

Now in its third year, The Armed Forces Race Challenge (AFRC) started with the largest number of competitors registered so far. Over winter in garages and car clubs across the country many a midnight candle had been burning and Sunday 20 March dawned with 26 competitors meeting at Donington Park, Derbyshire. Yet again service requirements would mean that some people would have to pull their entry at the last minute, whilst others were still on deployments elsewhere in the world.



*Simon and Scott through Coppice*

Again this year, the AFRC would be run on the Performance Index (PI) system. Races will be 40 minute long, with a 60 seconds wheels stopped pit stop.

Drivers can compete individually, share cars or run as 2 car teams. Each session either side of the pit stop would be calculated and a PI awarded for each and at the end the best PI would be declared the winner.

While there were a large number of newcomers it was nice to see some of the old competitors returning. Flt Lt Simon Frowen (RAF), now in a Ford Fiesta and SAC Dan Smith (RAF) also in a Fiesta would be joined by a returning L/Cpl Daz Smeed (Army), C/T Scott Lawson (RAF) and Sgt Chris Slator (RAF). Also trying out a new car for the CTCRC series was Paul Waterhouse (RAFMSA).



*Chris and Paul, Peugeot racing*

Scrutineering is always a nervous time with new competitors or a new car but everything seemed to go alright with little negative comments. Unfortunately for Robert Taylor (BAMA) when it came time to start the BMW, it wouldn't and despite the attention of some specialist mechanics the fault could not be rectified and he was forced to retire without turning a wheel.

Practice would be a formality for some, while an eye opener for others. Capt Mark Saunders (Army) in the Sierra only managed a couple of laps before the lack of power returned him to the pits, but being well prepared he had a spare Puma waiting in the pits so Team 51 could continue.

Lt Cdr Richard Scott in the newly completed 'Royal Navy Endurance' Peugeot 206 GTI used the session to get used to the car, while CPO Sean Graham (RN) re-equated himself with the Sultan Locost which he hadn't driven for a couple of years. New boys Cpl Ben Grundy, Cpl Dan Tedstone, L/Cpl Mark White and Pte Lewis Corton all from the Army had their first ever race practice, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all, especially Mark White in the Lotus Elise who was a creditable sixth.



*Team Royal Navy through Coppice*

The AFRC allows for 2 drivers to complete in the same car and so that they each get a 20 minute practice some drives have to go into different practice sessions. Team 29 (RAF) of Sgt Andy Holborn and Cpl Neil Icton where such a team with Andy running with the AFRC and Neil with the Clios.



*Team 29 - Andy Holborn\Neil Icton*

Guest drivers in Mini Coppers from Podium Preparation would fill the first row of the grid, with the BMWs of Jason Williams (BAMA) and WO Ed McKean (RAF) filling the second.

After an on track session it is always good practice to have a look over the car, especially when it's the cars first run in anger after a long winter in

preparation. Simon Frowen had complained the car's performance was a bit lack lustre and investigation reviled the cambelt had slackened, which when reset seemed to improve the engine response. Mark Saunders had decided that the Sierra needed extra work which couldn't be completed in time, so Jeff Windsor's Puma would do the whole 40 minute race. Sean had to reset the gear linkage, a known Sultan Locost quirk. Others found minor defects that would mean repair but nothing that couldn't wait till after the race.

At the start of the race Ed McKean got a flyer taking the lead by the time the cars were at Hollywood and heading down the Craner Curves, with the reminder streaming behind him.

By Lap 3 the pole man Andrew Stacey had to retire the mini with brake problems and soon after Simon Frowen brought the Fiesta back into the pits as the engine was still not performing and he didn't want to cause any further damage. Around this time Mark White spun the Lotus which was unfortunately hit by another car causing the safety car to be deployed.

With the race restarted, again Ed McKean was closely followed by Daz Smee and Jason Williams. On lap eight Seb Unwin took a wide exit at Coppice slid into the gravel trap and was beached. Further down the field Scott was maintaining a narrow gap to Richard but on lap 9 a mistake at Redgate allowed him to get past.



*Team Army at Coppice*

With drivers taking the compulsory 60 seconds wheels stopped pit stop the field became a little mixed until every had completed their stop. One normality had

been restored Ed was still in the lead, just.

In the second pack Sqn Ldr Darren Howe (RAF) in the Golf was just keeping ahead of SSgt Chris Wood (Army) in another BMW with Lt Michael Wells (RN) in an MR2 in close attendance should anything happen. Mike was having a busy weekend as he was also competing in rounds 1 and 2 of the Toyota MR2 Championship as well as the AFRC. Returning to the race now sporting a black tape front end, Mark White managed to get in a few laps before the end.



*Darren in the Golf holds off Chris in the BMW*



*Richard and Scott at the Old Hairpin*


As the race concluded it appeared that Ed had been a little too keen leaving the pits and incurred a 35 seconds penalty thereby handing the win to Jason, with Darren Howe 2nd and Ed now 3rd. But the AFRC is not about first past the post it's about consistency and after the calculations had been done the results were, heading the table was Chris Slator, Richard Scott and Niel Icton.

Full results can be found on the AFRC website below.

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



*Back for tea and medals*

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 Croft 21 May 2016,

See you there.

*Pictures by Nick and Mark Rogers*