

Grace grabs glory

David Grace continued his spirited defence of his British Hillclimb Championship title wrestling FTD from the eager hands of Andy Priaux.

The young Guernseyman stunned the Yorkshire audience with his opening championship climb, driving the the relatively underpowered 2.8 litre Pilbeam on the limit to set a new long course record. Grace was also well in the groove, trailing by only 0.07s having matched Roy Lane's previous best time.

At the other end of the top 12 Rob Fradley's Pilbeam MP43C followed up an earlier class win with a record breaking Sports Libre time to fend off the Pilbeam Vauthall of 12th-placed Simon Durling. Roger Moran was 0.03s ahead to take the last RAC/Gulf Oil point in the run-off, capping an excellent day which brought Bridgestone and 1600cc Racing Car Class victories to the Pilbeam MP62 driver.

George Ritchie shared his Pilbeam Judd with Kenny Allen, the two Scots enjoying a superb battle for eighth and ninth places behind Graham Priaux. Rapid Andy's father carved off over a second from his opening time in the final run to slip ahead of the V8-motivated Scots pairing.

Sprint exponent Roger Kilty was on great form with the relatively elderly Pilbeam MP40 Hart claiming sixth place. Current Championship leader Mark Colton seemed to be struggling with his Roman Judd. Only fourth at the end of the opening run, Colton appeared to give it everything on the last climb, but his efforts were all in vain as he proved to be a hundredth of a second slower than before and was forced to settle for fifth place.

Having held third place at the end of the first climbs, Harewoodmeister Roy Lane was only half a second off Priaux Junior's new course record and certainly did not look out of the game, but like Colton, the Steel King Pilbeam driver was also one hundredth of a second slower on his final climb and was demoted to fourth by Barbon record breaker Patrick Wood. The Target Pilbeam driver really attacked the hill on the final ascent and found well over half a second, still 0.09s shy of Andy Priaux's opener and an even more frustrating 0.02s adrift of Grace at that point.

Sensing his first Championship win was possibly on the cards Andy Priaux again attacked with the Pilbeam Hart for all he was worth, determined to put the V8 machines in their place. A

very slight moment over the finish line resulted in a time which was just a fifth of a second down on his opener. So it was all down to the the very last run, to be taken by the fastest qualifier and unlimited single-seater class winner - David Grace.

The defending champ rocketed into the final Quarry Corner at the end of a perfect display of controlled aggression - it was going to be close, very close indeed. He needed to beat the new hill record to snatch victory. The clock stopped at 53.15s, and Grace had beaten the record by 0.06s! Andy Priaux must have been bitterly disappointed at missing his first Championship round win by such a small margin after his superlative efforts.

The Bridgestone Leaders classes saw the Talbot brothers again devastate the opposition and the record, with Carl finally emerging ahead of Dylan by 0.29s. Peter Herbert wore a huge grin as he broke Carl Talbot's old record by finishing third in the 1400cc Mod Prod class. Darren Southill was just a little shy of his own Caterham record in Class B and with Roger Moran disposing of an off-form Richard Homer in the 1600cc racing car class was forced to concede the number one position in the Leaders series, having now scored in the maximum number of events and begun to drop scores.

Despite spark plug problems reigning Leaders Champion Tony Lambert was well under Mike Kerr's record in the unlimited capacity Mod Prod class with the charismatic Ferrari 308GT4, but the local man's new Rover-motivated Mobil Westfield was still ahead, taking victory by 0.31s with the first ever sub one minute climb of the hill by a car of that category.

With the Ian Blunt Jedi sidelined due to rear suspension problems, Daniel Stilp jumped into Mark Griffiths' similar machine and shocked everyone, his brilliant second climb not only overcoming the OMS of first run leader Alex Tyson, but also carving 0.29s off John Corbyn's class record. Phil Jefferies and the Hi-Tech Norton were forced to work tooth-and-nail on the last run to overcome handling problems and the amazing Inp-powered Tymtek of Andrew Tymkewycz which had not only headed the 1100cc racing car at the end of the first runs, but then proceeded to take Alex Tyson's class record out of the Harewood book on the second.