



Once again spring is upon us as we launch into the 2012 1/12th Stockcar National series.

This year sees a significant change. For the first time since 2003, the much coveted silver roof will not be worn on #471 Ben Harding's roof. Ben retained the title for a remarkable eight years in a row, beating the former record set by Gary McMullen. In 2012, #30 Anthony Wyper will be the proud new owner of the silver roof, having recorded a perfect score in the final two nationals late last year to snatch the title.

Between them last year, Ben and Anthony won every national final except one and set the highest lap score at every meeting. Will anyone else make the step up and gain a foothold at the top of the points chart this year?

Since the last national meeting (Leven, September), the 2012 Stockcar World Final was held at the excellent Coventry Transport Museum. On this occasion, Ben emerged victorious, comfortably winning the final by three laps and so will retain the gold roof reserved for the world champion for the next two years. Stu Clarke, another Rugby driver, was crowned the new junior world champion and will race with gold stripes.

As is now tradition, the opening round for the series was held at Hathern Raceway, based at the Charnwood Social Club in Loughborough. Chaired by Allan Inness, Hathern has an unusual track shaped like a coffin due to the confines of the previous racing venue. Even though they now have more space, the track shape has been retained and for new drivers it is one of the most difficult tracks in the country to master. There is no hiding place on the short, narrow straights and the angular corners punish anyone trying to turn in to the corner too early.



Ben Harding retained his world champion title.



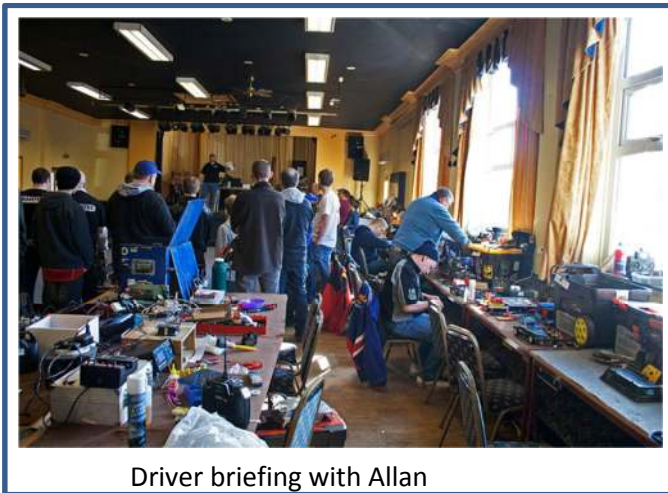
Josh Smith's F1 Stockcar

We had an excellent 50 drivers booked in for the meeting and many arrived early, keen to get their cells on charge ready for the 45 min free practice Allan had arranged. Whilst we waited, Josh Smith's immaculate F1 stockcar arrived for everyone to have a good look at.

Once the track was laid, it didn't take long before everyone was settled down and practice started. On such a small track you have pick and choose

your practice carefully. At times there were over ten cars on track making it difficult to nail down any serious laps without having to avoid crashed cars, or crashing yourself. There was plenty of rough and tumble with some drivers picking up damage before the racing proper had even started!

With practice finished (and some people already frantically repairing their cars) we moved onto the heats. At a national meeting every driver has four heats. Their top three lap scores are added together and the seven drivers with the highest number of laps qualify straight for the final. The next eight drivers are placed in the consolation race, where the winner is the last qualifier for the final.



Driver briefing with Allan

Round 1

Heat one and straight into winning form was local superstar driver Ian Johnson recording 83 laps from Gary Osbourne with 79, whilst Mark Goodchild and Martyn Harvey both had problems scoring 53 and 15 laps respectively.

Heat two was won by Miklos Szabados with a relatively low 74 laps. Allan Inness was next in a solid second place with 71 laps whilst down on 59 laps and missing a pinion was Anthony Wyper.

