class D pole.

Race

Starts have been a bit of a sore point for Allos this year – especially at the last round – and there was another heart in mouth moment on the grid for the pole man as his Radical rolled forward with the red lights still on. But this time he was determined not to squander another potential win.

“Last time I made a mistake, got confused with the lights, and jumped the start,” he recalled. “This time I nearly jump-started, but stopped completely in time.”

That avoided a penalty, but didn't do much for his speed off the line, and perhaps unsurprisingly it was the Norris Designs Mitsubishi Lancer of Simon Norris that blasted right around the outside of all the prototypes ahead and arrived at Quarry in the lead.

The Lancer contingent had already been halved by Kilby's massive crash in the Saloon race, and Norris' example did not last long either as a spin at the Esses was followed shortly afterwards by a cloud of white smoke from the rear of the car that heralded the end of its race.

As Combe disappeared in the mist, Norris feared a con-rod had relocated itself, but he later discovered that a broken oil filter housing had allowed seven litres of oil to escape.

Once in front again, Allos put his head down and started to make a break, leading by 2.5s after two laps as Tilling tried to reclaim the second place and Class B lead that perennial rival Shanley had taken from him at the start.

The overall championship favourite made a move stick on lap three as

Shanley lost momentum behind Robert Nash's Lola on the run into Camp. But Tilling's sojourn in second was brief, for a spin on the exit of the Esses dropped him back to third three laps later.

“Luckily I managed to keep the engine running and get back on,” said Tilling. “There was so much oil down there, it was scary.”

That handed second back to Shanley, who admitted that he had “taken a couple of laps to get going” and was relieved when Tilling gifted him the class lead.

It initially appeared that second overall would be the yellow Radical's limit, for Allos had stretched the gap to over six seconds with some quick laps amid the traffic, but then the leader's advantage began to dwindle.

“Towards the end I had problems with the gearbox,” Allos explained. “Then I saw Andrew in my rear view mirror so I had to speed up again.”

The lead came down from 5.7s to 3.8s on the penultimate lap, and then to just 0.8s on the final tour as Allos crossed the line with Shanley on his tail, but still victorious for the first time, to his delight. The win also clinched the Class A crown, although the division has not attracted any full season entrants this year.

Tilling came home 9s adrift in third, and although that wrapped up Class B in his favour, it didn't quite put the overall title out of his Class C and D rivals' reach. But he remains in pole position for the crown going into October's finale.

“I'll just try and keep it on the road, and see what happens,” said Tilling.

Darcy Smith kept his Thatchway Motorsport Nemesis within range of Shanley and Tilling at first, before falling away in fourth overall and third in Class B.

As the race progressed, Alan Hamilton edged ever closer, the former FF1600 man unable to repeat his amazing debut second place from earlier in the month because a wrong set-up call in damp qualifying had mired his Church Garage Radical on row five. Finishing within 1.4s of Smith was a sign of his continued progress, though.



Josh Smith settles into Combe Special GT life. (Image: Steve Jones)

The Smith family had two drivers in the top seven, as Darcy's son Josh announced his arrival in the series with seventh place and sixth in Class B, having made eye-catching progress through the field to finish right behind the experienced Norman Lackford's Radical Prosport.

Mark Funnell clinched another Modified Saloon and Sportscar class title with eighth overall and Class C victory. That crown had looked like it might be harder to come by when the Mitsubishi's started flexing their muscles earlier in the year, but as the Lancers wilted, Funnell grabbed the honours.

But having beaten Nick Williamson (Ford Escort Cosworth) to the class

win by a comfortable 15s, Funnell admitted that he had rather fancied another dice with Norris.

"It's a bit of a shame he retired because I'd had a good battle with him at the last meeting and I was looking forward to another one," said Funnell. "Still a good win, though."

Williamson lost ninth overall to Mike Roberts on the final lap as the series returnee got ever more comfortable with his new Radical SR3.



Mike Roberts made a very welcome return with a new Radical. (Image: Steve Jones)

All four class titles were clinched in this race, for Stuart Dixon completed a successful Class D title defence by earning his third class win of the year.

A blistering opening few laps that saw his humble Caterham hacking past the prototype midfield secured a commanding triumph for Dixon, while his class rivals fought over second. It was Nima Khandan-Nia, up from the back of the grid in his Ferrari 360, who eventually won a long dice with Stuart Dunn's Caterham and Keith Sprules' Ferrari to claim the Class D runner-up spot.

All images courtesy of Steve Jones. For more information call 01905 424944 or email stephen.jones28@virgin.net.

NEWS

The Castle Combe local scene is famously family-based, with many sons emulating their fathers by racing in the track's three championships. New dynasties seem to be springing up all the time, and on August bank holiday Monday it was the Smith family that followed the lead of the Higgins, Coopers, Fishers, Moores and many others, as Josh Smith raced alongside father Darcy in the Special GT event for the first time.

The younger Smith has already begun competing in a Radical Clubsport run by Bridgwater College, where he is currently studying. That programme had taken him to several 750MC events and sprints, but he broke new ground this week by making his Combe debut in the Radical SR4 that Darcy had used prior to introducing his new Nemesis this season.

After qualifying 11th (fifth in Class B) and losing a few places off the line, Smith Junior raced impressively through the field to take seventh overall.

"It was my first time in the car, and my first time at the track," said Smith, who hadn't tested the SR4 before qualifying. "It was enjoyable. I think I'm getting there, aren't I?"

