

Sports/Saloon Car Championship - Rounds 2 & 3 - Croft

ELEMENTARY FOR WATSON

Garry Watson made a winning return to the Championship at Croft, by taking his Westfield to a double success, despite some mechanical worries after the first qualifying session.

Qualifying - Race 1

27 cars made it out for first qualifying on a cloudy but dry morning. Watson took pole on his last lap, but on his return to the paddock the car refused to start. "I was worried it was the engine, but it finally started and I never found out what it was," he said.

The Saker's of Paul Rose and Steve Harris were next up, "we mixed and matched tyres Dunlop endurance and Avon but it didn't work," said Rose. "I just stayed on the Dunlops but keeping heat in them was hard and so grip was a problem," Harris added.



Philip Duncan was fourth best on his first outing of 2016, "I had gear change problems, so having to change back to manual," he explained.

Down in fifth was a disappointed Joe Spencer, "it was a set up issue. It kept kicking out the opposite way at corners," said the Locosaki driver.

Heading the third row was Jon Wollfitt, making his race debut with his MK Indy. He had Paul Dobson's Mazda RX7 alongside. "I flat spotted a front tyre messing around with the brake bias," said the former multiple champion.



Ilsa Cox was expecting to be heading for home after problems in testing. "We had a problem with a new ecu, put the old one back in and it wouldn't start. Then just tried the car before qualifying and it was OK. I hadn't been to Croft for 20 years though," she added.

David Harvey's Locosaki and Les Kirk's Fisher Fury completed the top ten. "I was learning the track," said Harvey.

“Dealing with traffic was my problem,” Kirk added.

Piers Grange’s Escort shared row six with Mike Hurst’s Seat. “The left foot braking still isn’t instinctive, I am braking too early,” Hurst reckoned.

After two years away sprinting and hillclimbing Paul Woolfitt joined his younger brother. His Z Cars Mini was 13th best and had Garry Wardle’s Ginetta G50 alongside.



Jamie Cryer’s Ginetta G20 and Steve Rowles’ Honda Integra Type R shared row eight. “Understeering but promising,” said Cryer Jnr. Steven Parker had concerns over low oil pressure in his BMW Compact, while returnee Paul Rotheroe was getting used to a number of changes made to his Citroen Xsara.

Kevin Cryer’s Ginetta G20 and Vic Lord’s Lotus Elise were behind them, “diabolical, all at sea and I didn’t know why,” said Cryer Snr. Ralph Underwood’s TR7 V8 and Matthew Spencer’s Peugeot 106 followed, before Brian Allen’s XR2i became the first casualty. His weekend ended in a cloud of smoke in the pitlane.

Debutant Alistair Chilton’s MK GTi completed the main qualifiers, but had the Bird brothers behind him, with Clive Dix’s Puma splitting them. “My new cooling system didn’t work to well, I was scrubbing tyres, the transponder didn’t work and I ran out of fuel,” Danny explained. “The kill switch killed it and I didn’t make a lap,” David added.

Race 1

With Allen’s absence it was a 26 car grid for the first of the weekend’s races.

Kirk was left at the start after stalling on the green flag lap too, but out in front Watson led Spencer, Duncan, Woolfitt, Rose and Harris, before both Sakers surged ahead of Woolfitt into Tower.

Dobson was into an early seventh, with Woolfitt Snr, Harvey and Wardle in formation behind.

Spencer was soon on the attack and was already hounding Watson as they started the second lap, surging ahead into Tower before an increased to gap to third.

Rose and Harris had both moved up after Duncan hit the chicane tyre wall and pulled off. Harvey had also made it passed Dobson and Woolfitt Snr into sixth.

Matthew Spencer had stopped at Tower and Jamie Cryer was off at Clervaux, while Lord slowed and cruised pitwards to retire after two laps. "A terrible start and I just locked up and went off," said Jamie.

Jon Woolfitt was the next casualty when his engine let go. "I was flat out just after the Jim Clark Esses and it just went," he explained.

The safety car was called into action for a couple of laps to clear the track, but from the green flag it was side by side into Clervaux with Watson emerging with the lead.

But almost immediately there was another casualty when seventh placed Paul Woolfitt tipped his Mini over at Clervaux. "I got it wrong, spun sideways and had a slow motion roll in front of the grandstand," he said.

