

Bemsee back at Brands as racing returns

It finally feels like winter is behind us, and while MotoGP was getting underway in the desert of Qatar, the British Motorcycle Racing Club was also kicking off its season of racing at its spiritual home of Brands Hatch. And to further signify the arrival of spring, the weather played ball for the most part, too.

Reactive Parts MRO Powerbikes and Racebuykz.com Clubman 1000

There will be a new Reactive Parts MRO Powerbike champion this year, as 2018 title winner Anthony Johnson departs for the British Superstock 1000 championship, and it could easily be argued that there are at least five serious contenders this year.

But while that could well be the case, it was one in particular who staked his claim early on, with Michael O'Brien taking a trio of wins on his Yamaha R1.

His victory in race one came late, requiring a charge from the fifth row of the grid, as Daniel Johnson hit the front early on, chased hard by Daryl Dance and former Formula 400 rookie champion Aiden Patmore.

As O'Brien cut through the pack Johnson held his own at the sharp end, leading all the way to lap nine, but by now he was being stalked by the eventual race-winner, who made his move and began to stretch the group.

At the chequered flag O'Brien had a three second buffer, but Johnson's second place gave him the Racebuykz.com Clubman 1000 win to get his year off to a strong start. Patmore, on the TBR Performance/NW Roofing Kawasaki, finished third, ahead of a close battle for the best-of-the-rest, with former champion Peter Baker taking the flag two tenths of a second ahead of Jason Byard.

A frantic start to race two saw Dance grab the lead on lap one with O'Brien second, but they were both passed a lap later by Dodfrey Engineering Kawasaki's Baker. Baker held station at the front until lap four, when he was passed by O'Brien, before then surrendering second place to Johnson.

It was then a gap just two big for Johnson to bridge to chase down leader O'Brien, the gap hovering around the two-second mark until O'Brien made two from two, with Johnson again second and the Clubman 1000 winner. Baker claimed the final spot on the podium, after holding off Dance.

The perfect start to the season was complete for O'Brien come the conclusion of race three, which he lead from start to finish to make it a hat trick of wins and 75-point haul. After following him round for 13 laps Johnson took another second place and Clubman 1000 victory.

While the results sheets might suggest we already have our favourites for the two championships, a third different podium finishers underlined the competitiveness of the class, with Tom Norton finishing third on his Mike Newman Haulage-sponsored Suzuki GSX-R1000.

Team Respro MRO 600 and MSS Performance Clubman 600

It was the familiar name of Chris Burrage at the top of the time sheets in qualifying for the Team Respro MRO 600 and MSS Performance Clubman 600 class at Brands Hatch, and Seton Tuning Yamaha rider backed it up with a brace of victories around the 1.2 mile Indy circuit. The third win went the way of Max Symonds, who took victory in the second of Sunday's two races to deny Burrage a perfect start to the year.

However, it was neither of the weekend's victors who led the first racing lap of the season, with former Senior 300 champion Jamie Kelman seamlessly adapting to 600cc machinery and bolting off the line to pull a lead of over a second on lap one.

Burrage dropped into second place, and reeled in the 86-plated Triumph 675 of Kelman before taking the lead on lap four, a position he would hold all the way to the chequered flag. Kelman though held onto second and started the year with a fine podium. Third went to Andrew Smith, who held off Symonds by half a second to complete the top-three.

The first MSS Performance Clubman 600 win of the season was decided with two tenths of a second splitting three riders, with Jack Younge, Michael White, and Thomas Bensted fighting over fifth place overall.

Burrage may have led every lap of race two, but he couldn't let up for a minute, as Smith pressed him all the way to the chequered flag. Burrage had escaped the chasing pack, leading by over a second at the halfway stage. But, after battling through to second place from fourth on lap one, Smith put the hammer down began to close him down.

Sadly for him, however, he would run out of laps with Burrage taking victory by three tenths of a second, and Smith taking the runner-up award. Symonds was third.

