



Armed Forces Race Challenge

CHAMPIONSHIP 2017



Bigger and better this year the Armed Forces Race Challenge (AFRC) has now gained championship status. Competitors across the country have been working hard to make the start of the 2017 season. Donington, 18 March saw a record 36 cars take to the Grand Prix circuit, with no fewer than 10 novice drivers.

Joining the young guns, were the old guard with the likes of Billy Fletcher (Vet) and Ed Fuller (Guest) returning to the series, as well as the mainstays drivers who have been racing with the AFRC for years. Over winter 'RAF Engineering', had provided a new livery for the RAF Team and many other competitors had also been busy with the spray gun, so there was a whole new look to the grid.



Billy in the Mk 2 Hornet.

With the new championship status, in each round the driver gets a Performance Index (PI) based on their consistency.

Championship points are awarded based on the overall PI classification. During each race, the driver has the opportunity to gain two PIs scores as the race is in fact two races, separated by a sixty second wheels stopped pit stop.

New for this year is the Team Championship. There are five teams competing, these are:

- British Army.
- Royal Air Force.
- Royal Navy/Royal Marines.
- Veterans.
- Guests.



Team RAF's New Livery.

The points awarded per team at each event will be the average PI of their representative drivers.

With a mid morning practice and weather ranging from heavy rain to overcast, a mixture of chosen tyres and different amounts of winter testing between the competitors saw a number of cars qualify out of position.

Some drivers used the qualifying session as a shakedown as it was the first time

their cars had run following winter maintenance work. Overcoming last minute problems the day before, Chris Wood's (Army) had his fingers crossed that the BMW would run without incident.



Chris Wood's BMW

Darren Berris (RAF) running his Westfield V8 on 'Normal' tyres was the pole sitter marginally in front of guest driver Paul Roddison in his race-wet tyre shod

Mk 4 Mazda MX5. The difficult conditions and a number of drivers finding their way into the gravel traps meant the end of the session was troubled for most by yellow flag zones.

The weather continued to be less than hospitable between qualifying and the race, which meant that the drivers and their supporters, more than welcomed the hospitality suite provided by Podium Prep, as a suitable escape from the weather. A chilli/rice or pasta Bolognese meal provided by the championship meant everyone was well feed, ready for the main event.



The AFRC paddock

The mandatory drivers' brief raised some valid questions and highlighted to the competitors just how many novice drivers and/or new to Donington drivers were in the field, given that we were operating a near capacity (42 cars max) the race was going to be challenging for all involved.

The AFRC race was in the middle of the race programme and as a number of the preceding races had red flag incidents and were restarted, meant the weather was now changeable instead of wet. The later the race start time, the better the weather, so there was some frantic tyre-changing going on immediately before the race and a mixture of choices between wet and dry suspension setups. The mixture of cars on the grid which stretched all the way to the hairpin was a sight welcomed by the spectators and barring Paul Roddison taking a diversion around the outside of Redgate corner the Lap one, Turn one, was relatively clear. Excellent driving by the experienced and novice drivers alike kept everyone out of trouble.

Unfortunately, for some drivers there were difficulties, Steve Hutchings (RN) retired his Dimma kitted Peugeot 106 Turbo on lap one following a spin at Goddards, luckily the following drivers managed to avoid him. Stuck in the middle of the track, the marshals did an excellent job of removing the stricken Peugeot from the track, which saved the safety car from joining the race.



Dimma kitted Peugeot 106.

There was some very close racing throughout the grid with cars from different classes mixing and trying to use their individual characteristics to their advantage. In addition, there were those drivers who qualified out of position moved up the field.



Tight squeeze around the Melbourne Loop.

The pit window opened after fifteen minutes of racing, which saw some drivers decide to opt for an early pit stop as it looked as though the rain was returning. After a few minutes, it was clear that it was only a passing shower and the track would remain dry for the remainder of the race.

Unfortunately, the second half of the race was to be where many of the incidents would occur.

Adam Dewis (RM) in his supercharged Vauxhall Astra Coupe was chasing Chris Camp (Vet) in his Nissan Skyline R32 GTR when Adam had a mechanically induced 'Off' and parked his car in the gravel at McLeans. Again, a quick response from the marshal/recovery team saw Adam and his car out of harm's way without the deployment of the safety car.



Adam (13) chasing Chris (19)

The conditions on the track were still treacherous, between Craner Curves and Old Hairpin Si Frowen (RAF) had an incident in his Ford Fiesta XR2i, which saw him

watch the remainder of the race with the marshals on the wrong side of the barrier while his car was parked in the gravel. On the next lap, again at Craner Curves Rich Evans (Vet) have a high-speed incident followed by a heavy impact with the barriers. Both Rich and Si were OK following their incidents, but their cars were a little worse for wear.

After the winter major maintenance some cars were likely to have, teething and mechanical issues and there were a number of retirements. Mark White (Army)



We're gonna need bigger brakes Mark!

retired his Honda Civic Type-R with brake failure whilst Ro Barratt (Army) retired his freshly prepared VW Mark 2 Golf GTi from its and his first ever race. The ever-reliable VW Golf Turbo of Darren Howe (RAF) was an uncharacteristic retirement from the race with damaged suspected from an incident in qualifying.

After the race back in the pits a number of other issues were apparent, Dan Tedstone (Army) in the other Honda Civic Type-R had also suffered terminal brake failure, while Simon Barlow's (RAF) MG ZR and Simon Wing's (Guest) Peugeot 205 had both suffered head gasket problems.

Drive of the day has to go to Keith Atwood (RN). Not only was this his first race event, but on the day he also took part in two rounds of the Super Cooper Cup.



Keith Atwood – Which way now!

Overall, there was some incredibly impressive driving given the diversity of the cars and driver experience levels and the changing weather conditions. 750 MC, the marshals, the officials, Podium Prep, Nyx-Nax catering, Max Coates and RTTF all did the competitors proud by facilitating the event in some very testing conditions. The full results are available at:

<http://www.armedforcesracechallenge.net/results/>

Mechanical work is now underway to prepare the cars for Silverstone on 29th April where we look forward to hopefully, operating close to the 40-car capacity grid.