



Penultimate Round Provides the Thrills at Manfeild

The business end of the Super Mini Challenge series roared into life at Manfeild Raceway over the weekend with all three classes fighting for North Island series points, combined with the Mini Sevens fighting for their national championship. Extended coverage of the New Zealand Mini Seven Championship is included as a separate article, with the North Island competitors leaving the weekend occupying the second, third and fourth positions in the points.

The second visit to Manfeild this season spelled the penultimate round of the Super Mini Challenge series putting added importance on race finishes for those defending, and importance on wins for those chasing in the points tally. The standings leading into the weekend gave Brian McMahon a strong lead to defend in the Mini Sevens, with Kevin Townsend having already wrapped up the Super title only having to defend his Overall series lead. The battle in the Miglia class was much closer, with Bill Robson losing the lead after Pukekohe to Steve Lovett by the slimmest of margins. The close battles throughout the series set the scene for an intense weekend of racing, with the South Island competition helping to boost numbers to the largest seen all season.

Qualifying:

The session started in warm sunshine, but as it drew to a

close the weather closed in with a fickle shower making conditions treacherous for those remaining on the track. Ian Silver was unlucky to get caught out by the conditions, as a rear brake lockup entering the sweeper put him into the fence. The impact put the car into a quick roll, destroying the back end of the once immaculate racecar. Silver walked away from the crash but the damage put him out for the

remainder of the round. The open class was reduced back to one entrant following the crash, with Richard Wagstaff making a welcome return to the series with his turbo Mini sporting a crowd of new technology for the meeting. The front pace was set by Rick Van Swet however, recording a quick pole time three tenths of a second ahead of Townsend in second position. Lovett took pole for the Miglia class, sneaking ahead of Robson on his home track. Wagstaff recorded the quickest time for the open class, just ahead of Tom Ryan making his return to the Super class in the green eyed monster. Also back on the entry list is Manfeild specialist Tony Axcell, who qualified sixth in class, behind

Steve Kerr and Mark Van Swet. Warren Heron in the Heron Racing Team 99 was absent from the line up for the round, following his tough run with engine

Round 6 Manfeild 6-7 Mar 2010

2010 Calendar

3-4 Apr: Taupo

29 May: Fun Day at Taupo
(non-championship)



failures.

Race 1:

The scratch grid first race gave R Van Swet the pole, but a fast starting Townsend managed to get the lead heading into turn one. A close battle ensued between the leading pair, with Ryan benefitting from a fast start to jump to third overall, close behind the leaders. Robson lead off the start from Lovett, who eventually was forced to retire with a broken castor arm mount. Further back M Van Swet and Trent Dixon battled hard for the second position, both suffering from gear selection issues through the race. Axcell made a good start to get by M Van Swet, but fell back in the opening laps with Kerr also getting by.

R Van Swet and Townsend stayed close throughout the race, but on the fifth lap Van Swet made the pass stick and managed to stretch out the gap to take a strong win. Townsend held on for second, with Ryan managing a consistent run to third. Robson took a clear victory in the Miglia class, finishing fourth overall



with Wagstaff retiring after carburetion issues caused the head gasket to give way. M Van Swet consolidated with second in class after his trying morning fighting brake issues reduced his stopping performance. Dixon followed with a strong third placing in Miglia, then back to Kerr, Axcell and the Wintec Racing team rounding out the field.

Race 2:

With the Mini Sevens removed from the handicap arrangement, the Miglia class were first away for both Sunday's races. Lovett made the most of pole position to head Robson for the opening laps. M Van Swet dropped a spot to Dixon off the line, but regained the position on the following lap, with Axcell also getting by. The Wintec team had a tough second race, with both cars retiring. Simon Mans had suffered fuelling issues throughout the weekend but was forced to retire following hydraulic issues, with David Middlemiss retiring with the same issue. In the closing stages Lovett lost all gear selection, remaining stuck in third gear for the remainder of the race. This allowed Robson to get by Lovett to take the win, with M Van Swet trying to chase them down on two deflating tyres in third. Dixon retired out of fourth with Axcell inheriting the position, and Kerr rounding out the top five.

Wagstaff made a storming run toward the front in the opening laps getting as high as second before the engine let go, putting him out of the rest of the round.

The action was once again red hot in the Supers, with Town-



send taking the early lead. The pace was the fastest it had been in recent times, with Townsend recording the fastest lap at a mid 1 minute 19. Ryan managed to hold on to the leaders, but fell back in traffic to take third spot. On the second to last lap R Van Swet got by Townsend to take the lead, which he managed to hold until the finish.

Race 3:

M Van Swet led the field away for the final race, and after a great start he remained untroubled throughout. Lovett was forced to retire with a blown head gasket, and Robson fell off the pace shortly after with the main hub nut loosening off. Dixon continued on for a strong second, and Kerr wrapped up third spot with Axcell close behind.

In the Supers Townsend once again managed to get by R Van Swet in the early laps but in traffic Van Swet got back past Townsend to put the icing on a clean sweep for the weekend. The handicap didn't allow the Supers to get through to the front in time, with M Van Swet taking the overall win with Dixon close behind. R Van Swet got through to third overall with Townsend in behind.

Championship Points:

Heading into the final round of the series the points situation becomes the main focus for the teams. In the North Island Mini Seven points Elliott Heron walked away with the round win on 87 points, with his double points

victory in race 1 helping him stay ahead of McMahon on 82. Leigh Bucksey ended up third with 78. This close finish did little to change the overall points picture, with McMahon 51 points up on Heron in second position. With 64 points up for grabs in the final round both Heron and Bucksey remain with a mathematical chance of taking the series but with only a slim chance.

M Van Swet's consistent run gave him his first round win for the season, a long way ahead of Robson. Dixon took out third for the round. The poor round for Lovett dropped him back out of the Miglia class lead, with Robson taking a close 23 point lead into the last round.

In the Supers, Townsend's already insurmountable lead stays, despite R Van Swet taking a strong round victory. Townsend also leads the overall series by 34 points ahead of McMahon who took second position from the lead Miglias after their poor round.

Next Round:

The final round of the Super Mini Challenge series will be held at Taupo Motorsport Park on Easter Weekend. The penultimate round at Manfeild left plenty unresolved, leaving the final round set to be a stunner. In the meantime the New Zealand Mini Seven Championship will be decided at Ruapuna Raceway on 20-21 March. With both series still very much undecided the last round leaves plenty to play for at some of the most technical and unforgiving tracks in the country.

