

Sports/Saloon Car Championship – Round 1 - Oulton Park

ROSE TAKES OPENING VICTORY IN WINTRY CONDITIONS

2016 CNC Heads Sports Saloons Champion Paul Rose opened his new seasons account with a victory in his Saker, at a bitterly cold Oulton Park.

The track was damp, but drying in parts for the morning qualifying session. The Saker's of Rose and Steve Harris secured the front row, with Rose over a second clear on pole. "I got some clean laps early on, it handled well but the conditions were very unpredictable," said Rose. "After a turbo pipe came off in testing, everything was OK," Harris added.



Paul Rose and Danny Bird in qualifying (Photo : Marvin Hall)

Danny Bird's Spire GT3 and Dave Harvey's Stuart Taylor Locosaki shared the next row. "The flat shift wasn't working for most of the session, then it did at the end," said Bird. "My clutch was slipping too," said Harvey.

Garry Wardle's Porsche 997 was fifth best. "I had a gear change problem too and was having to blip the clutch," he explained. Alongside was Oliver Thomas' Subaru Impreza. "We have got a new rear diff and front splitter and it feels like a different car, but I only ran low boost," he said.



Dave Harvey in his Locosaki (Photo : Matvin Hall)

Despite not having driven his new car before, returning multiple champion Paul Dobson headed the fourth row with his Mazda rotary powered Locost. "It's a twin injection unit and I had only driven it up the road before this session. It's a very steep learning curve and very different to anything I had driven before. We just couldn't get it warmed up enough," he explained.

Although Paul Woolfitt's Lotus Exige was alongside Dobson, he had clutch problems. "It was slipping for most of the session," he said. Having raced a Mazda RX7 in the Championship previously, Tony Ellis has followed a similar path to Dobson, with a Mazda rotary engine in his Gemini Elva Sports and qualified ninth best on his first time out in the car.

Jon Woolfitt's Mk Indy Turbo completed the top 10, but lost boost. "It was an intercooler pipe that came off as I hadn't tightened it," he admitted. Ian Burrows' Toyota Celica and Dan Crossley's VW Golf GTi shared the next row. Burrows again relishing the inclement weather, as he did on his one previous appearance last season. "I went for full wets to make sure I got through the session," said Crossley.

Philip Morris was half a second adrift of team mate Crossley, as headed the seventh row. "Two wets and two slicks was my choice, very tricky," he reckoned. He had Jamie Cryer's Ginetta G20 alongside. "I have got a bigger engine this year. I could feel the extra power and think I should have gone for slicks," he added.

Directly behind Cryer were class E rivals Nicholas Bartlett (BMW M3), Chris Maries (Honda Integra) and Paul Rotheroe (Citroen Xsara). "I have a rebuilt engine, so just need to go faster," said Maries. "I had no real expectations, but the car was good," reckoned Rotheroe.

Newcomer Allan Davies (BMW M3), Steve Rowles' Honda Civic Type R) and debutant Guy Carter in a TVR Tuscan completed the top 10. Kristian Rose was another debutant, but was driving his Integra too and from the circuit. "I think my tyre pressures were a bit high, as it wouldn't break in a straight-line," he explained. Graeme Laslett's paler yellow Elise completed the tenth row, while behind him Sam De Haan was out in a Caterham chasing signatures before his British GT debut in a Lamborghini Huracan GT3 in a couple of weeks.

Although Alex Modro headed team mate David Jones in their Focus's, he ended his session with an off exiting Shell Hairpin. "I just bided my time on some old wets and made it to the flag," Jones added.

Alistair and Dave Chilton's MK GTi's had Mike Storey's Renault Clio and Mike Hurst's "powerless" Seat Leon Cupra between them, while Robert Wakelin was out for the very first time in his Honda Civic and headed class F rival Clive Dix's Puma.

The 35 car grid was completed by Peter Koukoulas' Toyota MR2, Stephen Keenan's MK Indy RR, John Seery's Astra and Helen Allen's Fiesta.

