

ARMED FORCES RACE CHALLENGE 2015

The final round of the 2015 Armed Forces Race Challenge took place on the 3 mile long Snetterton '300' circuit. Forming part of Event 9 of the 750 Motor Club calendar, Race No. 17 was a 40 minute race with a 60 second 'Wheels stopped' pit stop. Some competitors decided to do the race solo, while others combined into 2 car teams.

As well as the usual stalwarts of the AFRC series, Snetterton also saw the arrival of some new competitors as well as the return of several racers from the RAFMSA days. A number of competitors took advantage of a practice on the Saturday by entering the all comers race, while others like new boys Sgt Andy Holborn (RAF) and Cpl Neil Iceton (RAF) in the MX-5 were racing at Silverstone on the Saturday before driving to Snetterton for the AFRC on the Sunday.



Andy (29) and Simon (108) get to grip during practice

Joining the usual RAFMSA Team of Sqn Ldr Darren Howe, WO Ed McKean and SAC Adam Twine were Wg Cdr Tal Lambert and Simon Moore.

Team Navy were out in force with Lt Cdr RN Richard Scott being joined by Lt RN Michael Wells in the now sorted Locost, CPO Steve Hutchings (Peugeot 106) and LH Seb Unwin (BMW 318is).



Team Navy Line a Stern

Team Army was lead by Capt Mark Saunders in the revamped Sierra Cosworth, SSgt Chris Wood (BMW 328i) and Sgt Will Ashmore (Honda Civic).

Not only is the AFRC open to serving members of the armed forces but also ex-serving members and both the RAFMSA and BAMA were well supported by their associate members.

Sunday morning was cool and overcast for the practice and from the start people were having problems. Will Ashmore thought the misfire that plagued him at Cadwell Park in the last round was sorted, but as soon as the Civic was raced hard the problem re-occurred. Steve Hutchings was having problems with the brakes, as was Simon Wing (RAFMSA). Andy Holborn had a small mechanical problem, which was sorted by the application of some black tape.

Conditions on track were still variable and entering Murrays a little too fast Matt Hoskings (BAMA) in the Subaru Justy put a wheel on the grass and spun 360



Justy too hot to handle

degrees, luckily avoiding all the other competitors, the only casualty being a track marker.

Snetterton having a lap of 2 minutes plus meant that there wasn't time for 2 driver teams to get the required 3 laps, so the extra drivers qualified in another session. Michael Wells was getting used to the quirks of the Locost, but changing gear through Palmer, the gear linkage decided to separate.

Fortunately he was able to affect a temporary repair and do the required 3 laps. After both qualifying sessions Simon Wing was on pole with the team of Ian Fletcher/Ed Fuller (RAFMSA) second and guest driver Andy Stacey third.

As the race wasn't until mid-afternoon there was plenty of time to sort out any niggling faults on the cars. Unfortunately for Will even with the TEGIWA Import Civic Cup Series there, the equipment needed to diagnose the problem on his car wasn't available, so he had to retire before starting the race. By the end of 4 laps Steve Hutchings's Peugeot 106 had run out of brakes with the pedal flat to the floor. Investigations revealed a small 'O' ring in the front calliper had failed allowing brake fluid to escape; it looked like his race was also over. But the 'Never say die' team Navy's spirit and the assistance of Team Army's spares department meant a repair was possible, so at least he could start the race, finishing was another matter.

Simon Wing was also having brake problems, whenever he applied full braking there was so much vibration he couldn't see where he was going, also the gearbox was making some strange noises. Mark Saunders was not convinced that the Sierra Cosworth was quite sorted after the extensive rebuild, but was happy that the quick shift gearbox was working nicely, as at every gear change there was a loud bang accompanied by flames from the exhaust.



Mark Saunder's Sierra Cosworth

Matt managed to push out the slight dent caused by the spin and with no other damage was ready for the race. After Team Navy having had so many problems with the Locost at previous rounds it was nice to see that after its extensive electrical work the car performed impeccably, apart from the gear linkage problem.



