

CNC HEADS SPORTS/SALOON CHAMPIONSHIP – ROUND 4

– OULTON PARK – MAY 27

It was more a case of surviving to the finish for most drivers, as the rain returned to Oulton Park for the fourth round of the CNC Heads Sports Saloons.

Despite running on slicks, Robert Spencer's Locosaki had the edge over Garry Watson's Westfield, with Joe Spencer joining them on the podium.

QUALIFYING

Officially it was sunny for the morning qualifying session, but everyone was already looking at the approaching clouds and the rain forecast for later in the day. Simon Allaway's Lotus Daytona Esprit V8 made the most of the dry track and took pole by 2.249secs from Robert Spencer. "Not bad, 1.9 secs faster than my best around here, so no changes needed and I just hope it doesn't rain," he said. "It was my best time ever too, brilliant," added a delighted Spencer.

Watson headed the second row, "it was busy but good. I found it hard to get a clear though," he reckoned. Alongside was Joe Spencer, "I tried to stay with Dad but cars got in between us. He told me to look after the car and then came in and told me he had gone flat out," Joe explained.

Former multiple Champion Paul Dobson unusually completed a whole session in his Mazda RX7. "I was just biding my time and it went well," he said after qualifying fifth. He had Steve Owen alongside but his Westfield had a small problem. "I wasn't sure I had full power, as the carbs sometimes go out of calibration and it causes a misfire," he explained.

Philip Duncan was disappointed to be down in seventh with his Westfield. "I had trouble with the braking point for Island, too early or too late. I need to latch on to someone doing it right," he said. Ilsa Cox completed the fourth in her Seat Leon Cupra, "It was Ok but I had no timer and didn't really know what times I was doing," she added.

Having rebuilt his Westfield Brian Dean was making his seasonal debut and felt "all's well" after taking ninth best time. Kevin Cryer's Caterham completed the top ten, "no cooling problems, no misfire, no clutch problems, it's good and quiet so far," he said.

Tony Ellis' Mazda RX7 was next up and outpaced class rival and defending champion Dennis Crompton's BMW M3. "I was bedding in new tyres and ABS packed up, so I locked up at Island and wrecked them," Crompton.

Next up was James Aukland with his battle scarred Capri, "a bit rusty myself," he reckoned. Ric Wood was alongside him with his Audi V8 Star now sporting a 3.5 litre turbo charged Nissan engine. "Educational, entertaining and with only 75 per cent throttle I was told. But it's the fastest thing I have sat in in a straight line," he said.

Alan Collinson was delighted with the pace of his TR7 V8 as he headed row eight, from Iain Gorrie's Ultima GTR which was due to make its race debut, after a testing shunt. "There's a lot to learn," said Gorrie.

A split manifold hampered Paul Sampson's Volvo Grand National Coupe, "it's OK though it will be patched up for the race," he explained. Steven Hibbert's Lotus Elise shared the row, back after more than a year on the sidelines. "It didn't really blow all the cobwebs away, but everything felt good and I finished the session unscathed," he said.

With his new car not ready yet, Graham Saul brought out his trusty XR2 to head the 10th row. "Just having fun on old tyres," he said. Richard Roundell was another having difficulties at the Island Hairpin. "Yes I locked up too, it was difficult but still one piece," he accepted.

Steven Parker encountered understeer at Island, "I know I wasn't the only one," admitted the BMW Compact driver. Jack Marland had his Volvo powered Mazda RX7 rebuilt after his Croft shunt, "it seemed Ok and nothing fell," he said optimistically.

James Caskey's rally spec Escort was the penultimate qualifier, making his racing debut. "It's set up far too high, but great fun," he said. Brian Allen's XR2i completed the line up, "I don't care if it's wet or dry as I haven't got a jacket to change the wheels," he concluded.

RACE

Although there was rain in the air, the track was still dry on the out lap. Wood and Crompton took the decision to pit for wets, while Gorrie pitted and stayed there, having elected to postpone his Ultima's debut.

As the lights went out poleman Rob Spencer led into Old Hall, but having initially got away second, Watson found himself demoted by Joe Spencer as they headed onto the Avenue.

Allaway was fourth as far as Cascades when Owen went by, but there was a change at the front too as Joe took the lead from Dad Rob as the top five began to settle. But the weather

certainly didn't suit Allaway's Esprit V8, he soon tailed off from the lead quartet, but had enough in hand over the remaining top ten of Duncan, Dobson, Cox, Ellis and Roundell.

Rob went past Joe to lead at the start of lap three. "He was all over me at the start so I let him go, went at his pace but he didn't seem to be enjoying it much, so I repassed," said Rob. But Watson had also started to close on the lead pair, leaving Owen and Allaway running solo in fourth and fifth.

