

## **CNC HEADS SPORTS/SALOON CAR CHAMPIONSHIP**

### **– Donington Park Rounds 8 & 9 Report**

#### **ALLAWAY MAKES IT EIGHT OUT OF NINE AND TAKES CHAMPIONSHIP LEAD**

There was no beating Simon Allaway's Lotus Esprit V8 again, as he powered to another double victory at Donington Park.

After morning qualifying Allaway headed former Champion Jon Woolfitt's Spire GTR by 0.384 secs, despite a busy circuit with 42 cars on track. "Traffic was a big issue and I lost a spark plug too," said Allaway after setting pole time on his final lap. Woolfitt was making his seasonal debut and had his best lap early on. "It was just nice to be back," he said.

Ric Wood's glorious Holden Commodore headed the second row, from debutant David Lawrence's Seat Leon Cupra. But Wood's session was cut short with a front puncture. "It's my first season with this car, I started in the BRSCC Prosport and previously raced Honda's," Lawrence added. Paul Masters was back to with his Westfield for the first time since the Oulton Park opener. "I thought we had sorted the problem, but we had a big oil leak again and found a split hose, so hopefully that will fix it," he explained.

Daz Owen's immaculate Escort RSR qualified alongside Masters, on his seasonal debut. "My son James has been using the car, but it was a good session," he said. Next up was Lea Wood's similar Escort. It was the former BTCC racer and Pickup Champions CNC debut, "I struggled to get a clear lap, but spent some time following Daz, so we know where should be," he added. Garry Wardle's Audi A3 TCR was 0.557 secs off Wood's best. "Too many yellow flags and the busiest session I have had in a long time. The car was fine though," he said. Billy Blockley took over the family Ginetta G56 GTA for the weekend from father Richard and was ninth best. "I managed to get some clear laps in, it was a good session so happy with that," he reckoned.

Andrew Armiger's Vauxhall Tigra completed the top 10, the fourth member of his family to race the car and his CNC debut. "I did an Allcomers race at Donington a few weeks ago so knew the circuit. Lovely to drive and a real pleasure to be here," he said. Alek Modro was running solo with the absence of brother Connor. His Westfield Aero was 11<sup>th</sup> best just 0.007 secs off Armiger. "It was my first time at Donington and the gear lever snapped halfway through the session, so I was stuck in fourth gear," he confirmed.

Although Chris Roberts was next up, his BMW M4 became the first victim of the weekend. "Disaster, as we only put the new engine in the day before with friends and family all helping. I drove it to the circuit again and plan to drive it home, but it's nowhere near ready to race yet," he confirmed. Team mate Carl Bennett therefore moved up a place in his BMW M3 E46, "we had changed tyres to a harder compound and that was a disaster too. So we are changing back to the old ones and I had an overheating issue so lost power," he explained.

Jamie Cryer was fairly happy with his session in the Ginetta G20. "Tyre pressures too high and traffic, but otherwise Ok," he added. With Zack Booth's Renault Megane another casualty, Marshall Groves' Vauxhall Vectra was next up. "A clean session, lots of overtaking, so it was exciting. I'm on very old tyres, so I hope they hang on in the race," he said. Mark Primett also had troublefree session in his Banks Lotus Europa. "It was good and I did the whole session, so have nothing to do before the race for a change. Cautiously optimistic," he reckoned.

Paul Rotheroe arrived at Donington as Championship leader, but pulled off early in the session in his Citroen Xsara VTS. "I just lost drive, so I knew it was clutch or gearbox," he said before heading back to workshop and missing the opening race. 2023 Champion Ian Bamber was back too in his Ginetta G20. "No brakes and no power as the rev limiter kicked in too early," he explained.

With father Daz reclaiming his Escort RSR, James Owen was out in Dave Yorke's Vauxhall Tigra, but snapped a halfshaft on his way to 20<sup>th</sup> best. Baz Johnson's Pontiac Coupe, Jason Hennefer's Fiesta ST180 and Phil White's BMW 325CL followed. Hennefer found his brake fluid overheating and White struggled with a power loss after fitting new throttle bodies. Defending Champion Steven Parker had a traction issue with his Fiesta, "too much heat in the tyres," he reckoned. Debutant Andy Tate's Renault Clio just edged out Paul Goodlad's VW Scirocco on his delayed seasonal debut, "I had a spin into the gravel at McLeans though," Goodlad admitted.

The drama had started the day before for Thomas Frankland, when his Renault 5GT Turbo's wiring loom caught fire in testing. "We replaced it all and it ran OK," he confirmed. Simon Graveley's VW Golf GTI had an off at the chicane, "I braked too late and it was hit the Yaris or the tyre stack, so I chose the latter," he said, while his team thought he was too focussed on which curry to have on Saturday evening. Matthew Jones was back in his own Ford Focus, after racing Dad David's car at Oulton. "A New diff and a sequential box, but it felt a bit loose," he said.

