

Royal Air Force Croft is located 4.6 miles south of Darlington, County Durham. The site also known locally as Croft Aerodrome or Neasham is now more famously known as Croft Circuit. RAF Croft was first home to No. 78 Squadron RAF which arrived on 20 October 1941 and it would be home to the Armed Forces Race Challenge (AFRC) for a weekend in May 2016.

Behind the scenes Sgt Chris Slator (RAF) had been busy. Being local to the circuit Chris had been able to get the support from the area and had been able to arrange a variety of activities from classroom sessions with a British Touring Car Championship driver, to locally supplied catering. Max Coates has for 2016 joined Ciceley Motorsports to race in Renault UK Clio Cup and was also on hand during Friday's track test day. SAC Dan Smith (RAF) took full advantage of Max's training and by the end of the day had shaved at least 18 seconds off his previous best time.



Dan Smith at The Complex

Saturday morning saw a grey and very damp day; certainly conditions would play a great part in the day's activities. Again some of the cars would be driven by two drivers, so some drivers would have to practice out of session. First out would be



Royal Navy Endurance Peugeot 206 GTI?

Lt Cdr Richard Scott in the 'Royal Navy Endurance' Peugeot 206 GTI.

Unfortunately for Richard he would be quickly back to the pits with a modified rear end after an off track incident. Richard would not be the only driver caught out by the conditions and a number of cars returned sporting a yellow makeover after a trip into the 'Rape Seed Field'.

After a trip to the doctors and permission from the Clerk of the Course, 'Royal Navy Endurance' driven by Richard would be back out before the end of the day. Accompanying Richard in the 206 GTI was Marine (Mne) Adam Dewis. Adam is the first member of the Royal Marines to race with the AFRC, so perhaps the car should be given its correct title the 'RNRMMSA Endurance Peugeot 206 GTI'.

Returning to racing after a long 'Holiday in the Sun' Sqn Ldr Darren Berris would be the man to catch. The V8 Westfield is outside the normal classes of the AFRC and would be running just for fun. At around 6 seconds a lap quicker Darren would be the hare to their hounds.

Team Army were without their captain, Mark Saunders, so SSgt Chris Wood (Army) would be their most experienced driver, although it would be LCpl Mark White, in the



Team Army's fastest, Mark White

Lotus Elise who would be their quickest driver. After his little accident at Donington Mark had been busy in the workshop and the black tape nose had been replaced with a nice shiny one.

Cpl Ben Grundy (Army) was not having the best of times and the Fiesta was not firing on all cylinders, so much so that he couldn't complete practice. Will Ashmore (Army) was another who was having problems who could not do the full

practice session.

Now that the Sultan Locost had been re-engined PO Sean Graham (RN) could hand the Locost 7 over to new boy AET Lewis Pemble (RN), but after a couple of laps I bet Sean wished he hadn't. The Sultan Locost was making some weird noises that it shouldn't and being prudent Sean return to the pits for some remedial work. Working hard to keep 'Team Navy' on track CPO Stuart Balls soon diagnosed some loose rocker bolts which after being correctly tightened returned the Ford crossflow to a sweet running engine. Unfortunately for Sean he hadn't completed the required number of laps and would have to do so at lunch time behind the safety car.



Sultan Locost back to full health

With its long straights and tight corners, Croft was being hard on brakes as well as cooling systems. Sgt Andy Holborn (RAF) and Cpl Neil Icton (RAF) found that they could overcome the overheating on the MX-5 by switching the air-con fan on permanently.

Having a much better time was WO1 Matty Taylor (Army) in his M3 powered BMW Compact. After frying the ECU at Donington Matty managed his first full practice session and recorded a time that would see him head row 3 of the grid, with Chris Wood.



M3 powered BMW Compact

In true English fashion the weather would take a turn for the worst just as lunch was declared, so having had dry practice thoughts turned to a wet race, but not before a well earned lunch of pulled pork baguettes.

With a mid-afternoon race there was still time for the weather to change yet again, but for some the day was already done. Ben Gundry could not find the fault on his Fiesta and Simon Wing (RAFMSA) was having oil pressure problems; neither would be able to start the race.

By 2 o'clock the sun was out and the track quickly becoming dry. Some frantic action in the pits would see everyone start the race on dry weather tyres. As the lights went out, Darren was away followed by Mark in the Lotus. Sean in the Sultan Locost made a good start making up a few places quickly, but going into Clervaux spun, luckily no one hit him but how he was last. From the start Cpl Dan Tedstone (Army) found himself with an understeering Honda Civic but managed to keep in the mix with Flt Lt Simon Frowen (RAF), Chris Slator and Sgt Dom Benfell (RAF) in the Lotus Espirit.



Darren and the ever impressive Westfield V8

The AFRC is a 40 minute race with a 60 seconds 'Wheels Stopped' pit stop. Until all competitors complete their stop the race is a bit difficult to follow. One thing for sure Darren was still out in front, but was having to short shift as fuel was a bit of an issue. Simon's Fiesta was having overheating problems and during his pit stop the oil pressure was dropping, so he decided to retire.



Racing hard Chris Wood and Will Ashmore

Also forced to retire would be both Dom Benfell and Will Ashmore with brake problems, as well as Chris Wood when a water hose came off, his first non finish in 4 years of racing.



Ed McKean's BMW


Drive of the day had to be WO Ed McKean (RAF) Who was 1st on Performance Index (PI), 1st in Class B and only beaten to the line by the much faster Westfield.

Full results can be found on the AFRC website below.

<http://www.armedforcesracechallenge.net/>



Croft award winners

In support of the Armed Forces race Challenge,  Managing Director, Mark Scott presented F1 Memorabilia trophies to all the winners.

Next round of the Armed Forces race Challenge will be at Snetterton 300
26 June 2016,

See you there.

Pictures by Nick and Mark Rogers