RACE

All 35 cars made it through qualifying but within metres of the start, there was chaos and the race was red flagged. Jon Woolfitt had made a flying start to lead, but it was all in vain as Dobson had broken the transmission, Morris had speared off into the barriers and Laslett had collided as everyone hit the brakes, putting all three out of the restart.

As the lights went out, for the second time, Harvey led the charge to Old Hall, from Bird, Wardle, Rose, Woolfitt J and Harris. Rose ousted Wardle into Cascades before taking Bird into Old Hall as they started lap two and the snow began to fall. Woolfitt P was up to sixth after contact with Harris, which left the Saker driver eighth behind Ellis.

By the start of lap three the lead trio had gone clear, but Rose was biding his time before pushing for Harvey's lead. "It was brilliant leading, but I could see Paul coming for me, but I thought he had a problem as it took longer than I expected before he challenged me," said Harvey. "I had a reasonable start, made places but had to make sure I had enough temperature in the tyres, as Dave was much quicker at the chicanes," Rose added.

He led before the end of lap three and eased his way to the flag and a 21 second victory, while Harvey retained second but was almost caught by Bird on the last lap. "It was backmarkers and I locked up as I was trying to pick my spot and Danny hit me up the back," he said after they held station to the flag.

After his second lap incident, Harris caught the Woolfitt brothers and attempted to take them both into Old Hall on lap three. He got by but couldn't make the corner. "The splitter was damaged in the first incident at Knickerbrook, so when I retook it just wouldn't go around the right hander, I went off, finished the splitter off and retired to the pits," he explained.

Jon Woolfitt was then pursued by brother Paul, until the latter was brought pitwards with a warning flag, leaving Jon to take a solitary fourth. "I was worried at the end though as my battery wasn't charging and the car kept missing. So I tried less gear changes and less power and brought it home," he said.



Class D and Class F winners, Allan Davies and Clive Dix (Photos : Marvin Hall)

Ellis was in fifth from lap five, "really pleased with that for a debut. My slicks were Ok and I had no problem at all," he said. Debutant and class D winner Allan Davies' BMW M3 was a lap down in sixth, while Wardle had to fight back to seventh with a lap to go, having spun at Cascades on the second lap. "It was cold tyres and I had spun on the green flag lap too, but just went straight on when I tried to brake," he explained.

Crossley, another newcomer, had changed to slicks for the race. "Not in the snow though," he reckoned after being shadowed by Kristian Rose on his way to eighth. "I had a mirror knocked off, but had an early duel with Paul Rotheroe, then saw him disappear," said ninth placed Rose junior.

Guy Carter brought his TVR home to complete the top 10 on his debut having ousted Burrows on lap seven. The Celica driver then lost a further place to De Haan's Caterham a couple of laps later, to take the flag in 12th.

Despite his early spin, Rotheroe was delighted with his race. "I got all excited after the spin, but it was Kristian's fault as he went by so fast, the comeback felt brilliant though" he said after taking 13th and second in class from Bartlett with a lap to go. "I had stayed on wets, but Paul got me right at the end as I had steam in the cockpit from the tyres," Bartlett replied. Cryer struggled for grip early on, "then it came good later on and I got both Focus's and was catching Paul and Nick too," he said.

As well as Cryer, both Jones and Modro gained a place on the last lap when Alastair Chilton pitted. "The throttle broke about 50 yards from the line," he said, after not being classified.

Maries, Storey and Keenan completed the top 20, whilst Hurst continued with no power to finish 21st.

Dix took the class F spoils and had Koukoulas between him and class rival Wakelin. "I had a new sequential gearbox, so this was just my test, but I kept an eye on the Honda behind," said Dix. "I had spun at Old Hall on the third lap, then saw red after that," Wakelin added.

While Dave Chilton, Allen and Seery all made the flag, Rowles had retired after two laps with a puncture and Thomas had pulled out with a lack of grip.

There are four weeks to the next round at Cadwell by which time spring may be a little closer.

Published by Peter Scherer for BARC North West, March 17th 2018