Heat three saw a close victory by junior racer Elliot Oliver with 84 laps, beating Dutch driver Maikel Rutten by a single lap. Josh Smith (whose superb looking F1 machine was sitting outside the hall) was less than a tenth of a second behind Maikel. Jono Hartley who had successfully retained his Junior National Points title last year was down in last place with 68 laps.

Heat four saw another junior victory, this time Urmston driver Adam Sutherland with 84 laps beating Matt Bennett into second place with 82 laps. Two of the youngest drivers racing, Tommy Johnson and Scott Darvill both drove extremely well to record 67 and 65 laps with their fathers urging them on.

Heat five and Kamtec chief Keith Dowsett started in winning fashion with 81 laps beating Tony Wade by some five laps. Hard trier Pete Kurlyo suffered from reliability problems and only scored 27 laps.

Heat six contained the senior and junior world champions. Ben Harding had the upper hand with 87 laps whilst Stu Clarke came in second with 81. Chris Darlaston, trialling LiFe cells for the first time at a national event proved the technology has promise with 79 laps and no problems.

Heat seven saw Rugby driver Paul Darvill record possibly his first national event heat win with 80 laps, closely followed by Joe Huxley on 79 and Jim Burkett on 77. Next was popular Urmston promotor Alan Crossland, making a rare racing appearance but proving he still knows his way around the track with 75 laps.

Round 2

Heat one and Ian Johnson was in the first heat again, this didn't slow him down as he set the highest score so far with 90 laps. Newport racer Keith Stanford's long drive to Hathern was rewarded with a second place and 83 laps.

Heat two saw Ben Harding improve on his previous score with 88 laps and Matt Bennett some way back on 84.

Heat three and Jono Hartley was back on form with 81 laps beating Leighton Holroyd into second place with 78. Stu Clarke had a difficult race in fourth with 71 laps.

Heat four saw a superb drive from Alex Montague scoring 85 laps and beating respected drivers Keith Dowsett with 81 laps and Jon cuts with 80.

Heat five and Anthony Wyper could afford no more serious problems after the first round mishap. He duly delivered with 92 laps and a massive eleven lap lead over Ian Roper back in second place with 81 laps.

Heat six saw an even bigger winning margin as Maikel Rutten scored 88 laps, some thirteen laps clear of Scott Darvill who had an excellent second place with 75 laps.

Heat seven only had six starters as Gary Riddell and Michael Fryatt were not racing. Josh Smith took full advantage of the clear track recording 91 laps. Adam Sutherland was only three behind with 88 whilst Hathern debutant Mark Goodchild was in the eighties with 82.

Round 3

Heat one and Ian Johnson made it three from three, pushing the FTD so far out to 92 laps and beating Gary Osbourne into second place with 85 laps.

Heat two saw Elliot Oliver recording another heat win on 83 laps from Alex Montague with 77. Pete Kurylo's disastrous meeting continues with 24 laps recorded.

Heat three was a won by Mark Goodchild on 74 laps from Loran Darlaston, finishing an excellent second with 71 laps on split from Rugby co-promotor Loz Collins.

Heat four saw yet another junior, this time Leighton Holroyd win a heat with 82 laps from Joe Huxley on 81. Matt Bennett was starting to wonder if the journey from Switzerland was really worth it as he tried to wrestle his seriously twisted baseplate back underneath his chassis and only scored 66 laps.

Heat five and Ben Harding also recorded his third straight win, with 89 laps from Jono Harley with 81.

Heat six was won by Anthony Wyper, back in the nineties again with 91 laps and a high scoring 87 from Adam Sutherland in second. Maikel Rutten was some distance behind on 81 laps in third.

Heat seven saw a second heat win by Josh Smith with 89 laps, four clear of Chris Darlaston who was starting to get the hang of his new cells with 85 laps. Nick Wallace had a race to forget scoring only 5 laps.

Round 4

Heat one was a full heat of eight cars, all scoring decent laps. The traffic didn't slow Ian Johnson down as he recorded a perfect four from four with 87 laps, a distance clear of Elliot Oliver with 79.

