

Snetterton Sunday 8th April
First two rounds of the Morgan Challenge
A report by Greg Parnell

On an overcast wet Sunday morning 31 Morgan racers and support crews gathered for the AR Motorsport Morgan Challenge season opener at Snetterton. Despite the gloomy conditions the paddock soon came to life with drivers preparing their cars for the early qualifying session which was to be on a wet track and not the bright and dry conditions later stated in the official results bulletin!

We were pleased to welcome a newcomer to our series, Max Whitehouse, who, whilst an experienced racer, was new to racing Morgans. His car was previously Jonathan Edwards class B plus 8 and Max had bravely driven it to the track from his home in Oxfordshire. MMC and the team of UWR students arrived with the two new Club Sports for their debut races in the capable hands of Craig Hamilton Smith and Tony Hirst. Another newcomer to the Morgan paddock was the enormous articulated truck and trailer recently purchased by Williams Morgans. Laurie, aptly named, had just been awarded his HGV licence and was proudly showing off his new toy - Eddie Stobart eat your heart out!

With the class structure revised for 2018 to reflect more fairly the relative performance of the now many differing types of Morgans the packed grid would be seeking honours in the 9 classes now in contention. Qualifying saw some very impressive performances from the smaller engined cars as the bigger cars struggled to get their power down and find any grip on their wide tyres.

For almost the first three quarters of the session Phil Thomas, in his 2 litre BabyDoll led the field until Keith Ahlers finally established a pole winning time of 1:39.779. Simon Orebi Gann pulled out a very good time to join him at the front of the grid with Phill Thomas taking a creditable third place beating the 3.7 litre ARV 6 of Andrew Thompson who joined him on the second row.

Race 1

Our first race at 14:33 was greeted with more foul weather and at the rolling start visibility was greatly impeded by the spray thrown up by 29 Morgans dashing to the first corner at Riches. Despite the conditions many individual battles took place as drivers started to find some grip although at almost every

corner the surface was slippery catching out the over enthusiastic. Unfortunately on lap 4, as he was approaching Riches , Max Whitehouse lost all grip and once on the grass headed at high speed for the Armco resulting in serious damage to his car but luckily escaping injury - tough cars these Morgans! The race was won by Keith Ahlers with Andrew Thompson, snapping at his heels, taking a very close second place. Phil Thomas continued to find his form and took third place on the podium. With only one other DNF all drivers escaped pretty well unscathed and finished the race with many winning class honours. The Driver of The Race award went to Andrew Thompson for his mighty battle with Keith Ahlers.

Race 2

The second race at 17:00 started on a damp track which again was very slippery in the corners. With grid positions determined by the first race results the rolling start was again a furious rush down to the first corner in a cloud of spray. With experience gained from the first race drivers were able to be more circumspect and as the track dried out lap times greatly improved with the more powerful cars finally finding their feet.

Keith Ahlers took the win establishing his 99th win in the Morgan Challenge. It is said he plans to retire from the Challenge once he has won his 100th race but seeing the smile on his face at the end of the race I reckon he will go on for many more wins. Andrew Thompson had another great race and took second place joined by Phil Goddard taking third. Tim Parsons and John Milbank exited the race on lap 9 despite having achieved fastest lap in each of their classes. John Milbank was awarded Driver Of The Race for his spirited performance whilst his race lasted.

We now look forward to our next two races to be held on 21st April at Silverstone where hopefully the weather will be warm and sunny!

Greg Parnell