It stayed somewhat closer behind the lead duel too with Rose and Harris continuing to head the chase, while Dobson came under pressure from Harvey for fifth as Danny Bird's Pell Genesis closed after his charge from the back of the grid.



Wardle was under attack too with Cox, Hurst and Grange in line behind. The pressure told on lap nine when Wardle spun at the Complex, Cox took to the grass to avoid him and Hurst shot ahead of them both, only to spin himself at Sunny a lap later. "My tyres had shot it and I struggled

especially in the slow bits and then the safety car ruined it for me," said Wardle. "I touched the grass and got sideways then knocked the gear change from manual to automatic," Hurst admitted.

Watson finally eased to the flag over four seconds up on Spencer, who had had to survive a late lunge from Rose at the Hairpin. "I had been confident I could get Joe without the help of the safety car, so would have waited until we had the backmarkers," Watson admitted. "I showed my hand too soon, I came back but Garry knew exactly where to position the car," Spencer replied.

"I just had to try on that last lap, Steve had been ahead of me too at the start until my demon move into Tower," said Rose

Harris retained fourth and Dobson managed to keep Harvey at bay for fifth. "I was pushed quite hard for a few laps by Dave and the Woolfitt's," said Dobson. "It had been really good chasing Dobbo and I even had a go at him at the Hairpin," Harvey admitted.

Cox got away from Grange to reconsolidate seventh, while the recovering Hurst was ninth. "That was great, I only got delayed when Garry spun," Cox explained.



Kirk worked his way up to tenth and had a late exchange with Hurst too, while Rowles followed in 11th and just held off Parker for 12th after a racelong duel as Kevin Cryer looked on. "I hit the tyres after Philip Duncan dislodged them and took a wing off. It was close with Paul but I didn't want to take him off on his comeback," said Parker. "I had been sandwiched with Steven and Paul but think I fell asleep behind the safety car and fell behind them," Kevin admitted.

Danny Bird retired from seventh on the 10th lap. "I got a bit of a misfire after the safety car and was nursing it until the bottom balljoint snapped," he said.

Wardle made it home 15th after his spin, while Underwood, Chilton, Dix and David Bird completed the finishers. "I led the class and then spun at Hawthorn after the safety car," admitted Bird Jr. "My rear brakes were locked on," Dix admitted after winning his class.

Results

1 Garry Watson (WestfieldSEW) 14 laps in 22m47.171s (78.33mph); 2 Joe Spencer (Stuart Taylor Locosaki) +4.089s; 3 Paul Rose (Saker RAPX); 4 Steve Harris (Saker RAPX); 5 Paul Dobson (Mazda RX7); 6 David Harvey (Stuart Taylor Locosaki); 7 Ilsa Cox (Seat Leon Cupra); 8 Piers Grange (Ford Escort Mk2); 9 Mike Hurst (Seat Leon Cupra); 10 Les Kirk (Fisher Fury).

Class A: 1 Rose; 2 Harris; 3 Garry Wardle (Ginetta G50); no other finishers.

Class B: 1 Watson; no other finishers.

Class C: 1 Spencer; 2 Harvey; 3 Kirk; 4 Alistair Chilton (Mk Gti); no other finishers.

Class D: 1 Dobson; 2 Cox; 3 Hurst; 4 Ralph Underwood (Triumph TR7 V8); no other starters.

Class E: 1 Grange; 2 Steve Rowles (Honda Integra Type R); 3 Paul Rotheroe (Citroen Xsara); 4 Steven Parker (BMW Compact); 5 Kevin Cryer (Ginetta G20); no other finishers.

Class F: 1 Clive Dix (Ford Puma); 2 David Bird (Honda Civic); no other finishers.

Fastest lap: Rose 1m25.261s (89.72mph).

Qualifying - Race 2

The Saker duo of Rose and Harris topped the times for Sunday's race. "It's good to be at the front but we know we will lose out at the start due to our high gearing," said Rose. "I don't think I got a full clear lap but front row is still good," Harris added.

Spencer and Watson were left to share the second row. "I felt I had lots of pace and got an early quick lap," said Spencer. "I came in early to save my tyres after being badly cut up on my best lap," Watson replied.

Harvey had a good early lap too for fifth, “then I tootled round to save tyres,” he admitted. His race one adversary Dobson was alongside. “A bit of understeer but great,” he summed up.

Danny Bird had his balljoint repaired. “I was pumping the clutch too but it seemed Ok, and seventh is good,” he said. “I had a bit of understeer but gaining confidence with the circuit now,” added Cox as she completed the fourth row.