Although Duncan was still sixth, he had Wood closing in, after storming through the field after his pitlane start. In ninth Dobson was attracting similar pressure from Crompton.

As the rain got heavier Rob's lead increased and secured him victory by over two seconds. "I just watched in my mirrors. It's nice to win, but I did make one mistake. I went through the Knickerbrook chicane on my cool down lap," he said.

Once Joe had lost his lead he had Watson to contend with. "I got lost at Druids. I was going to have Dad again until I went off, but after that I couldn't catch up and it got boring," he said.

Watson eagerly accepted second place after Joe's mistake, "I found it hard to get the power down at the start, but when Joe went wide at Druids it was easy to take second. I knew I couldn't catch Rob, if I had pushed any harder I would have gone off," he replied.

For nine laps Owen had kept a safe hold on fourth until one mistake lost him two places on the remaining laps. "I was so annoyed they got past. I locked up at Island and went off and suddenly Ric and Dennis were on me. Then as I tried harder I made more mistakes," he explained.

Wood was into fourth past the pits as they started lap 10 and Crompton followed two laps from home. Wood had his own problems in retaining fourth however, "It felt very loose me and the car so I had to go for wets, but so did Dennis and I couldn't shake him off at the end. I had an ecu problem and had to keep resetting the throttle. When it did out of Lodge on the last lap he nearly got me," Wood explained.

"That was such good fun, but I was braking early as I wasn't sure if ABS was working. I was with Ric in the corners then he just powered away," Crompton added.

Both Allaway and Duncan slid down the order as they struggled for grip, which brought Dobson into seventh, "I liked drifting it through Lodge, I had the wrong tyres and no one to race with, so just enjoyed myself," Dobson added. Allaway held onto seventh, "probably my least enjoyable race for a while. I would have rather gone shopping than just drive around for a finish," he reckoned.

Duncan had started the last lap in ninth, under pressure from Cox. But she pitted her Seat at the end of the lap, "I wanted to start on wets and Brian said no stay on slicks, so I popped a driveshaft with so much wheelspin," she explained.

But Duncan's pace slowed even more on the last lap, which allowed Roundell, Hibbert and Parker to go by. "I should have gone for wets and hoped for the best, I just had no grip and too many moments," Duncan declared.

Roundell was delighted with his ninth place, "really pleased but still locked up and cut out, but gave myself a clap," he said. "I thought it was right on slicks and then it rained more and it was difficult to judge grip," said Hibbert. "So many of us seemed equally matched in the rain so the gaps stayed the same, but I overtook Richard twice and went sideways, so he went by again at the same corner," Parker added.

Saul had been just outside the top ten early on, "wonderful in the wet and it didn't feel a problem on intermediates. It was an equaliser so I mixed it, but when I challenged Roundell into Island I locked up and hit Tony Ellis," he admitted after settling in 13th at the flag.

"I had a good first half then more rain," said 14th placed Collinson, while Sampson had "a big spin at Knickerbrook and stalled" forcing him to back off for the remaining laps. Aukland's Capri was "a bit of a handful" but survived a spin at Island, while Caskey, Marland and Allen completed the finishers.

Elis retired after his contact with Saul, having been in 10th place early on. Cryer pitted after one lap due to engine maladies and Dean spun off on the opening lap.

Results: 1 Robert Spencer (Stuart Taylor Locosaki) 13 laps in 22m35.662s; 2 Garry Watson (Westfield SEiW) +2.013s; 3 Robert Spencer (Stuart Taylor Locosaki); 4 Ric Wood (Audi Star/Nissan); 5 Dennis Crompton (BMW E36 M3); 6 Steve Owen (Westfield Sei); 7 Paul Dobson (Mazda RX7); 8 Simon Allaway (Lotus Daytona Esprit V8); 9 Richard Roundell (Vauxhall Vectra); 10 Steven Hibbert (Lotus Elise). Class A: 1 Wood; 2 Allaway; 3 Paul Sampson; (Volvo Grand National Coupe); 4 James Aukland (Ford Capri); 5 Jack Marland (Mazda RX7). no other starters. Class B: 1 Watson; 2 Owen; 3 Philip Duncan (Westfield Sei); no other finishers. Class C: 1 R.Spencer; 2 J.Spencer; n3 James Caskey (Ford Escort); no other starters. Class D: 1 Crompton; 2 Dobson; 3 Steven Parker (BMW Compact); 4 Alan Collinson (Triumph TR7 V8); no other finishers. Class E: 1 Roundell; 2 Hibbert; no other starters. Class F: 1 Graham Saul (Ford Fiesta Xr2); Brian Allen (Ford Fiesta XR2i) no other starters. Fastest lap: R.Spencer 1m42.174s (78.43mph). .