

## Brands Hatch 27th April 2002 Round 3

Grrrr. Brands is 8am scrutineering. So even though the circuit is nearby its an early start. Small compensation was the Vees had the pit lane garages. The team reserved the garage the night before with the proverbial towel. I set off early to arrive in good time and ended up getting there too early (for me anyway). Having never been to Brands hatch I drove past the paddock entrance, was I driving too fast ? I was expecting a sign announcing my arrival instead it was a piece of cardboard on a pole and the entrance is through an industrial estate, not what I had imagined.

In the pits I found the towel and unloaded the car. Then hiked over to the admin office outside the track to sign on, stopping to look down paddock hill bend (luckily more frightening on foot than in a car). Scrutineering was a breeze because the scrutineers came over to us (thank you !). I was practicing in the first session. The lap record is 53 seconds and I set myself the target of 57 secs. Brands Hatch is a lovely track. Plenty of gradient changes and corners, in fact the straights are not straights. I was thoroughly enjoying myself when practice finished. While the next practice session were waiting the commentator read out the times from our session. "12th fastest - Tony Dowson - 55.953". I was quite pleased with that effort. The commentator then preceded to say I was the last person to automatically make the final. He corrected himself and then just about everyone in the next session went quicker and I was pushed down to 32nd overall. The 10 drivers in front of me were all covered by a second so it was going to be a close race.

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### Fastest Practice Lap: 55:953 - 78.89 MPH

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In between the race and practice we fitted a new exhaust bought from John Mitchell. It proved a little painful fitting it when Ian stripped the thread on the studs holding the exhaust on. I quick bit of improvisation and with me and my mate Simon hacking the bodywork we had it all finished just before the first race. I pressed the button to start the engine. Nothing. The relay in the starter motor circuit had gone. A quick bypass job and it fired first time.

I don't remember too much of the start. I remember Richard Harris being 3rd on the grid and I overtook him by the first corner. I remembered reading an article a month earlier by Johnny Herbert. He was describing his epic win in the Formula Ford festival. In the practice session he threw it off at Paddock Hill bend on his first or second lap and therefore earned himself a back of the grid position for the heat. Not the place to be when you have the creme of European formula ford drivers/brats in front of you. But with some splendid driving, Brands being a circuit he knew well, he managed to work his way nearer to the front in the next few races. For the final he was 3rd on the grid. Johnny reasoned that 3rd on the grid was the best place to be at Brand, pole and second start on an uphill gradient whereas 3rd and 4th are on the level. Anyway he past the 2 guys in front of him from the start and went on to win easily. I told Richard this story and what did he do, unwittingly turn off the ignition as the lights went green. Bravo. There was some jostling over the next few laps but I found myself in a 5 car train and was holding on to the back of Richard (who went 1.3 seconds quicker than me in practice). Then the yellow and black quarter flag came out. The most misunderstood flag in the history of motorsport. I know that the leader on seeing the flag should slow gently to about 50 mph and everyone catch up to form one long train doing 50 mph. So our 5 driver train slowed to about 50-60 mph while the people in front carried on at 70-80 mph. A gap opened pretty quick and now we needed to catch up which meant going at near race pace. I was accelerating hard out of Clearways to just keep up with the guys in front thinking "Some people have not got a clue what this flag means" when there was a noise like a machine gun and no power. I dipped the clutch straight away and coasted to halt opposite the pits. I watched the rest of the race which went on for an extra 2 laps. The black and yellow quarter was out for about 2 to 3 laps, seems like the officials don't know how it works.

Back in the pits someone quickly pointed out that there was a hole in the block. Oh dear. Engine rebuild time. A few offers of lending an engine for the next race came in but I declined them. I wanted to race with my own engine and the money saved by not racing at Donnington would help to pay for this rebuild. Ian, my mechanic, quickly volunteered his services to rebuild the engine. So we took it out of the car and popped it into the boot of his car. Part of me was a little apprehensive about letting him rebuild it but the other part thought "what's the worse could happen".

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**Heat: Grid Position: 17**  
**Heat: Race Result: Retired**  
**Heat: Fastest Lap: 56:195**

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