

For the final round of the Armed Forces Race Challenge competitors descended on Rockingham Motor Speedway, Northamptonshire. After the summer break the weather also was on the turn, not for the first time this year daybreak would dawn drab and wet. Unlike the previous event where the sun eventually came out, this day would remain decidedly damp.

Observably for Team Navy the fleet was in, as this event saw the largest number of Navy drivers ever assembled for an AFRC race. Joining the usual team were a couple of new novice drivers, Cpl Mark Inman (RM) and CPO ME Gareth (Sterling) Moss (RN).

With a late morning practice, the day could start at a more leisurely pace than usual. There was even time for Max Coates the AFRC driver coach to give some advice on the best way to tackle Rockingham. Max is a BTCC/Clio Cup driver, who is currently leading the Clio Cup Graduates Cup. His advice would be particularly relevant as practice would require lots of concentration. From the start of the day, the rain was intermittent. This meant that the track had no time to dry, so there was little to no grip, especially as many of the drivers were using the last tread out of their tyres, before storing the cars for winter.



Seb Unwin (RN) Showing Mark Inman around Rockingham

With the cars not being pushed in practice because of the conditions, none of the usual mad repair sessions were needed before the race, although CPO Sean Graham (RN) was having the usual troubles with the Sultan Locost. Having tracked down its previous problems to a worn out carburettor, the replacement was still not operating correctly.



Sean Graham having the usual battle with the Sultan Locost

Team Army had a returning Cpl Ben Gundry after a disastrous event at Croft. The problems on his Fiesta were traced to a number of bent valves, possibly due to over revving. Anyway, after a trip to a nice man and some TLC the Fiesta was firing healthily on all four cylinders.



Ben's back racing after Croft

Another member who had woes at Croft, Sgt Will Ashmore had also

been hard at work overhauling the brake system on his Honda, as well as getting to the bottom of his misfire problem, a worn fuel pump. Team Army were running a little light on this event as Capt Mark Saunders had, during preparation for the event diagnosed a turbo issue which was unrepairable in time. Also SSgt Chris Wood was having issues with the BMW and Cpl Dan Tedstone had opted to do the Birkett in October, but all would be there to 'Fly the flag'.



Team Army regulars, Will Ashmore and Mark White

old sprint tyres as being very soft with tread should provide enough grip for practice, although they wouldn't last for a 40-minute race. With conditions this bad, no one would be making lap records today, so the best thing to do would be, to stay on the black stuff and come home in one piece.

Sqn Ldr Darren Berris (RAF) in the Westfield had decided to use his

Simon Wing (RAFMSA) was back again, after many weeks working on the Peugeot 205. New big end shells and a complete redesign on the dry sump oil system Simon was hoping that he had cured the previous problems, time would tell.



Chris and Paul '306 Racing'

Also returning to continue the clash of the Peugeot 306's from Snetterton were Sgt Chris Slator (RAF) and Paul Waterhouse (RAFMSA).

For Team 29 (RAF) Sgt Neil Icton had managed to regain his seat again after missing Snetterton and joined Sgt Andy Holborn in the MX-5.

Chief Tech Scott Lawson (RAF) had finished repairs to the BMW as well as reapplying the graphics to the rear quarter of the BMW and Sqn Ldr Darren Howe (RAF) had cleaned the windscreen of the Golf and it was ready to go!

With no green flag lap to test track conditions, the first couple of racing laps would require patience and not trying to win the race in the first corner.

After practice, the dialogue had been whether wet tyres would be a good choice or not? After discussion with the others, Simon decided to try his wets. Darren had already decided to replace his sprints tyres with wets. Most of the others did not



Battling for the lead Darren and Simon

have that option and had to go with what they had. From the start, Darren realised that his wets were one race too old, and not providing the grip he expected, although he was still out in front of the rest. In contrast, once Simon had the confidence to press hard he was flying through the field and quickly catching Darren.

trickier. WO Ed McKean (RAF) had a scary moment through Chapman Curve as did Mark Inman in the VX220, while Gareth had a spin at Tarzan. The RNRMMSA Endurance Peugeot 206 GTI had taken to the grass at some point as the mud splatters up the side indicated, but other than that all seemed to be running well. Sean was still having problems with the Locost this time the throttle stuck wide open. Having got it to a place of safety he decided enough was enough and he retired. Unfortunately, one of the guest BMWs tangling with the wall while braking for Deene, which brought out the safety car just as the pit window opened for the compulsory pit stops.

Caught in traffic, after the pit stops Darren now had Simon on his tail and once released by the safety car it wasn't long before Simon was able to pass and then he was away.



Paul, Michael and Chris

After the pit stops, Paul managed to break away from Chris and was chasing after

Cpl Daz Smee (Army) and Seb Unwin (RN). Chris was having his own fight with Lt Michael Wells (RN) MR2 in front and L/Cpl Mark White (Army) Lotus following closely behind.

SAC Dan Smith (RAF) was lapping consistently and gaining confidence, although he did have trouble keeping up with the safety car when it came out. Well the safety car does have about 50 more horsepower and an expert driver!



Darren Howe (Golf) and Dan Smith (Fiesta)

After 40 minutes of racing Simon crossed the line first, with Darren Berris second and Ray Honeybone (Guest) in another Fiesta 3rd. Checking the car after the race Simon found all to be well his repairs had been successful, no damage and all of the breather pipes were clear of oil.

The race is run as two races for Performance Index results; one before the pit stop, one after. At this event, all of the best PIs were achieved in the first race before the pit stops.

The final PI results were:

<i>1st</i>	<i>Lt Michael Wells</i>	<i>(RN)</i>	<i>7a</i>
<i>2nd</i>	<i>WO Ed McKean</i>	<i>(RAF)</i>	<i>39a</i>
<i>3rd</i>	<i>Sgt Will Ashmore</i>	<i>(Army)</i>	<i>61a</i>

Full results can be found on the AFRC website below.

<http://www.armedforcesracechallenge.net/2016-round-4-rockingham-results/>

Although this concludes the AFRC for 2016 it's not the last time outing for some of the drivers, because AFRC teams will be racing in the Holly Birkett 6 hour Relay Race, Silverstone on 22nd October 2016.

See you there.

Pictures by Nick and Mark Rogers