

Armed Forces Race Challenge 2018 Championship

750
MOTOR CLUB



Silverstone 27 October 2018

68TH BIRKETT RELAY

The Holly Birkett handicap relay was devised back in the fifties and runs virtually to the same formula today. For this the 68th running, team RAFMSA will be the returning champions. They will also be defending the Inter Forces Challenge which they also won last year.



WO Ed McKean back for another trophy?

For team RAFMSA Flt Sgt Chris Slator had the car repaired from Donington, but on the annual training camp at Silverstone, just a few days before the Birkett, the ECU packed up. This meant Chris was not only out of the Birkett team but also the entry in the Race of Remembrance had to be pulled, which was particularly difficult with the significant of the one hundredth anniversary of the Great War armistice.

Taking Chris's Place would be last year's team manager Sqn Ldr Darren Berris. Darren would be joined by Sqn Ldr Darren Howe, Sqn Ldr Simon Frowen, WO Ed McKean, Chief Tech Scott Lawson and SAC Dan Smith. Chris took the role of Team Manager to both the AFRC team as well as the RAFMSA Team, Gp Capt Brian Watson was drafted in as deputy manager for the RAFMSA team. Brian is a previous Birkett winner as a driver and manager.

Racing alongside the RAF would be teams from the Army, Navy as well as a team made up of competitors who have previously raced in the AFRC. Team RAFMSA, like most of the teams; have had to make a few changes from last year's teams

due to last minute mechanical issues. Whether it was the hot conditions this year or just bad luck but a number of competitors have suffered engine failures, none more than the Army Sports Car Racing (ASCR) drivers. Donington proved particularly crucial.

Both Hondas of Sgt Will Ashmore and LCpl Mark White suffered catastrophic engine failure, while the drive shafts problems for LCpl Ben Grundy continued. This meant last year's ASCR team were decimated, luckily they were able to call up extra resources. SSgt Chris Wood has spent all year building an Ashley GT, while WO1 Matty Taylor had parked the BMW in favour of a Peugeot 206 GTI.



The Ashley GT

Team Army were getting another Peugeot 206 GTI ready as a driver development car for next year, so this was hastily prepared and finished just in time for Mark White to run.



The Army's driver development car

WO2 Simon Skerton would race his Mini, while a generous offer from LCpl Tom Sykes for Will Ashmore to run his BMW E46 meant that with Maj Farard Darver's BMW E46 M3 Army Sports Car Racing (ASCR) had a team, albeit un-tested.

The Royal Navy Royal Marines team (RNRMCRT) would be represented by the usual contingent of Lt Cdr Keith Atwood, Lt Mike Wells, POAET James Cantwell, Simon Vernon and a returning Cdr Richard Scott who would share the drive in the Navy's Peugeot 206 GTI with James.



The Navy's Peugeot 206 GTI

The last team of drivers from the AFRC Championship was made up from Veterans and guests who had race during the year. Joining ex marine Mark Inman, would be Trevor Hancock in yet another Peugeot 206 GTI, Stan Palmer in a Civic Type R and Martin Hathaway in a Mini Cooper S.



Mark Inman, leading team AFRC

Problems started early for some. On the Friday test day Farard had the clutch fail and Saturday Morning saw the car on blocks with half its drive train removed while a replacement clutch was being sourced.

Scrutineering like your annual MOT is necessary to ensure the safety of not only competitors but also the officials and marshals. Like your MOT each time different things are noticed. This is what happened to Si Skerton's Mini. A problem was encountered with the battery installation, apparently a liquid lead battery must be covered and the regs require that it be covered by plastic. Luckily a plastic dinner tray lent against the garage wall was the perfect solution, secured with some self tapping screws, and sealed with tape, all was good to go.