Bensted was awarded the Clubman 600 win, after Younge was handed a 10-second penalty for passing under a yellow flag and White crashed out in the closing stages.

The last race of the weekend again began with Burrage grabbing the lead on lap one, as Kelman and Symonds gave chase. Symonds went from third to second on lap two, and set his sights on Burrage, yet Burrage held on until the final third of the race, before relinquishing the lead to Symonds.

The race was far from over, however - just a tenth of a second split them as they started the final lap, yet Symonds was able to hold and take the win, with Burrage second and Kelman rounding out the podium finishers. Fifth place gave Younge the Clubman win.

L&W Contractors Rookie 600 and 1000

There were three winners from four races in the L&W Contractors Rookie 1000s, while the same number of Rookie 600 races were dominated by Cedric Bloch, as he took all four wins.

Chris Cayford won the opening 1000s race on his Yamaha R1, ahead of Joe Bassett and Luke Dixon, before Dixon grabbed a brace of wins, taking victory in Saturday's second race and Sunday's opener. He bettered Cayford and Michael Cherrett first, before winning with Cherrett second and Cayford third.

The final race win in the 1000s class went to Bassett, six tenths of a second ahead of Cherrett and Seb Jenkins.

Bloch took all four wins in the 600s, and he was joined on the podium in races one and two by George Prince and Toby Reynolds. Luke Stoneman then claimed the runner-up spot in the first of Sunday's encounters, with Reynolds third. Reynolds and Stoneman then reversed positions in race four.

The weekend's racing also saw the awarding of two special memorial trophies; the Vincent Fox memorial trophy and the Ron and Bill Collins memorial trophy.

The Vincent Fox memorial trophy was handed to Bloch, and is awarded to the Rookie 600 rider judged to have put in the best performance on the first day of racing, and with a brace of wins, Bloch was an obvious choice. Fox raced with Bemsee from the age of 16, progressing to 600s after dabbling as a sidecar passenger. Competing mostly on Yamaha and Suzuki machinery, he was tragically killed in a road accident while riding to an MOT in 2007. He was due to realise an ambition of riding at the Manx TT later that year.

The Ron and Bill Collins memorial trophy - which remembers two brothers who had been attending Bemsee meetings since the club's resumption after the Second World War - is handed to the best performing Rookie 1000s rider from Saturday's races, with Cayford collecting the gong during the evening's presentation.

ACU Team Green Junior Cup and Senior Ninja Series

The ACU Team Green Junior Cup and Senior Ninja series returns for 2019 and again delivered packed grids and close racing. For this weekend, however, there were also a number of riders joining from other similar championships for extra track time, providing the spectacle but forgoing championship points.

Harry Fowle - who finished runner-up in last year's EDIasia Formula 400 Sub-64bhp championship - qualified on pole, but it was Owen Jenner*, the 2018 Junior Cup winner who finished third in the overall Ninja championship, who took the win in race one from the second row of the grid.

In fact, Jenner hit the front on the opening lap, but he was in for a battle with Kyal Tinker*, the pair swapping the lead throughout until Jenner snatched victory by a tenth of a second. The top four were covered by less than a second, with Kam Dixon* bettering Lewis Jones for third.

With it an all-Junior top four, Kai Dickinson's fifth gave him the Senior race win.

The same riders again finished in the top four positions in race two, albeit with Tinker this time coming out on top in the battle for the win with Jenner. The duo battling for third also reversed their positions, with Jones taking the final podium spot.

Behind them, Dickinson and Fowle did battle for the Senior win, half a second covering them as they finished fifth and sixth respectively.

The first of Sunday's two races ended with a Tinker one-two. Kyal took the win, with brother Corey* taking an excellent second place and with it winning the unofficial award for most improved rider of the weekend. Corey - the younger of the pair made huge strides from qualifying, finding seven seconds in lap time after qualifying in 23rd.

Dixon secured third place, again narrowly holding off Jones as well as Senior winner Tony Davies and Konrad Breese.

