



Darvill Racing  
 Parkgate House  
 Victoria Road  
 Castletown  
 Isle of Man  
 IM9 1EN  
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**National Championships**

We are now well into the season and it I am well overdue in supplying you an update on our endeavours. As well as the Thunderbike Series, Chris Firmin (Toffa) is competing in the BMCRC F1 Sidecar Championship with Echelon Racing, whilst not riding under the Darvill Banner we are avidly following his progress and assisting them wherever we can (and what we know about those lunatic vehicles you could record on the wings of a ladybird), however if I can get them to sit-still for long enough I will slap a Darvill Racing sticker on the F1 when they are not looking...

**1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> May – Pembrey Circuit, Miles and miles down the M4, Wales**

**BMCRC F1 Sidecars:**

Round three of the BMCRC F1 Sidecar Championship has been a good one for the sidecar team.. ‘Smithy’ (Gary Smith) is starting to show the pace which made him so successful on the ‘Slidey cars’ outfit, back before grey hair (sorry Gary... 😊) and Chris’s body is adjusting to the abuse that is sidecar passenger’ing , and believe me it is serious abuse (he must be a little unhinged... Sorry ‘Toffa’).



The round was light on entries, mainly due to the distance, but also the British sidecar round that clashed, so they had a relatively easy time of it, especially as and a great opportunity to get some time on the thing together.

4 out of 4 race wins came to them over the weekend, which although there were limited entries, competition was fierce. So a nice collection of points to hopefully make up for the low points scored in rounds one and two, and keeping them firmly in touch with the opportunity of a championship.



Perhaps I am expecting a lot, Toffa has only about an hour or so of experience on the chair, and Smithy hasn’t touched one competitively for about 20 years, however they are competitive sods and talented to boot, given some luck and some opportunities and they will be mixing it with some of the quicker lads sooner rather than later.



## Thunderbikes:

Saturday – Practice begun well, Mike hadn't been to Pembrey from a few seasons but was eager to return to what was a successful track for him. Lap 1 and he was in the mix, mid pack with regard to timings. Lap 2 and halfway round we lost the chain, this fortunately exited without touching rider, machine or any competitor, the result was we didn't get the bike 'dialled-in' correctly.

- Race 1 – A good start but our lack of setup time was apparent, it transpires that the suspension was working against us and around Pembrey cornering speed makes or breaks a race, we finished in 15<sup>th</sup>, 2/3 down the field but with a point.
- Race 2 – Another really good start, we had made changes to the set-up but the net overall effect was we were still off the pace, engine and rider were there, tyres doing their job but we ended up just out of the points.... It was going to be a long night...!



Sunday – We awoke to bleary eyes, after a few eager rubs of our lids we realised that you couldn't see more than 10m in front of your nose... Welcome to Wales

- Race 1 – With the mist lingering, moisture in the air and the weight of a long night of fettling we lined-up on the grid. Another blistering start and the mist seemed to be lifting as we hit mid race, however the bike was still not near enough to where we needed it to be and I could see that Mike was pushing far too hard. Time to withdraw and go to plan B.
- Race 2 – Air-cooled Ducati time...! WHAT a difference, on the warm-up lap Mike was visibly more comfortable, his positioning on both the bike and track was 100% improved, watching the bike clip the apex of the bends you could see Mike getting onto the throttle much earlier and powering out of the bend. Starting at the back of the grid due to race one, visor up and a huge grin on his face Mike was defiantly ready. The starting lights go out and before I blink he is 1/3 of the way up the grid into the first corner, within 3 corners he was up to 15<sup>th</sup> and then making time with some open track. Unfortunately this was rather short-lived, there was, as Mike explained later an almighty crack and then serious noise coming from the exhaust, not knowing what the problem was he hauled-in the clutch and brought her to a stop... Whilst day 2 was a complete write-off, no damage was done and it transpires that the Lambda Sensor plug has worked its self loose, Phew...!! Note to self, more lock wire on this for Brands.



**15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> May – Brands Hatch GP**

**BMCRC F1 Sidecars:**

Confidence was high for the 4<sup>th</sup> round of the Championship, both ‘Smithy’ and ‘Toffa’ had spent considerable time recalibrating the bike, making significant improvements to the set up, this coupled with the return of the top runners gave them something to aim for.

