


Matt Nicoll-Jones Takes Double-Win at Brands




Matt Nicoll-Jones takes the Championship lead with a maximum points Brands Hatch weekend. Two poles, two fastest laps and two wins leaves him 31 points ahead at the top of the table from Joe Osborne who struggled on the GP circuit.

A red flag halted the first of two races, but a trouble-free race two gave Frank Wrathall his first Ginetta podium.


Qualifying



A Saturday afternoon qualifying session produced a mixed grid for both races. Osborne started off his weekend on the back foot qualifying fifth and third for the two races respectively. Usual frontrunner Dan Laddiman's lack of straight line speed put him almost two seconds off the pace down in 14th and 15th.



Two newcomers to the 2007 front row were Spencer McCarthy and Frank Wrathall. McCarthy was in the thick of the action at the same circuit back in April and on his 8th lap, secured a second place slot for race one. Frank Wrathall qualified 4th and 2nd; his experience in racing cars rather than karts developing all the time.




Contact up at Druids on the opening qualifying lap between Paul Moden and new entrant Edwina Graham eliminated them from the session and so without a time recorded will start from the back of the grid with Chris Petch who also had a first lap trip into the gravel.

A last-lap dash by Jonny Hyde put him in 8th and the second Speedworks Motorsport car in the top ten. Christian Dick had to settle for tenth; retiring after 8 laps with a cracked thermostat housing sending his car's temperature "through the roof". David Jackson's Speedworks car just behind in 11th in his personal best yet, but also having to retire early because of electrical problems.



A textbook start by Nicoll-Jones maintained his lead into Paddock Hill bend, but a bad one for Wrathall dropped him well down the order to 10th. Rob Austin initially got up to second place off the line, but McCarthy and Osborne finished the first lap ahead of him in 2nd and 3rd.



Chris Wright's stranded car on the way down to Hawthornes then brought out the safety car. A first-lap tangle with FNH Racing's Neil Houston resulted in the rear of Wright's car making contact with the wall.

Julian Barratt took advantage of the race restart after two laps behind the safety car. The Reflex Racing driver made up two places at Paddock Hill moving back ahead of Laddiman. Meanwhile, Nicoll-Jones, McCarthy and Osborne pull out a gap from the rest of the pack, but Austin and Ben Elliott close on the leading three.

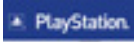
On lap 6, Osborne loses out to both Austin and Elliott then out of Druids for the seventh time, Elliott gets sideways in his efforts to steal Austin's place and the three of them are nose-to-tail into Graham Hill bend. But Austin couldn't hold Elliott off much longer - lap 8 Elliott secures his podium place from Austin who now leads a close battle for fourth, fifth, and sixth.

With six minutes of the race to run, the red flag was deployed and the race ended prematurely. Edwina Graham had been lapped by the top 5, but Julian Barratt collided with the slow backmarker as he came to lap her approaching Westfield. Barratt's car suffered extensive damage and came to rest on his roof but escaped unhurt.

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Mark Wania too became stranded on the track having been squeezed into the barrier during the collision. Wania had been jostling with Barratt in a good, clean attack for position, but suffered right rear body and suspension damage.



"I got a fairly good start" explained Nicoll-Jones "Spencer gave me some stick on the first few laps. I figured if I pushed hard, I might be able to break his tow and get him fighting with the guys behind. As it happens, he stuck with me for a few more laps and slowly started to drop off the pace and built myself a gap, steadied the pace from then on to save the tyres and everything else for the next race."



Charges from the back of the field by Chris Petch and Paul Moden took them from 31st and 32nd respectively to a classified 18th and 16th - either side of an improving Gary Simms.



A personal-best 5th place for Jonny Hyde continued his strong run from qualifying, getting ahead of and fending off Joe Osborne.

Race 2



Frank Wrathall scored his first Ginetta podium on the third step behind guest racer Rob Austin in another race dominated by Academy Motorsport owner Matt Nicoll-Jones.

Julian Barratt, Chris Wright and Edwina Graham did not make it to the grid because of the substantial damage sustained to their cars in the previous race.

Wrathall just nipped ahead off the line into Paddock Hill but Nicoll-Jones had the line up to Druids and reclaimed the lead - where he would remain unchallenged.



"I wanted to break the tow first and foremost at the beginning of the race" explained Nicoll-Jones. "As soon as I broke the tow, put in about four or five quick laps and set my own pace. The car has been absolutely excellent [this weekend]. I couldn't fault it."



Action behind him was intense. Osborne ran in 2nd on lap three from Wrathall who was now under pressure from Elliott into Graham Hill bend but the young ex-karter held his line until in the forest from which Elliott emerged in 5th - Rob Austin having also slipped by during Elliott's move.



By lap 5, Nicoll-Jones had already pulled out a 6 second gap but now Ben Elliott was to be the one bearing down on him soon to be followed by Rob Austin. Osborne lost out once again at Druids - the top 10 on lap 6 being 62, 27, 15, 42, 66, 46, 88, 89, 22, 91.

Action at the front on lap 7 - Austin pressurises Elliott by trying the outside line at Paddock but cannot make it stick. One second later at the same corner, Osborne runs wide and Wrathall retakes 4th place. Austin and Elliott attacking and defending until on lap 9. Austin tries the outside line into Paddock, but Elliott defends. Austin moves across to try the inside, but contact with Elliott's right rear corner sends him into a spin. Austin inherits 2nd place and Wrathall 3rd. Elliott recovers to an unlucky-for-some 13th place and eventually 9th.

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As for the remainder of the slimmed down field, the race had ended at the first corner for Gavin Mitchell who received a tap that tipped him into the gravel, Michael Ralph kissed a wall out in the forest, and race one podium-finisher Spencer McCarthy retired to the pits with suspension damage after contact with Jonny Hyde at Westfield. Hyde later retired himself with engine problems.



Mark Wania was back out and on full form - battling with Speedworks Motorsport owner Christian Dick for much of the race and then holding off Laddiman on the last lap.



Neil Merry took his first Ginetta top ten finish in another strong race for the Speedworks racer. "I was so excited when I saw my position on the pit-board that I almost put it in the gravel," said the delighted Merry. "It was hard work from where I was on the grid, but it was a really enjoyable race."



Andy Smith looked promising in practice on Saturday morning, emerging third fastest, but had failed to deliver in qualifying - much to his own bemusement as "I haven't done anything to the car in between!" he said.



Coming up the order from 12th to 4th suggested he was happy with the balance once again. Taking Osborne into Clearways on the final lap, Smith and Wrathall crossed the line side-by-side - just a gap of 0.067s between them.

Paul Moden was once again on a damage-limitation exercise from the back of the 31-car grid to finish 13th, and furthering a charge from 24th to 12th on the opening lap by Edd Straw was hampered by braking problems. "In the end I couldn't touch the pedal without the brakes locking" said Straw. "I decided that enough was enough when I almost took out Matt Nicoll-Jones, who was leading, after the fronts locked solid on the run to Paddock."



Wrathall's place on the third step of the podium may open up a new-found confidence in the young racer.

"It's been a steep learning curve" explains Wrathall. "My whole team are new to car racing. this just shows how much we've learned, how far we've come on and that we really know what we're doing and we can be competitive in it."



"Luckily we got to come here earlier this year with the A1GP which gave me an opportunity to learn the track because all the tracks are new [to me] this year so I had a bit more advantage than the rest of the rounds and I think it's shown."

The Texaco Havoline Ginetta Championship will continue on 11th / 12th August at Silverstone racing on the International circuit.

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