Rounding off the top 30 was Stuart Connolly's Honda Civic, followed by Riccy Walkers' JCW Mini and Simon Hutt's BMW Z4. "Ok once the tyres were up to temperature, but so crowded," said Walker. Louie Dobson's Fiesta ST150 and David Jones' Focus followed, "I had a new diff, a bit unpredictable and I need to stiffen the rear," said Jones. "My car felt better as I had bigger ducts to keep the brakes cool," Dobson added.

Apart from traffic, Cavan Taylor had no issues with his Clio, while Rob Wakelin's Honda Civic was bedding in new brake pads. "Not easy in such a crowd," he reckoned. John Edwards-Parton's Fiesta, Dave Owen's Escort RSR, Jonjo Lee's Mini Cooper, Bob Claxton's VW Golf Gti, John Madoc-Jones' BMW E46 and Errol Taylor's Toyota Yaris completed the qualifiers. "It went onto four cylinders, I pitted and it was cured and then it did it again," said Madoc-Jones. "I had an ABS issue but drove through it," Lee added.

## **RACE ONE**

With Roberts, Booth and Rotheroe absent it was still a huge 39 car grid lining up for the first race of the weekend. But Bamber, James Owen and Madoc-Jones all headed pitwards after the green flag lap, with Bamber remaining there for the duration.

From lights out Allaway headed Woolfitt down the Craner Curves, but roles were soon reversed as Ric Wood slotted into third, from Masters, Daz Owen and Lawrence. The lead duo had a number of exchanges over the second lap, but it was Allaway that led over the line, after powering ahead on the Exhibition Straight. Owen took Masters for fourth as they arrived at the chicane for the third time, it

was now a five-car train for fourth, with Owen, Masters, Lea Wood, Lawrence and Armiger, after the Seat driver had lost a place to Wood. "I had started to get temperature issues when we ran to close, so had to back out a bit," Lawrence explained.

Lea Wood managed to get clear in fifth after ousting Masters, but Ric Wood was now in second as Woolfitt's pace had slowed. Lawrence lost another place to Armiger, while Blockley and Bennett's dual for ninth had Wardle closing in too. Woolfitt's race came to premature end on lap five when his gearbox failed, but Ric Wood had started to close. "I had to work hard with Jon, he went and then Ric arrived," said Allaway. Owen was now third, but had Lea Wood closing on him, while behind him Armiger and Masters were still fairly close, with Lawrence managing to retain seventh, despite losing power.

As Wardle's progress continued he had Modro close on him and on lap seven they swapped for eighth. But Allaway's lead had started to grow and on lap eight it grew even further as Ric Wood's Holden came into the pits with another front puncture.

Although Owen still had second, Lea Wood was right on his tail. Armiger had managed to gap Masters again for fifth, but Modro, Wardle, Bennett and Primett all moved up when Blockley spun out of eighth place. "I was too quick at the bottom of the Craner Curves and in the wrong gear and lost it," he admitted.

Allaway's lead grew still further and he finally took win number eight by over 21 seconds from Owen. "I kept seeing Lea coming at me, but I kept my foot in. I think he got level with me but not ahead, but I have got bigger brakes," said Owen. From challenging for second in a terrific dual Wood lost third place to Armiger on the final lap. "I had a fuel surge problem down the Craner Curves, but I did get Daz once," Wood replied, before his issue was diagnosed as blocked fuel lines from his tank internals.

"That was a really good race, I was supposed to bed in the brakes, but had to race early to try and hang onto those Escorts," Armiger admitted after completing the overall podium. Masters held onto fifth, "the oil light came on at the end again, but I couldn't hold on to those Escort's," he admitted. Modro completed the top six, after demoting Lawrence a lap from home. "I was on my own quite a bit though," said Modro. Despite his power issues Lawrence kept Wardle at bay for seventh. "Usual start and then battled on and got places," said Wardle.

For a while Primett, Bennett and Cryer had a great scrap to complete the top 10. Cryer had lost out to Primett at the chicane on the opening lap, while Primett took Bennett on lap eight. Cryer got Bennett at the chicane a few laps later, and then had his sights set on recovering ninth from Primett. "Great battling with them, but after Jamie came by and I couldn't see him, I started to think about the Championship. So I backed off, short shifted and made sure I finished, said Bennett who settled for 11<sup>th</sup>. "I lost the rear when Mark got me on lap one. I had swapped places with Carl, Marshall, Billy and Mark after some caution," Cryer added, after scything ahead of Primett into the chicane on 14. "I was on oil and just couldn't stop the car, so Jamie got me, then I just focussed on getting him back," Primett replied, after retaking ninth on the final lap in the run to the flag by just 0.005 secs.

Groves was 12<sup>th</sup> on the road but was disqualified for a yellow flag incident. "It was at McLeans I saw the incident was cleared, but didn't see the flag still out," he admitted. So Blockley was classified 12<sup>th</sup>, from Class E winner Parker. "I had Jason following me for almost the whole race, I couldn't get rid of him. I had new front tyres, old rears and struggled," said Parker. "I followed Paul Goodlad in the early laps, then he slowed and I followed Steven," Hennefer admitted.