Wardle and Kirk were next up with Grange 11th despite having brake problems.”It started at the end of the first race,” he said. Hurst completed the row while Jamie Cryer felt much happier with his set up. “I changed my braking technique, softened it up and it felt much better,” he said.

Parker had patched up his BMW with copious amounts of tape, “it was a bit looser at the front but not too bad,” he said. But Rowles had problems too. “We lost some inlet bolts and lost power too,” he explained.

Rotheroe was happy with his set up and Kevin Cryer reckoned he was quicker than the previous day. Chilton, David Bird and Dix completed the line-up after Underwood pulled out. “The clutch slave cylinder went on the second lap,” he confirmed.

Race 2

As expected Spencer and Watson jinked between the front row Saker’s to lead into Clervaux at the start, with Harvey in third from Harris and Rose. Harris had a huge lock up at Tower but retained third place, while futher back Dobson, Wardle, Bird, Cox and Kirk had settled into the initial top ten.

Watson wasted no time in making his challenge for the lead and led into Clervaux on the second lap, The same corner claimed Parker as the first and only retirement, after he had been chasing Grange for 11th. Harvey had also lost out as both Harris and Rose surged by. “I managed to stay with them for a lap but then I was on my own,” he said.

Bird had fought his way passed Wardle for seventh, which left the Ginetta driver a clear target for Cox after she had shaken off Kirk. Rotheroe and Rowles also duelled over 12th which allowed Jamie Cryer to join in.



As the lead duo built on their advantage, Rose outbraked Harris into Tower on lap five and set about closing on Spencer.

Watson continued to build his lead and took win number two by well over four seconds. “It was an OK start and I just had to see what happened with Joe. But I could see he was a bit sideways when he was coming back at me,” said the double winner.

Both Rose and Harris had continued to close on Spencer. "It wasn't my best but I started to lose touch with Garry after a huge slide at Sunny and it got worse, so Paul got me into Tower and Steve at the Complex," said Spencer after coming home third.



"I could see Joe sliding and he hit traffic in all the wrong places," said Rose. "I had locked up with new front pads and it filled the cockpit with smoke. I didn't put up a fight though when Paul challenged me," Harris added.

As well as Harvey finding himself a solitary fifth, Dobson had "no one to play with," as he took sixth, followed by Bird who was a lap down. "I had no clutch from the start and once I got Garry at Sunny I was on my own too," said Bird.

Wardle had lost out to Cox on lap five, "she got me into the Hairpin and then pulled away, but I could see her braking earlier and went for it," he said after regaining eighth place on the last lap. "I tried to defend from him but had understeer and struggled with grip," she replied.

Kirk comfortably completed the top ten, while having changed the master cylinder Grange held 11th for the entire race. Rotheroe was next home, from a close duel between Rowles and Jamie Cryer. "I got him at the Hairpin and then he took me back at Clervaux. He just had too much power for me," said Cryer.

Hurst recovered from two excursions on the opening lap to take 15th from Kevin Cryer and Chilton. But the class F duel went right to the flag, with Dix just edging it after contact exiting the Hairpin. "He got the lead when I missed a gear and then thought I was in trouble after the contact," said Dix. "He got me back when I missed a gear too, then just couldn't get back, fantastic though," Bird Jnr concluded.

RESULTS

1 Watson 15 laps in 21m39.692s (88.29mph); 2 Rose +4.629s; 3 Harris; 4 Spencer; 5 Harvey; 6 Dobson; 7 Danny Bird (Pell Genesis); 8 Wardle; 9 Cox; 10 Kirk.

Class A: 1 Rose; 2 Harris; 3 Wardle; no other starters.

Class B: 1 Watson; no other starters.

Class C: 1 spencer; 2 harvey; 3 Bird; 4 Kirk; 5 Chilton; no other starters.

Class D: 1 Dobson; 2 Cox; 3 Hurst; no other starters.

Class E: 1 Grange; 2 Rotheroe; 3 Rowles; 4 Jamie Cryer (Ginetta G20); 5 Kevin Cryer; no other finishers.

Class F: 1 Dix; 2 Bird; no other starters.

Fastest lap: Rose 1m24.481s (90.55mph).

Published by Peter Scherer for BARC NW, April 26th, 2016; Phtographs by Peter Scherer.