Lt Cdr RN Richard Scott in the sorted Locost

As is usual for an ex-airfield circuit judging the weather is

always a tricky business. Since practice it had been a warm sunny day, but as race time approached clouds gathered. As the competitors have to go the collection area sometime before their actual race and with only the threat of rain the choice had to be a dry setup with dry tyres. Just as they were going to the grid there was a brief shower which made the start interesting. Ed Fuller (RAFMSA) in the Tiger Super Six got a flyer to take the lead headed the field for the first lap. The rain had stopped but the track was now very greasy and going through the Bomb Hole, Ed slid onto the grass letting Simon take the lead. Even with his problems Simon pressed on hard and soon had a good lead. Ed wasn't the only one to be caught out by the conditions Chris Camp (BAMA) in the Lexus also had a spin, at Agostini he did a complete revolution, selected first and continued. After a good start Richard gained 3 places, but a 360 through the Bomb Hole dropped him down the order. Chris Camp did well to avoid a Locost in full astern mode and as the Locost now felt like it was running with a puncture, Richard decided to pit early.

In the pit lane Billy could see that Ed had dropped to fifth and was struggling, so jumped out of the car and dropped the dampers a couple of clicks and got back in just before Ed came in. Out onto the track, and there was no-one in sight except Mark who was parked up at Hamilton, unfortunately for Mark the fuel pump relay on the Sierra packed up and he had to retire.



Sqn Ldr Howe leads Wg Cdr Lambert at Hamilton

Everyone got through the 60 second pit-stop without incident. Next to fall prey to the gremlins was SAC Adam Twine (RAFMSA) in the Honda Integra when the brakes locked on.

With cars stranded on the circuit the decision was made to bring out the safety car.



Billy in the Hornet try's to fend off the much faster Lotus

At the restart Simon was the one who got a flyer, but Billy in typically fashion made an a blinder, going from fifth to third down the start/finish straight and just managed to get past Ed McKean going through Riches to take second. Chasing after Billy was Phil Seaman (Guest driver) in the very rapid Sunbeam Lotus.

Midfield there was a very good battle developing between Darren, Steve, Seb, Chris and Tal. Seb in the BMW was

swapping places with Chris Wood's BMW and guest drivers Paul Roddison's MX-5. With the safety car out the field bunched up, but after the restart on a drying track Seb couldn't stick with the MX-5 and instead found he had to defend from Steve, Darren and Chris. With the extra horsepower of the Peugeot 106, Steve was able to pass once on the Bentley straight.



Midfield battle

Even with failing brakes and a sticking throttle Steve managed to put in the fastest RN lap. At the finish it was Steve, Seb, Darren closely followed by Chris. Bringing up the rear Andy and Neil in the MX-5 were lapping consistently and that is what the AFRC is all about, not first past the post but consistency.

Back at the front and lap by lap Phil was reeling in Simon. At the end of lap 15 Simon was 0.1 seconds ahead of Phil, going through Agostini Phil passed and lead to the flag. Unfortunately for Phil the chequered flag was shown 1 lap late and the result was taken on lap 15, therefore Simon Wing was the first past the post.

Normal AFRC results are calculated by performance index and first past the post get nothing, except for this event there were special prizes for first, second and third as well as the usual best service drivers. Presenting the trophies was the RAFMSA President, Air Vice Marshal Mark Neal OBE, who was visiting the event for the day.



**Top RAF driver Sqn Ldr Darren Howe with
AVM Mark Neal**



Top Navy driver Leading Hand Seb Unwin



Top Army driver SSgt Chris Wood



Overall winner Simon Wing

That concludes the AFRC for 2015 although there are other events that members of the three services will be involved in, the main being the Holly Birkett 6 Hour relay in October at Silverstone.

Pictures by Nick and Mark Rogers