Practice is all about see what track conditions are like, especially with the conditions, rain overnight and a cold crisp morning, things were going to be difficult. Teams are identified by a number with each driver allocated a letter. At 9 o'clock sharp the A drivers took to the track. A number of drivers were discovering how difficult conditions were. On his out lap Si Skerton spun the mini at Becketts and a couple of laps later while avoiding a slower car ended up in the gravel, stopping just shy of the crash barrier. Apart from a few squeaky moments, no other problems were encountered.



Which way now?

The grid would line up with ASCR 43rd, RAFMSA 50th, AFRC 53rd and RNRMCRT 63rd but it's not where you start that matter but where you finish!

In the garages teams were planning strategies and getting cars ready. Although the start would be dry, rain was forecast, so cars were prepared to cover all situations. The ASCR had more work to do. With Si's Mini back in the garage his trip to the gravel had done more damage than expected; that with the ongoing repairs to Farad's BMW the ASCR pit crew would keep busy.

RNRMCRT decided to put out Keith Atwood first, while RAFMSA chose Ed Mckean and the ASCR Will Ashmore. For the first few laps all was well, but on lap 7 the gremlins were at it. Will's BMW suffered total electrical failure but he managed to coast it into the pits, to release Mark White and loose little time.

After the first hour of racing the standings were, RAFMSA 38th, AFRC 43rd, RNRMCRT 46th and ASCR 63rd.



Trevor enjoying the conditions

For the next couple of hours it would be nip and tuck as to who would be the best AFRC team. First it was the RAFMSA and then it would be the AFRC. Si Skerton would be able to do a stint for the ASCR. Unfortunately for the RNRMCRT the conditions resulted in Mike Wells having an incident which forced his retirement, leaving Simon Vernon to bring it home. For the RAFMSA the event ran like clockwork, although Simon Frowen reported that the windows of his Fiesta were constantly steamed up and down both straights he was doing his best to clear them.

The team of mechanics worked feverishly all day on Farads BMW and repairs were completed, just after the time limit which would have allowed him to take the flag. He thanked them for their hard efforts and remarked, "Well....that's racing!"

After 6 hours of racing on scratch AFRC 31st, RAFMSA 34th, RNRMCRT 53rd and ASCR 58th. But that is not the full results, with the handicaps taken into account the final results:

<i>Team</i>	<i>Laps</i>	<i>Position</i>
AFRC	116	7
RAFMSA	116	15
RNRMCRT	110	31
ASCR	108	56

Congratulations to our mixed AFRC team who finished the race 7th overall on handicap, a great achievement given that it was the first time at the Birkett for some.

In the Inter-Services race the RAFMSA were the team to watch, a trouble free and consistent run throughout the whole race saw them defend their 2017 Inter-Services win on the way to finishing 15th overall.



Darren Howe on track

With the safety car deployed teams took the opportunity to make their next change over's. The AFRC now had their fastest driver on track, Mark Inman, the RAFMSA had Darren Howe, and the ASCR had short stinted Mark White to release Chris Wood. With his stint completed Keith handed the RNRMCRT baton over to Richard Scott in the Peugeot 206 GTI. On his sixth lap, just as Richard was getting into the groove, the clutch expired on the 206. That meant that the team would be two drivers down. Mike Wells now took to the track for the RNRMCRT. At the 2 hour point the AFRC were ahead of the RAFMSA, followed by the RNRMCRT and ASCR.

It was around this time that the weather started to deteriorate, with the light dropping and light rain falling. It wouldn't be long before the light rain turned to torrential rain and those were possible retreated to cover. Teams were now sending out drivers who excel in wet conditions. Darren Berris in the Westfield would be able to set some quick times that would enable the RAFMSA to make up places on the AFRC, although they also had a quick driver in the wet, Trevor Hancock.

P.S.

Although not actually part of the AFRC, Podium Preparation provided a great deal of support to the AFRC championship. Congratulations go to their team for a Class win in this year's Birkett.



Andy Stacey in the class winning supercar.

Full results can be found at:

[750mcBirkett Relay Results](#)

You can relive the entire 2018 Birkett relay race at:

[Birkett 2018 by alpha live](#)