

## **The Morgan Challenge heads north to sunny Cheshire**

The AR Motorsport Morgan Challenge visited Oulton Park in Cheshire for round five of its 2018 season on Saturday 19 May.

Under a fine blue sky, and in contrast to last year's soaking wet conditions, 17 cars qualified for the single 30-minute race. Keith Ahlers, the victor of 99 Morgan Challenge races, placed his mighty 4.6 litre Plus 8 model on pole position, ahead of Reading's Roger Whiteside's similar Plus 8. Roger's car was suffering from using the tyres he normally used in the wet, as his regular dry weather tyres had been flatspotted at Silverstone in the previous round, but he gallantly conceded that even with the right tyres, Keith would still have taken pole.

Roger was instead looking forward to a close dice with Derby's Andrew Thompson, who claimed third in his race-bred ARV6 just 12 hundredths of a second behind Roger. Keith and Andrew both enjoyed the sunny conditions, and managed to get clear laps early in the session to cement their grid positions.

Keith made an excellent start from pole position, with Burton in Kendal's Tim Parsons launching himself into second into the first corner, Old Hall. However, as the cars came back to the start line at the end of lap one, the order had changed completely, with Andrew leading, and Keith slowly trailing into the pits. Keith's dreams of achieving a century of wins were undone by a very rare mechanical fault, a wheel bearing failure halfway around lap one nearly pitching Keith, and Andrew who was following closely behind, into the barriers at Water Tower.

With Keith sat in the pit lane, unable to go further, Andrew pulled steadily away from the field, just over one second a lap on average to achieve a largely uneventful but highly emotional first victory in the series. Andrew's race was not completely without incident however, nearly being collected by the duelling factory Club Sport cars of actor Tony Hirst and Morgan director Craig Hamilton-Smith as they battled for class honours. Both cars came together at Old Hall on lap 10, with Craig spinning to a halt, though his subsequent charge through the field brought him right onto the tail of Tony's car, and he was pipped for the class victory by only 0.28 of a second.

Behind Andrew, Roger finished in a comfortable second place, rueing the need to use his less favoured tyres, while third overall was Tim Parsons. His four-cylinder Plus 4 couldn't match the larger engine cars on top speed, but canny driving secured him his first ever dry-weather podium, a result of which he was justifiably very proud.

Keith's was the only retirement, a very low attrition rate given the close competition and the high temperatures over the 30 minute race. The other notable success was Reading Morgan dealer Richard Thorne. Though an experienced racer, this was the first race for his car, the first customer Club Sport racer, which began the day with just 60 miles recorded on the odometer; it came home a creditable 11<sup>th</sup> overall.

The Morgan Challenge heads next to Spa in Belgium on the weekend of 23/24 June, before returning to the UK on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July, where the Morgan Sports Car Club celebrates the late Peter Morgan with its annual Memorial Trophy meeting, held this year at Donington Park.

### **Media enquiries**

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