

KING RACING

HIGH PERFORMANCE BEARINGS



MSA British Drag Racing Championship

CHAMPIONSHIP ROUNDS RACE REPORTS

Round 4: Santa Pod Raceway – Mopar – 29th to 31st July 2016

This was the best non-FIA Pro Mod race of recent years, perhaps the best since Pro Mod became the designated class of the MSA British Drag Racing Championship in 2007. There was a heartening sense of progress throughout the weekend. No one crashed, no one suffered serious damage, performances stepped up a gear and even the early losers seemed quite chipper about it.

British veteran Philip 'Bert' Englefield and Dutch newcomer Michel Tooren were the stars of the show. Tooren had occupied the limelight right up to the final round, qualifying low and setting Low ET and Top Speed of the Meet with fresh personal bests (6.074sec/237.33mph), only for the remarkably resurgent Englefield to pressure him into a red-light start and snatch victory from his grasp. As he occupies with increasing distinction the Pro Dutch driving seat left vacant by last autumn's untimely death of Robert Joosten, Tooren's rate of progress suggests his next port of call will be the 5-second zone. If he is watching from above, Joosten will be proud.

This victory was Englefield's second of the MSA Pro Mod era, his previous win coming at the Summer Nationals in 2008, the year he won the championship. At the start of that 2008 season, his personal-best figures were 6.564sec/215.15mph; six years later, at the start of 2014, the PBs had crept no further than 6.489/218.24. The all-black '38 Ford Coupe appeared to have reached a performance plateau and tended to run inconsistently, suffering more than its fair share of mechanical difficulties and damage as Englefield shared the driving with BA Racing team partner Andy Wright.

All that has changed now, especially this season. Englefield's PBs now stand at a brisk 6.203/228.05. Moreover, each of the five passes he made during the Mopar Nationals – two in qualifying, three in eliminations – registered in the 6.2sec/220mph-plus zone. On each run the Coupe launched like a rocket and ran straight as an arrow. What has brought about this transformation? Hard work, lots of hard work, is the reply. Would that mere perspiration might always produce such inspirational effect!

What had begun to look like a runaway MSA championship season for Andy Robinson now promises a battle to relish in its last two rounds. Robinson still leads in the points but Englefield's victory has cut that lead to just 12 – less than a single elimination round. Tooren lies a further 40 points – or two elimination rounds – adrift.

Robinson is one of two racers left feeling less than satisfied after the weekend. Ready for the first qualifying session, the orange '69 Camaro would not start. In the second session, Robinson clocked 6.593 at only 183.62mph, emitting a puff of smoke towards the finish, to qualify fifth, uncommonly off-pace for him in such company. He did not contest the third session.

PRO MOD

Sunday's opening elimination match found Robinson pitted against fourth qualifier and defending MSA champion, Kev Slyfield, and a great match ensued. Slyfield has been plagued by tyre-shake all season but appeared now to have shaken off the problem (sorry), clocking his quickest ET of the weekend, 6.455. Robinson, though, was back to flying form, hitting 6.121/232.87 for a fine win. Robinson's semi-final meeting with Tooren looked to be the pivotal match of the day but ended in unexpected fashion. Tooren's left-lane, shake-afflicted 6.429/228.16 seemed there for the taking, but Robinson, shaking even more violently, swerved hard left on two wheels at around 330 feet, crossed the centre line and – in an exhibition of heart-in-mouth driving skill – missed clouting the wall by mere inches.

It may have been an unsatisfactory weekend for the championship leader but it could have turned out so much worse.

While on the subject of dissatisfaction, the other racer to depart less than thrilled was Marck Hartevelde. The Dutchman's Voodoo Hemi Racing '70 Plymouth Superbird was disqualified on each of its three qualifying attempts for being narrowly overweight, a rare if not unique occurrence. A minimum weight rule is standard, of course, for any heads-up class, but a maximum weight rule? It's there for sure in the rule book – page 159, 2,800 lb., apparently – but its existence took more than one observer with impeccable background credentials by surprise.

Hartevelde made a couple of 6.2sec/220mph test runs on Sunday afternoon which comfortably undercut his legal personal bests (6.408/219.20). If he can shave more weight off the car, it can only be to his advantage.

The happy weekenders included Roger Moore, who reached the semi-final, losing there to Englefield but setting a fresh ET PB (6.390) by just one thousandth of a second in the process. Moore also set a new speed PB (218.13) in qualifying. Mick Payne went home very happy, having demolished his long-standing PBs (7.229/185.13) with a

6.781/208.88 losing blast against Tooren in the first round – that's almost half-a-second and 24mph of improvement in a single shot. On a subsequent test pass, Payne even had to spin out to avoid finishing in the field after his wheelie-bar fouled his parachute, but the absence of damage and the 6.99/203 timeslip sent him home in a cheerful frame of mind anyway.

Wayne Nicholson is another troubled soul (in track terms, of course) now beginning to see the light. Three 6sec/200mph passes over the weekend, including a post-race test best of 6.722/209.15, put the Lucky Devil team once more in sight of the 6.4sec/220mph personal bests Nicholson established in 2013. Perhaps the happiest sight of all was that of Roger Johansson, aiding and abetting the Bobby Wallace team making its first appearance of the season. Just two months earlier, Santa Pod had held its collective breath, fearing the worst after the Swedish star's almighty finish-line crash at The Main Event; yet here he was, admittedly on crutches with a broken leg, but otherwise fit, relaxed and genial. While enjoying his first spectator experience since 2003, Johansson hasn't let the accident deter him and is having a new Mustang built in America by ace constructor Rick Jones with a planned debut at next year's Main Event.

Pro Mod's newest entrant, Steve Rawlings, continued his nitrous Corvette's shakedown runs with new best marks of 7.647/195.52 on a Sunday afternoon test.

It is always an attractive prospect when Pro Mod's top Europeans arrive for one of the season's joint FIA/MSA Championship events, but following this Mopar Euro Nationals weekend, September's forthcoming European Finals looks more enticing still.

Po.	No.	Competitor	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	B	Total
1	2	Andy Robinson	63	34	103	54	54	57	100	465
2	6	BA Racing	57	52	36	97	32	76	100	449
3	1	Kev Slyfield	34	52	57	35	52	95	100	424
4	1971	Michel Tooren	10	34	75	83	53	12	100	369
5	777	Wayne Nicholson	33	10	54	33	10	33	100	273
6	1968	Mick Payne	34	10	33	33	10	10	100	230
7	1	Michael Gullqvist	0	97	0	0	123	0	0	220
8	480	Roger Moore	0	31	33	56	31	33	0	184
9	2	Mats Eriksson	0	75	0	0	96	0	0	171
10	3391	Johan Lindberg	0	76	0	0	77	0	0	153
11	12	Jean Dulamon	55	31	0	0	31	34	0	151
12	70	Chris Isaacs	36	31	34	0	0	12	0	113
13	222	Marck Hartevelde	10	52	0	10	34	0	0	106
14	1953	Marco Maurichat	0	0	0	0	32	63	0	95
15	3630	Norbert Kuno	0	32	0	0	52	0	0	84
16	625	Bobby Wallace	0	0	0	34	0	34	0	68
17	13	David Vegter	0	33	0	0	31	0	0	64
18	650	Steve Rawlings	0	0	10	10	0	10	0	30
19	427	Roger Johansson	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	10

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