

Donaldson dominates in the Dark

6-7 Mar 2010
Manfeild, Round 1

Results

Qualifying	Time
Mark Donaldson	1:26.491
Chris Parkinson	1:28.288
Elliott Heron	1:28.354

Race 1	Deficit
Mark Donaldson	0.00
Elliott Heron	9.19
Leigh Bucksey	9.61

Race 2	Deficit
Brian McMahon	0.00
Mark Donaldson	0.04
Leigh Bucksey	8.90

Race 3	Deficit
Mark Donaldson	0.00
Brian McMahon	1.27
Elliott Heron	7.59

Championship Points

Mark Donaldson	91
Brian McMahon	71
Elliott Heron	70

A dominating pair of victories at the opening round of the New Zealand Mini Seven Championship gave Mark Donaldson a commanding lead in the series points ahead of stiff competition from around the country. The round was held in conjunction with the Super Mini Challenge round of Thunder in the Dark 2 at Manfeild Park Raceway, located in Fielding. Despite being the home track for the North Island competitors they were forced to fight over the minor positions, the only highlight being Brian McMahon's victory in the second of the three races.

The field of Mini Sevens was the strongest seen in recent years even with some notable exceptions from the programme, with in form South Island competitor Mark Mitchell forced to withdraw from the entry list due to damage at the previous round. Tim Pipes faced the same problem after his off at Pukekohe. The reigning champion Kent Yarrall was also missing from the line-up.

A top quality field still remained, with the usual field of North Island competitors joined by a half dozen of the South Island's finest making the journey north to compete for the Bruce McLaren Memorial Trophy.

Qualifying:

Fielding's morning sunshine was short lived with rain clouds rolling in toward the middle of the qualifying session, benefiting those who



timed early. Donaldson was straight on the pace, scoring a flying 1:26.49, just shy of two seconds ahead of Chris Parkinson in second place. Elliott Heron pushed the Heron Racing Team 66 to third position with the Thompson brothers, Scott and Chris, rounding out the top five. The Merlin Motorsport pairing of McMahon and Leigh Bucksey were caught out by the weather closing in, qualifying a disappointing 10th and 12th respectively.

Race 1:

The opening race was held in perfectly calm conditions, with the fickle showers wasting away to leave a dry evening's race. Donaldson had a clean start from the pole and scampered away to a strong early lead. Most of the remainder of the grid were slow off the line with the exception being the Merlin Motorsport team, who made quick progress toward the front. The chasing pack was led by Parkinson, with Heron moving into third only to get shuffled back as Bucksey and McMahon worked forward. S Thompson and Chris Armitage were also close on the

bunch. Parkinson managed to fight off attacks from Heron, and then followed by McMahon and Bucksey until all hell broke loose on the fourth lap approaching Higgins. McMahon contested Parkinson on the outside of the hairpin, slowing both cars' run down the intermediate straight. This gave Bucksey and Heron a great overtaking opportunity heading towards Higgins, with Bucksey taking the outside line to make it three wide. Bucksey managed to out-brake the battling pair to move into second, but contact between Parkinson and McMahon sent them both off track on the outside narrowly missing Bucksey. S Thompson was the innocent party, colliding with the spinning McMahon to suffer considerable front end damage. Heron managed to escape the melee on the low line, working to catch Bucksey. Although all three cars were damaged, they all continued to take some part in the remaining race distance. Thompson limped back to pitlane but could not continue. Both Parkinson and McMahon got back into the race proper, with McMahon limited to a tenth place finish.



Parkinson rejoined the race in 8th position behind the battling pack of C Thompson, Mark Gavin and Geoff Holland. In the closing laps a half spin from Gavin left Holland with nowhere to go, and was unlucky to puncture the radiator in the contact. On the following lap at Higgins Holland suffered his own half spin caused by fluid leaking on his tyres. Parkinson was unlucky to get into the back of Holland and was forced to retire with front end damage. Gavin and Holland managed to make the finish, with C Thompson getting by Holland on the final lap. The final order gave Donaldson a commanding 10 second victory over Heron who got by Bucksey with an over and under move in Toyota laps earlier. Armitage took out fourth position with Gavin, C Thompson and Holland rounding out the top seven. Fastest lap went to Donaldson, the only person to break into the 1:26s all day.