The fourth and final race of the weekend looked set to be another Tinker one-two, but those hopes ended on lap four for Kyal as he crashed out of the lead, handing the lead to his brother and eventual winner Corey to complete a remarkable weekend.

Half a second then covered the three riders fighting for the remaining two podium positions, with Jenner and Dixon denying Jones another podium finish. Davies' fifth gave him the Senior win.

*Denotes riders outside of the series, not scoring championship points.

Steve Jordan Motorcycles BMCRC Thunderbike Extreme and Thunderbike Ultra

A new class joins the Bemsee ranks for 2019 under the popular Thunderbike banner, with Thunderbike Ultra running on the same grid as the Extreme class. The category is open to machines up to and including 2007, with legacy rules applying whereby a machine is manufactured past this date but mechanically unchanged. There is also a maximum class horsepower limited of 170hp, with a maximum power to weight of 1:1.

And it was an all-Ultra top three in qualifying, with former EDIasia Formula 400 champion Steve Palmer on pole, alongside Aiden Patmore and Jason Byard - the trio all also contesting the Reactive Parts Powerbike Championship.

Despite Byard not making the start for race one, the racing between Palmer and Patmore was fierce, the lead changing hands. Disaster struck on penultimate lap for Palmer, however, as he crashed out under pressure from Patmore, leaving the former Formula 400 rookie champion to take the win.

Second went to reigning Thunderbike Extreme champion Barry Chamberlain - now in the Ultra category - with Dave Shelvey picking up the Extreme win in third place.

Palmer was back in action for race two and claimed victory, with Patmore second and Chamberlain third. Richard Willsher finished fourth to pick up the Extreme win.

A second win was chalked up for Patmore in race three, as Palmer failed to make the grid. Patmore was left to ride unchallenged to the win, with Andrew Saunders second and the leading Extreme rider. Chamberlain was third.

Battle re-commenced between Palmer and Patmore in the last outing of the weekend, with less than a second covering the pair at the line as Patmore made it three wins. Palmer was second as Saunders' third gave him the Extreme win.

Steve Jordan Motorcycles BMCRC Thunderbike Sport

A packed entry list for the Thunderbike Sport class - also again sponsored by Steve Jordan Motorcycles in 2019 - saw a change to the racing structure to accommodate. The entries were split into three - groups A, B, and C - with three races taking place each day. The structure would see group A and B combined in race one, B and C combined in race two, and A and C combined in race three, giving all competitors the chance to race each other and maintain the two races per day (per rider) schedule.

All rookies were designated to group C, while the rest of the entries were split after qualifying.

Race one saw Daniel Singleton take the win, beating the pole-sitter Thomas Watson to victory, the pair both in group A, while group B qualifier Edward Watson - Thomas Watson's **younger/older** brother - finished third.

Edward Watson was then the victor in race two, taking the win by nine seconds as three riders dived for the remaining two podium positions. Less than two tenths of a second split them at the line, with Shane Beasley beating Andrew Moxon and Ricardo Branco. Fifth went to Alex Robinson, giving him the Rookie win.

Singleton was again the victor in his next outing in race three, taking the flag ahead of Michael Simmons and Thomas Watson. Two tenths of a second decided the Rookie win, as Michael Benn pipped Robinson to the spoils.

With the format repeated on Sunday, Singleton notched another win in the opener, and was joined on the podium by Thomas Watson and Jack Sim, while Beasley was the victor in race two. He was flanked on the rostrum by two rookies, with Robinson second overall and Benn third.

Just one second covered the podium in the final race, and less than a tenth the winner and the runner-up. Sim got his first win of the season, with Thomas Watson and Shaun Wallis second and third respectively. Robinson's fifth gave him another Rookie win.

Chilton Motors BMZRC MZ 250 Championship

Peter Woodall and Robert Dessoy took one win apiece from the opening two races of the 2019 Chilton Motors BMZRC MZ 250 Championship, before Chris Kent doubled up on Sunday with two victories.