Heat two and the drivers and now the drivers were starting winding up the speed. Ben Harding putting a marker down with 96 laps and a mile clear of Miklos Szabados in second with 86.

Heat three saw fast Fordham racer Jim Burkett finally put the bumper in and come out with a heat win on 86 laps. Neil Ritchie was in second on 80 laps. Jono Hartley was back in fourth with a low score of 68 laps.

Heat four had two non-starters (including Pete "Samson" Kurlyo who somehow managed to snap his rear axle whilst in the pits) and saw Alex Penman drop out after only 13 laps. Anthony Wyper made hay whilst the sun was shining and set an unbeatable FTD of 98 laps, his third heat win of the day. Jon Cutts also enjoyed this heat with 90 laps and Scott Darvill beat Stu Clarke to get a third place with 83 laps.

Heat five and Matt Bennett finally got his act together to win a heat with 89 laps, from Josh Smith with 84.

Heat six was won by Maikel Rutten on 88 laps from Paul Darvill and Keith Stanford, both on 82.

Heat seven, the final heat of the day saw a win for Keith Dowsett on 84 laps, from Rugby driver Senfield Norton on 79. Another race to forget for Nick Wallace with only 4 laps.

The anxious wait started as the lap scores were added together to find the final and consolation qualifiers. Those who knew they hadn't made the cut started to pack their equipment up ready to watch the final two races.



Concourse winner Tony Wade

Final Qualifiers

Driver	Laps
Anthony Wyper	281
Ben Harding	273
Ian Johnson	269
Josh Smith	264
(jnr)Adam Sutherland	259
Maikel Rutten	259
Matt Bennett	255

Consolation Qualifiers

Driver	Laps
Jim Burkett	250
Keith Dowsett	249
Keith Stanford	247
Jon Cutts	246
(jnr)Elliot Oliver	246
Gary Osborne	246
Iain Roper	242
Paul Darvill	241

Due to trying out LiFe cells Chris Darlaston would not be competing in the consolation, thus promoting Paul Darvill into the final 8th place qualifying position. A fast and furious race ensued – with only one person able to qualify the bumper work started immediately. With so much chaos it was hard to predict a winner, but after the five minutes were completed a happy Keith Stanford emerged victorious and would take his place on the final grid with his 86 laps enough to beat Jon Cutts by two laps, who himself was one lap in front of Jim Burkett on 83.



The drivers line up for the final

And so we move onto the final, eight drivers representing Urmston, Rugby, Hathern and Newport, travelling from England, Scotland, Holland and Switzerland. A crowd developed around the track as the ten second counter sounded. After escaping the first corner mayhem, Anthony was quickly able to build a solid lead pulling a couple of laps on Ben within the first minute. The race settled down as people began to find a rhythm, until we hit the four minute mark and a stray wheel suddenly bounced its way down the track. A quick look around revealed the wheel was from the race leader's car. Such was Anthony's lead, and thanks to some extremely fast marshaling he was back on track with 4 wheels present within ten seconds and never lost his first place. Maikel Rutten decided he would show us what the bumper was for and delivered a couple of cracking hits before the buzzer sounded and the race was over.

Anthony had taken a lights to flag victory with 90 laps, and thanks to some fast marshaling beat Ben into second place by a single lap. Josh Smith was an excellent third, followed by Ian Johnson, Adam Sutherland, Matt Bennett, Maikel Rutten and consolation winner Keith Stanford.

Trophies were handed out to all of the finalists, and the following:

Concourse - Tony Wade
Best White - Martyn Harvey
Best Yellow - Scott Darvill
Best Blue - Iain Roper
Best Junior - Adam Sutherland

Allan was thanked for running the event as smoothly as ever, and everyone left looking forward to the next national at Rugby on the 15th April.

Report by Matthew Bennett, photos by Mark Goodchild, Allan Inness and Matthew Bennett.