Race 2:

The grid order was modified slightly for Sunday morning's opening race, with Bucksey moving up to the front row courtesy of his quick time in race 1. This slotted Parkinson back to third, lining up beside Heron on fourth with McMahon working up to fifth spot.

Donaldson once again managed a quick getaway, holding out Bucksey on the run down to Toyota. Parkinson held third through turn one but McMahon soon worked his way by with an inside move on the entry to Splash. Heron had an atrocious start, with the car jumping out of gear right after the flag fell, dropping him outside the top ten. At the end of the first lap Heron had worked his way back up to seventh, entering the battle for fourth with S Thompson, Parkinson and Armitage. Heron snuck by on the inside of Armitage entering the hairpin and passed Thompson and Parkinson with a three wide move on the entry to Higgins. The following lap Parkinson retired from the race with a broken axle. S Thompson also had issues with the main clamp holding his tailpipe on failing, leaving the exhaust behind as he rounded Higgins. This dropped him back into the clutches of the main battle pack, headed by Armitage. Holland and C Thompson were also involved, repeatedly changing positions in the final laps. At the front of the field, McMahon systematically wound in Donaldson and in the process smashed the lap record set at the 2008 NZ Championship

meeting by almost half a second. On the final lap McMahon sat poised to make a pass, but held out until the final corner where he got by Donaldson on the run to the flag. The final winning margin was 0.04 seconds. Third went to Bucksey who was coming increasingly under pressure from Heron, who had to settle for fourth spot. S Thompson battled on for fifth, heading Armitage and Holland who managed to hold out C Thompson for seventh.

Race 3:

The grid for the final race of the weekend gave McMahon pole due to his flying lap in the morning's race. Donaldson sat alongside on grid two with Bucksey and Parkinson filling the second row. The start was very even for the front of the grid, but under braking in turn one Donaldson managed to shut out McMahon from the outside, with Bucksey also working by on the cleaner racing line. Parkinson held fourth spot with Heron sneaking by S Thompson on the inside for fifth.

Out front Donaldson cleared out for a relatively untroubled final race, with McMahon managing to work by Bucksey on the second lap. Behind them the battle for fourth raged on between Heron and Parkinson, with S Thompson close in behind. Heron applied pressure to Parkinson for the opening laps, but managed to make the pass stick on lap three, with an under and over manoeuvre at Toyota. The battle pack was once again headed by Armitage with Gavin storming close behind, getting by C Thompson in the early laps to put the pressure on Holland.

As Donaldson and McMahon stretched out to a comfortable first and second result, Bucksey started to fall back into the clutches of Heron, who made over a second in the final lap to get by on the run to the line. Fifth went to Parkinson scoring his first finish of the weekend, with S Thompson close in behind. Armitage followed, but on the trailer home an electrical short circuit triggered a fire which will force him out of the final round of the series. Gavin managed to get by Holland on the final lap to score an eighth place finish with C Thompson rounding out the top ten.

Championship Points:

At the half way point of the NZ Mini Seven Championship series, Donaldson has a commanding lead over the field, sitting on 91 points. McMahon follows on 71 with Heron one point further back on 70. Bucksey sits in fourth with 66 and Armitage fifth on 50. From there its back to Gavin, followed by Holland, Wilson, John Donaldson and S Thompson in tenth spot.

Next Round:

With 96 points up for grabs in the second and final round of the championship it is still anybody's game. The decider will be held as a part of the Autumn Race Meeting at Ruapuna International Raceway, just out of Christchurch. Come along to see the most important meeting of the season, as the country's top Mini Seven competitors vie for not only the Bruce McLaren Memorial trophy but to give the coveted NZ #1 a fresh home on their door.