

# CASTLE COMBE SPECIAL GT CHAMPIONSHIP

in association with [savesomemoney.info](http://savesomemoney.info)

Final Round – 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2009



**Simon Tilling got the points he needed to become Castle Combe Special GT in association with [savesomemoney.info](http://savesomemoney.info) champion – and also played a starring role in an epic season finale on a slippery track, won by Simon Norris in a breakthrough for the Mitsubishi Lancer contingent. *Images courtesy of Oliver Read and Owain Shaw.***

## **QUALIFYING**

Conditions were hideous during qualifying, and that meant a big powerful sports prototype was far less pleasant to handle than for instance a nimble Lotus Exige.

Having a rain-master like Mark Funnell behind the wheel didn't hurt either, and the Class C champion grabbed an incredible outright pole by 0.7s over Andrew Shanley's Radical.

Guy Woodward made a welcome return in Shane Marshall's Jade and claimed third on the grid, alongside Tilling, who just needed second in class to bag the overall crown. Manhal Allos (Sollatek Radical) took fifth, with Class D pole-sitter Nima Khandan-Nia (MTECH Ferrari 360) completing row two.

## RACE

It seemed like the weather was improving as race time neared and the sun started to make its presence felt – but then another brief shower hit as the teams formed up in the collecting area so it was back to wet and intermediate tyres.



*Last-minute changes had to be made before the start as the rain returned to a drying track.*

(Image: Owain Shaw)

Pole-sitter Funnell was certainly planning on rain when he set his Lotus up, so would be frustrated and hampered by the increasingly dry conditions when the race began. He also lost ground off the line, so it was Shanley who came into Quarry for the first time with a clear lead.

Allos had made a great getaway too though and by the end of the lap he was swarming all over Shanley's less powerful Radical.

A divebomb move at Camp saw Allos take the lead but slide wildly wide, skirting the grass and falling back to second – but still carrying enough speed to power ahead again by Avon Rise.

But with Allos still slithering all over the place in the corners, Shanley, Norris and Woodward began queuing up behind him, with Norris getting between the two

Radicals as they battled on lap four, then snatching the lead at Tower a lap later.

Then at the halfway point Allos' ambitious approaches to Camp finally got the better of him, and he spun backwards into the barriers with frightening velocity.

The Radical was badly damaged at the rear, so it was a relief to see Allos hop straight out.

The inevitable safety car for the crash turned the already great race into one of the highlights of the season.

For the remainder of the race Norris fought doggedly to fend off a horde of prototypes as Shanley, Woodward, Tilling and Darcy Smith – flying up the order from 16<sup>th</sup> on the grid in the Thatchway Nemesis – fanned out behind the Mitsubishi.

Things got even more fraught when Phil Gale spun his Darrian in front of the leaders as they hit traffic at Camp on lap 13, leading to a three abreast moment between Tilling, Shanley and Smith that saw Shanley fall to fifth and Smith emerge in third overall and in the lead of Class B for the first time this year.

That's how they stayed to the flag, with Norris resisting Woodward for the outright win, Smith completing the podium, and Tilling becoming the 2009 champion in fourth ahead of Shanley.



*Simon Tilling takes the applause of his Special GT rivals as 2009 overall series champion. (Image: Owain Shaw)*

As well as paying deserved tribute to the Tilling Motorsport team who had helped him to such a successful season, to his many supporters around the track, and to class rival Smith for his stunning drive, Tilling also celebrated just how exciting the race had been.

“I was third, second, back to third, then fourth...” he said. “I think it was the best race we’ve had this season.”

Norris was equally delighted to beat the Class A and B cars to the top spot.

“I didn’t think I’d get a win overall, I’m well chuffed with that,” he said. “The car was going really well up until about lap 10, the safety car let the tyres cool down, and after that the tyres had gone through the heat cycle and had no grip at all. But I just managed to hold them off at the end.”

Behind the ultra-close top five, Darcy’s son Josh Smith took the Thatchway Radical to sixth, ahead of Alan Hamilton, who made up ground in the race after his lack of wet weather Radical mileage told in qualifying. He also picked up a jump start penalty, but had enough of a gap behind to retain a pleasing seventh overall and fifth in class.

In Hamilton’s wake, up to nine cars of all shapes and sizes battled through the traffic in a brilliant finale.

Mike Roberts came through to the front of the pack to take eighth in the Summertree Radical, followed very closely by Funnell, Norman Lackford (Radical), delighted Class D winner Jon Dhillon (MTECH Ferrari), Guy Parr (Lynn Poole Racing Nemesis), Class D runner-up Keith Dunn (Caterham), Richard Rozhon (Radical), Didier Denat (Solutions Caterham), Khandan-Nia and Keith Sprules (Ferrari).

The wheel to wheel battles both in the midfield and particularly right at the sharp end brought the current era of Combe Special GT racing to a brilliant finale, and proved that the circuit’s sportscar racers can easily match their Saloon and FF1600 counterparts for spine-tingling action.

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