Tate had Johnson shadowing him for most of the race two, they held station and Tate retained 16<sup>th</sup>, with Johnson picking up a track limit penalty, but was still well clear of Walker. Matthew and David Jones were next home, with Dave Owen completing the top 20. "I wasn't in gear at the start so played catch up and still won the class," said Matthew. Graveley and Connolly were next home, the latter losing four places on the last lap, before being disqualified for a yellow flag infringement. White struggled with no power throughout in his BMW, while Cavan Taylor's Clio and Class C winner Edwards-Parton both finished well clear of Class F winner Wakelin.

Dobson, Lee and Claxton completed the finishers, but out for the rest of the weekend were Errol Taylor and Hutt with blown engines. Goodlad retired with a turbo pipe off, Madoc-Jones with continuing engine issues, James Owen broke a driveshaft, Frankland split the cambelt in the gravel and Underwood had mechanical woes.

## **RACE TWO**

With Rotheroe back with a new clutch fitted and Bamber returned from a 400 mile round trip to Norfolk to have his engine checked, there were still 32 starters for Sunday's second race.

As the grid formed up Ric Wood headed straight into the pits with a broken driveshaft, so Allaway was on his own at the front, and made the most of it. As the Lotus blasted off from pole, Masters was in second, from Lea Wood, but Lawrence was into third at the chicane, as Masters slipped to fourth. Lawrence began to close on Wood too, but Allaway was well clear again, while in fifth Daz Owen couldn't match his pace from race one, as Armiger closed in, having taken Groves, Cryer and Blockley over the first three laps.

By the end of lap three Lawrence was poised to challenge for second and Owen for fourth, while Armiger now a clear sixth tried to bridge the gap. Behind the top six Cryer and Blockley were having a great dual, while Modro edged closer to joining in too. Lawrence's charge went into decline again from lap six, when overheating once again halted his progress, as Masters, Wood and Armiger all went by.

A three-way fight for third almost ended in disaster approaching the chicane for the seventh time. Owen had just about got Masters on the inside exiting Coppice, but Armiger had a run on them both. "I had a shocking start, spun the wheels and finally got going. I was going down the inside into the chicane and didn't see Andrew, so we just escaped without contact, said Owen. "I got away really well and was second for the first two corners, I managed to avoid Daz and Andrew by almost doing a three-point turn," Masters added. "I got alongside Daz, braked as we both turned in then locked up. I missed gears, got going again and had to catch up," Armiger replied, as Owen was now clear in third, from Masters and Armiger.

Cryer and Blockley continued to dispute seventh, until Modro got them both, before the latter took the ever slowing Lawrence too a lap later. Armiger finally got Masters again into the chicane on lap eight, but Owen was long gone in third. It was another 20 secs+ win for Allaway, with Wood an equally dominant second. "A great start, but I didn't realise Lea was going so quickly. I was managing my tyres, saw my board and then in my mirrors so sped up," said Allaway. "We had cleared the fuel blockage and had a great race and a great weekend," Wood added.

Owen remained third on the road, but was penalised for his incident with Armiger, which saw the two swap places. Masters remained in fifth, from Modro, Lawrence and Cryer, while Blockley and Wardle rounded off the top 10. "I had a good race on harder tyres, which took a while to get up temperature. A good weekend for us though," said Modro. "It was a great race with Billy, I got away from some of

the chasers better this time,” Cryer added. “Jamie had the edge over me on the straights,” Blockley replied.

Primett and Bamber spent the early part of the race in close proximity contesting 10<sup>th</sup> place. Neither however made the finish, “the exhaust manifold blew it’s self to bits,” said Primett. “I was hanging on four wheel drifting, missing my braking points and great to be back out, until a bonnett clip broke and I had to come in,” Bamber replied. Wardle therefore completed the top 10. “I tried to get a better start, moved slightly and got penalised, so still played catch up,” he said. Bennett was on his own in 11th and the final unlapped runner. “It was overheating again so I backed off,” he explained.

Rotheroe returned to take another class win, “mine was overheating to and I think there was coolant on the rear tyres, so drove for the finish,” he said after just losing out in a great scrap with James Owen. Johnson should have followed Groves to the flag, but retired on the final lap, to promote Parker, Hennefer, Walker, Graveley and Matthew Jones to round off the top 20, Walker losing two late places when his car suddenly slowed a lap from home. “What a brilliant race with Steven and Riccy,” said Goodlad. “I lost fifth gear on the Craners after three laps, so I just carried on,” Groves added.

Taylor was next home from Class C & F winners Edwards-Parton and Wakelin, leaving Dobson, Connolly, Dave Owen and Claxton to complete the finishers. Madoc-Jones had retired early again with his engine problems, while Lee was a late casualty, after a rear caliper locked and spat him off at the chicane.

RESULTS @ <https://www.tsl-timing.com/event/253263>

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