

A Long Delayed Challenge.

Finally after an easing of the restrictions on 'social gatherings' the first two rounds of the 2020 Aero Challenge were run as part of the MG Car Club's opening meeting at Donington on July 12th. A good entry of twenty four cars demonstrated that enthusiasm for competition had not faded during the lockdown. Many of the regular runners were there, plus a few new or less familiar names, although the factory duo of Tony Hirst and Craig Hanilton-Smith were absent along with the Aero team of Mark Evans, the MMC not wanting to risk the virus spreading to the factory floor. Probably a wise decision..

Qualifying saw Roger Whiteside take pole position with Andrew Thompson in second place, Simon Orebi Gann and John Emberson, in a newly acquired, Baby Doll, third, and fourth. Brett Syndercombe, Sam Butterworth, John Milbank, Phillip Tisdall, Tom Richards, and Phillip Goddard completed the top ten positions.

Race 1.

From the start Andrew Thompson's ARV6 made a rapid start, as Roger's more powerful V8 proved difficult to get underway quite as well. This led to a great spectacle for the spectator, as Andrew defied all attempts by the bigger car to get past, the two constantly cornering side by side, Roger unable to get close enough to utilise his power advantage. With just two laps left to run, muscle triumphed over suppleness, and Whiteside squeezed by although unable to relax as the ARV6 refused to go away, crossing the finish like less than a second behind. John Emberson had a fairly lonely race in third spot, after disposing of Simon Orebi Gann's ARV6, Simon holding fourth place until with just one lap to go engine problems forced him out of the race. Further back Brett Syndercombe, and John Milbank took turns to be fifth, with Mark Butterworth looking on, Phillip Goddard, and Phillip Tisdall were another pair keeping company, while Sharlie kept an eye on them both, and Paul Voakes was going well in his Club Sport. Mid race John Milbank lost a bit of pace and dropped back several places. Tom Richards had been well in the mix until he mistook a warning flag for the dreaded Black Flag, and stopped to find out what was wrong losing a lot of places before he rejoined. When the Chequered flag was waved Roger had won by a narrow margin, ahead of Andrew Thompson, John Emberson and Brett Syndercombe, however shortly after the race had finished it transpired that several drivers had committed flag infringements, leading to the disqualification of the winner, and three other offenders. Thus the final result was;

1. Andrew Thompson
2. John Emberson
3. Brett Syndercombe
4. Mark Butterworth
5. Phillip Goddard
6. JohnMilbank
7. Sharlie Goddard
8. James Sumner
9. Kelvin Laidlaw
10. Simon Sherry'

As the leader entered his last lap he passed Rob Gilmore who was just starting his 13th. lap, however, Rob left his braking rather late into the first corner. Redgate, and ended up stuck in a gravel bed. This lead to yellow warning flags being shown, meaning 'Slow down- no overtaking'. Unfortunately these were still being shown as Roger Whiteside crossed the finishing line to take the chequered flag, and failing to notice the yellow flag a little further along the straight. Despite slowing down, his pace was such that he passed Sharlie Goddard who was just commencing her last lap, and slowing because of the warning flags. The stewards took a tough line and Roger was disqualified and given penalty points on his licence, a very harsh call considering the circumstances.

Phillip Tisdall, Paul Voakes, and Simon King also fell foul of officialdom and were likewise punished. Aero Challenge competitors have a fully justified reputation for good behaviour on track, and it a shame that the stewards seemed to be in a bad mood that day. In addition to these unfortunate drivers five other cars failed to finish for various reasons.

Race 2

With the 'winner' of race one starting from the back of the grid, Andrew Thompson was looking confident of an easy win in the second round, and taking into consideration the problems Roger Whiteside had getting past in the previous edition, he had good reason for such confidence. However, sitting back there still smouldering over his DSQ, Roger was a 'Man on a mission', and put on a quite dazzling exhibition of Morgan racing, carving his way through the field to lie 6th after just one lap and by lap 9 he was in a lead he was not to lose, taking the flag after 15 laps for a well deserved and popular victory. Andrew clung on for a fine second place, kicking himself for not pushing harder in the early laps, but with Roger so fired up one suspects it would have only delayed matters a little longer. John Emberson was again a solitary third, followed by Brett Syndercombe, Phillip Goddard, Tom Richards, Paul Voakes, Sharlie

Goddard, Sam Butteworth, and Phillip Tisdall rounding out the top ten. There were no retirements or other incidents and all that started, finished.

Simon Orebi Gann's engine problems from race 1 were incurable, and Kelvin Laidlaw and James Sumner were also absent for reasons unknown, while Richard Fearn had bent his Club Sport rather badly in the first round.

With the sun in attendance all day, and plenty of time between races to socialise (all in accordance with Government guidelines, of course), it was a most agreeable start to our truncated season. Next outing, Covid permitting, will be the Bentley Drivers Club Meeting at Silverstone on August 22nd always the highlight of the year.

Bob Bull