Woodall qualified on pole, but Dessoy took the plaudits after the chequered flag fell on the first race of the year. Woodall still managed a podium, finishing second with Chris Rogers third.

He then went one better in race two, as just one second covered the top three. Rogers also went one better, progressing from third to second, as Dessoy picked up the bronze medal.

Come Sunday though a new name was on the podium, with Kent taking both wins. He took his first win by less than a tenth of a second, as Woodall and Rogers - who was only another tenth further back- joined him on the podium.

Dessoy was back inside the top three in race four, chasing Kent to the line as Woodall finished third.

EDlasia Formula 400

Long-time sponsors EDlasia returns for 2019, supporting the popular Formula 400 championship.

Glynn Davies took a hat trick of wins, with the other win going the way of Chris Burrage. Burrage qualified on pole on his Seton Tuning Kawasaki, and took victory in race one, narrowly holding off Davies. Third went to Matthew Scott - he was chased by Richie Welsh early on before the former champion retired, leaving Scott to a lonely ride to the podium. The Sub-64bhp class win went to Doug Edmondson in fifth.

Burrage failed to make the start of race two, and would miss the remainder of the weekend's action with machine trouble, allowing Davies to take the three remaining wins. However, it was anything but plain sailing, as Scott finished second in race two by a quarter of a second. Welsh was third and Edmondson again the Sub-64 winner in fourth.

It was repeat of the top four in both of Sunday's races, with a similarly narrow margin of victory for Davies on each occasion, as Edmondson also notched up two more Sub-64 wins.

ProperlyProtected.co.uk MRO Minitwins

The ever-popular MRO Minitwin class was again packed, and provided some of the most exciting racing of the weekend. Glynn Davies added to his three Formula 400 wins with a trio of Minitwin victories, with Daniel Singleton also tasting victory.

Davies set pole, but it was Singleton who took the win in the first race of the season as Davies hassled and harried all the way to the chequered flag, along with Keith Povah, who bagged third.

A tight finish for top rookie honours was undone with a 10-second penalty for Matt Wetherell, as Tommy Downes took the 25 points in ninth.

It was Singleton's turn to chase Davies in race two, but a spill before the halfway stage brought his challenge to an end, allowing Davies to take the chequered flag by seven seconds. Povah was second ahead of David Twyford, as Wetherell put the disappointment of race one behind him to finish fifth overall and take the Rookie win.

It was a repeat podium in the first of Sunday's races, albeit by a narrower margin of victory for Davies. It was also a close run thing for the final podium spot between Twyford and former MZ and Yamaha Past Masters champion Mark Taylor, with Twyford securing by less than a tenth of a second. It was also another Rookie win for Wetherell in eighth.

A start-to-finish win for Davies in the final encounter of the weekend gave him another victory and the championship lead from round one. Meanwhile, half a second covered four riders squabbling over second and third.

Taylor secured the best-of-the-rest runner-up position, ahead of Singleton, Twyford, and Povah. Wetherell made it three Rookie wins with a sixth overall.

RKB-F1 and F2 Sidecars

Ryan and Callum Crowe set pole position at the opening round of the RKB-F1 and F2 sidecar championship, before going on to take three overall wins and three F1 class victories.

Dave Molyneux and Harry Paine finished second in race one but took the F2 class win, with former British Supersport racer Tommy Philp and Jonny Allum third and second in the F1 class.

The Crowe pairing then took victory in race two, again ahead of the F2 outfit of Molyneux and Paine and F1 runners-up Philp and Allum.

It was three from three for Ryan and Callum Crowe in the first of Sunday's races, this time with F2 winners Michael Jackson and Sarah Stokoe second overall and F1 pairing Kevin Cable and Kyle Masters third.

In the final race of the weekend Philp took his debut sidecar win with Allum passenger, as Cable and Masters finished second. The F2 win again went to Jackson and Stokoe, the duo on the overall podium in third.