

Birel ART UK Karting 2017 Championship

Race report by race driver Matt Pearce

Round 7 Shennington 1st October

Surrounded by the rolling Oxfordshire hills, Shennington kart track shares the airfield with the present gliding club. Flying started on the site from 1941 as RAF Edgehill, where it was home to bomber command. A place steeped in history and arguably the fastest circuit in the country, Shennington is a challenging but rewarding circuit to drive for the brave.

This round was the penultimate race of the season and after some bad luck in previous rounds with being caught up in accidents not of my making, it was important to have a strong high scoring round if I was to have any hope of a top three finish in the championship.

Each round weekend consists of practice on Saturday followed by qualifying and three races, a heat, pre-final and final on Sunday. Each race scores points with all points contributing to the championship total.

Qualifying

After a dry day on Saturday, Sunday morning started with interval showers, which made qualifying interesting. With a drying track, we were caught out not being on the optimum set up, and despite putting in progressively quicker laps the highest we climbed to and qualified was 8th.

Heat

Starting 8th on the grid suggested a very challenging race ahead as the top 7 drivers on the grid were all very competitive and this was a short sprint race of only 10 laps. However, after a lightening start with 4 laps into the race, I was up to 4th challenging for 3rd. The top four of us were bunched up and fighting hard, and on the 8th lap the top three places were so close together bumper to bumper that it gave me an opportunity to overtake, I threw it up the inside of all three karts ahead of me emerging from the corner in the lead. We were so closely bunched that the lead swapped between all three of us a few times over the remaining laps, but as the final lap sign came out I manage to hold onto 2nd by the end of the race. My kart was showing great pace which was promising for the rest of the day ahead.

Pre Final

Starting 2nd on the grid isn't the best position at Shennington as you can be pushed wide into the first corner and run the risk of dropping places. However, I managed to hold onto 2nd position by the first corner and settle down into the race. After a couple of laps the drivers behind were threatening to overtake as the tyres on my kart were taking longer to heat up and give the grip I needed. I did enough to hold them at bay and started pulling away, trying to close the gap on the leader. However, despite catching the leader and with too many seconds to make up and not enough laps left, I couldn't catch him but I held onto 2nd to take the very valuable points and close down the gap in my challenge for 3rd place in the championship.

Final

Again starting on the front row of the final started smoothly. My game plan was to sit tight with the leader to ensure we could pull a gap between him, me and 3rd place, before trying the overtake for the lead and the win. The difference in pace was so small between me and the race leader, no one could tell who was going to win. With 2 laps to go the race leader made a small mistake which gave me a chance to use the slip stream for an overtake. Unfortunately, the leader was wise to this and defended well closing the door which left me no chance of a pass. With 1 lap left and trying too hard I too unfortunately made a small mistake which opened up the smallest of gaps, which I was unable to close over the last lap. However, the day was very successful overall as with the collection of 2nd places in all three races I was pleased with my points haul, and I had closed up on the championship 3rd place driver with the gap now down to 3 points going into the last round of the season.

Next Race

Up next is at Whilton Mill where my main focus is to get enough points to finish 3rd in the championship.

We had an awesome day today and raced hard all day. With the points gained today we can really focus on wrapping up the season with 3rd place. I would like to thank the team for its support for the whole weekend, and to give me such a competitive kart, and a special thanks to Oakenhurst Aircraft Services LTD for your continued support.