In the closing stages Smith caught up with the highly experienced Norman Lackford, who he chased to the flag.

"I latched on to Norman and hoped to pass him, but he knows all the lines," said Smith. "I was still learning gear ratios as we went round."

Whether Smith will become a Combe regular remains to be seen, for the family had originally intended to sell the SR4 now that Darcy was racing the Nemesis.

"Hopefully I can come back," said Josh. "But I've got to persuade my Dad to keep hold of the car..."

A familiar face made a very welcome return to the Combe racing scene on bank holiday Monday, as Mike Roberts contested his first Special GT round since May 2007.

Roberts' first attempt at a racing career had actually ended at Castle Combe in 1973, when back injuries from a violent crash on the approach to Camp convinced him to call a halt to his three seasons of competing to focus on his growing business interests.

Two decades later he returned in a Ferrari 355, before wowing the crowds at Combe and elsewhere with his speed at the wheel of increasingly impressive sports prototypes over the following years, when he starred with Radicals, Junos, Jades and even Lola LMP2 cars.

For his latest return, he has purchased a Radical SR3, and after a brief run at Lydden (interrupted by gearbox problems), he rejoined the Combe GT scene with the car for round eight of the 2009 season.

"Obviously next year the three-litre machines are being outlawed," said Roberts, "but I still wanted to come here."

A full season programme is the aim for 2010, but in the meantime Roberts acclimatised to the car by qualifying 16th then progressing to ninth in the race – picking up more and more speed as the day progressed.

"I'm still feeling my way with it and getting to know it," he admitted. "I think it's capable of going a lot quicker than I'm doing at the moment, and I will come back for a full season with it next year. For now I'm just slowly leaning on it more and more."

STATS

Results

Pos.	Cl.	Cl.pos.	Special GT Driver	Round eight Car	Mon 31st Aug Time	15 laps Qual
1	A	1	Manhal Allos	Radical SR8	16m45.464s	1
2	B	1	Andrew Shanley	Radical Prosport	+ 0.818s	3
3	B	2	Simon Tilling	Radical SR3	+ 9.173s	2
4	B	3	Darcy Smith	Nemesis RME98	+ 36.591s	6
5	B	4	Alan Hamilton	Radical Prosport	+ 38.069s	10
6	B	5	Norman Lackford	Radical Prosport	+ 1m06.188s	12
7	B	6	Josh Smith	Radical SR4	+ 1m06.739s	11
8	C	1	Mark Funnell	Lotus Exige	+ 1 lap	9
9	B	7	Mike Roberts	Radical SR3	+ 1 lap	16
10	C	2	Nick Williamson	Ford Escort Cosworth	+ 1 lap	8
11	A	2	Jim Mort	Radical Prosport	+ 1 lap	7
12	D	1	Stuart Dixon	Caterham 7	+ 1 lap	18
13	B	8	Des Andrews	Sleek	+ 1 lap	13
14	B	9	David Smith	Mallock Mk34	+ 1 lap	15
15	C	3	James Johnson	Fisher Fury	+ 1 lap	17
16	D	2	Nima Khandan-Nia	Ferrari 360	+ 1 lap	30
17	D	3	Keith Dunn	Caterham 7	+ 1 lap	19
18	D	4	Keith Sprules	Ferrari 360	+ 1 lap	14
19	D	5	Tim Woodman	Caterham Roadsport	+ 2 laps	27
20	D	6	Mike Eickmeyer	Caterham Superlight	+ 2 laps	28
21	D	7	Neil Garner	Caterham 7	+ 2 laps	23
22	C	4	Phil Gale	Darrian T9	+ 2 laps	24
23	D	8	George Michael	Toyota MR2	+ 2 laps	25
24	B	10	Jeremy Irwin	Jertona	+ 2 laps	29
25	D	9	Malcolm Webster	VW Golf	+ 3 laps	26
DNF	B		Alan Redpath	Radical SR3	+ 3 laps	21
DNF	C		Lee Joint	Westfield SEW	+ 8 laps	20
DNF	B		Robert Nash	Lola 594C	+ 12 laps	31
DNF	C		Simon Norris	Mitsubishi Lancer	+ 14 laps	4
DNS	C		Laurence Kilby	Mitsubishi Lancer	-	5
DNS	B		Martin Baker	Radical Clubsport	-	22
			<i>Fastest lap:</i>	<i>Allos</i>	<i>1m04.561s</i>	

The title battle

Class A			Class B		
1	Manhal Allos	21	1	Simon Tilling	44
2	Shane Marshall	10	2	Andrew Shanley	36
3	Altay John Ali	8	3	Darcy Smith	31
Class C			Class D		
1	Mark Funnell	40	1	Stuart Dixon	41
2	Simon Norris	31	2	Keith Dunn	31
3	Phil Gale	23	3	Keith Sprules	16

Manhal Allos, Simon Tilling, Mark Funnell and Stuart Dixon all put their classes beyond their nearest rivals' reach in round eight, but the latter three remain in a head to head for the overall title.

It will be a strange contest, for barring a huge surprise they won't be racing in close proximity at the October decider and cannot really influence each other's results. Whatever happens, a fourth place in Class B will make Tilling the champion even if both Funnell and Dixon take class victories and fastest laps, and that should be achievable for the Radical man.

But if things go wrong for Tilling, then Funnell and Dixon need at least second and third in their classes respectively to catch him even if he fails to score, and given how frenetic some of the Class C and D racing has been this year, those results cannot be taken for granted.