Saturday:

- Race 1 – Qualified well and looking to the race, on the warm-up lap ‘Smithy’ pulled off-line as he realised that there was something “not quite right” with the power delivery, they decided to start anyway. This was a nine-lap sprint and the pair found themselves sitting in the top-five by half distance...! It was evident early on that the clutch



was giving out, but due to the improvements in set up they were able to ‘drive’ through the corners keeping the speed and staying in contention. Lap after lap this became increasingly difficult and with only a couple of laps remaining the clutch ‘let-go’ and they had to retire... Very frustrating...!!

- Race 2 – With the clutch changed the pair were eager to return to the grid and make amends for the premature departure from race one, sadly this was not to be and within the first lap ‘Smithy’ realised that there was an issue and pulled out. This began a serious amount of analysis throughout the afternoon and evening, it was only when late into the night ‘Eagle-Eyes Smithy’ spotted brass filings in the oil that they realised the root cause, not good as it was evident that a main bearing had failed. On the plus side no additional damage was done but as the spare engine was still being built this meant that the weekend’s activities were at an end.

Sunday:

There was a serious incident at the start of the second Thunderbike race that forced the cancellation of the remaining races and brought an early close to the meeting, these races will be rerun later in the year.



## Thunderbikes

Saturday:



Race 1 – The weather was fantastic, warm and sunny and given the previous meeting we had to send the Air-Cooled DS out for a spin. Another ‘cracking’ start and Mike was up to 15<sup>th</sup>, he was able to hold this through the majority of the race. As he describes it “the drive out of the corners was unbelievable, the mid-range torque making it hard for other riders to pass”. Mike backed-off to ensure of a finish, and rightly so. We finished in 19<sup>th</sup> (and there was a massive field) with a 1:43.8 lap time, very happy indeed. There is room for improvement, the bike does tend to ‘kick’ the back out on exiting the corners, but we are really happy with the result and caused quite a stir in the Paddock with this ‘Old Lady’ putting the younger models in their place.

Race 2 – We needed a top 50% finish and realistically the only way to achieve this was to put the 748 back out there. Mike started in 19<sup>th</sup> on the grid and got a great start, driving hard into the first corner. This enabled Mike to stay in contention with the fast group leading the front, he also realised that in order to achieve a good finish the first three

laps were crucial, cue some serious ‘scratchin’. The changes to the suspension and geometry were working very well, and what a contrast to Pembrey, it was planted into the corners and under hard acceleration with the front-end staying firmly on the deck. We finished in 12<sup>th</sup> place with a lap time of 1:41.9 very happy indeed.

Sunday:

- Race 1 – What to do...??? Mike opted for the 748 over the DS as his confidence was high after the previous days racing, and with a grid position of 12<sup>th</sup> it was game on. The lights go out and with, what is now becoming the norm, make an electric start... By the time he had exited ‘Druids’ he was up to 6<sup>th</sup>.. He was passed by another competitor but their cornering speeds were so fast that competing with





them wouldn't have been a valid option. He continued to stay in 7<sup>th</sup> until 2 laps to go when another rider was able to squeeze by, Mike kept pace with him and was able to bring her home in 8<sup>th</sup> ... Fantastic... It is worth noting that we were only 12.5 seconds behind the 2<sup>nd</sup> place rider on overall distance (The winner was 24 seconds quicker than that of 2<sup>nd</sup> place and clearly in a world of his own), it was a tight and well contested race.

- Race 2 – This was cancelled due to the serious incident on the start line and will be rerun later in the year.

So, a mixed bag really but lots of positives to take away, Confidence is high in both camps and we are looking forward to Silverstone.

Please take a moment to check-out Echelon Racing, the website address is below:

[www.echelonconsultancy.co.uk/echelon/index.asp?pageID=92](http://www.echelonconsultancy.co.uk/echelon/index.asp?pageID=92)

If you get an opportunity in the paddock, say hello, they don't bite (much)...

Quick thanks to [www.racing-line-photography.com](http://www.racing-line-photography.com) for the images.

What's Next?

We are rebuilding the Spondon Endurance Machine and hope to have a shake-down test at Mallory in July, in addition to this we are preparing a 2<sup>nd</sup> race engine to accompany this bike.

The hunt to secure the funds for the 6hr race in Spain (September) are going well, if not somewhat frustrating as we are sooooo close now to hitting the magic number, I was contemplating having a virtual 'Cash Thermometer' on the new website (which is almost ready) as this may assist us in securing the last of the funds....

Yours Sincerely,

Alex Aitchison  
Team Principal



Phone: +44(0)7624 433 594

Email: [alex@darvillracing.co.uk](mailto:alex@darvillracing.co.uk)

Web: <http://www.darvillracing.co.uk>

