

British Racing & Sports Car Club



Brands Hatch 2017



8th-9th April, 2017 | Rounds 1, 2 & 3

RACE REPORT

Author Alex Soar | Pictures Jon Elsey | Layout Jem Soar

BRANDS HATCH

RACES 1, 2, & 3

With the BRSCC's strong focus on driver talent over their tightly controlled "SuperCup" class of Mazda MX5 racing machines, the eagerly anticipated roster for 2017 summoned a perfectly competitive storm.

Supported by Clapham North, DPA Technologies and PRG Trailers; the championship saw experienced veterans, 2016's SuperCup championship winner, returning MX5 and SuperCup champions as well as titleholders from other series, all roll onto the track to assemble the largest line-up in SuperCup history of forty registered drivers.



Rob Boston – Multi-discipline Champion including Lotus and both Mazda Mk1 & Mk3



James Blake Baldwin – Current title holder and first person to win both BRSCC Mazda championships



Luke Herbert - After a long career in Clio Cup, swaps front for rear wheel drive.



Jon Greensmith - Talented Porsche & Mazda veteran



Jack Harding - Multiple MX5 race winner mentored by Alan Henderson



Liam Murphy - Impressive return to racing



Tom Roche – Multiple Mk1 Champion



Paul O'Neil – BTCC alumni



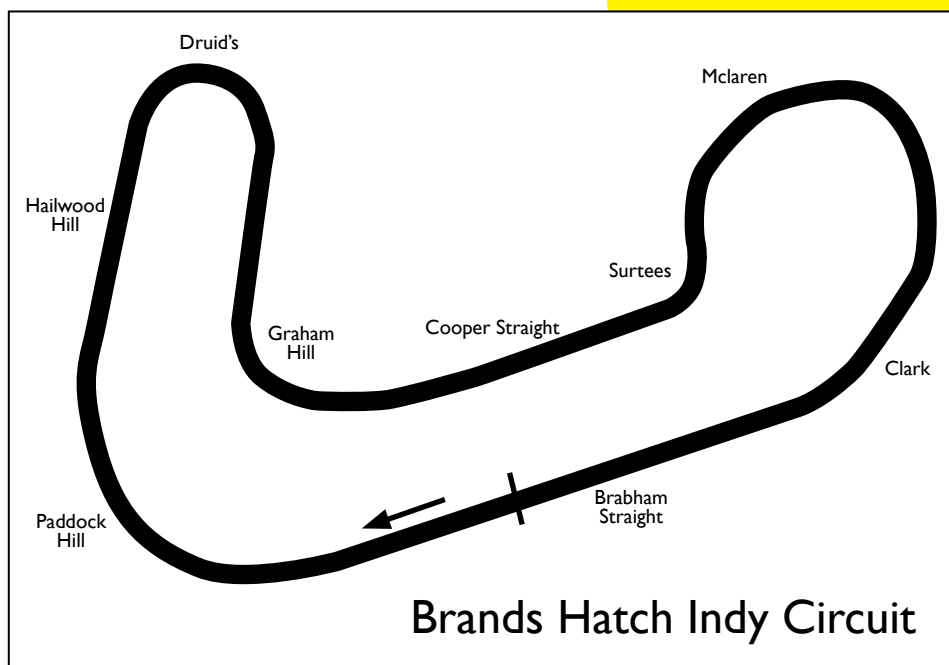
Brian Chandler - 2015 Mk1 Champion.

BRANDS HATCH

Hosting the first three races of the season, the legendary Brands Hatch circuit in Kent provided a rollercoaster format, including the infamous Paddock Hill bend where a steep descent will plunge any overly bold racer into its deep gravel traps.

Typically taking less than a minute to complete a lap, the chosen Indy-Circuit configuration is comparatively short but provides spectacularly open views of the wheel-to-wheel action.

As such, with superbly sunny weather, the stage was set for what would prove to be intense battles and a truly astounding qualifying result...



QUALIFICATION:

The SuperCup season sees twenty-four rounds spread evenly over eight track events.

Each two day event, with its qualification and three rounds are, for many teams, heralded by a day of practise where both drivers and mechanics can explore the optimum racing line or setup.

A rapid gearbox swap for Luke Herbert, returning after eighteen months away from racing, demonstrated some of the keen frustrations experienced during practise; although it was clearly an overall success for many as qualifying yielded unbelievably close lap times throughout the grid.

New to the 2017 season is the introduction of the MSA's "Code-60" condition, where the deployment of purple marshal flags requires all competitors to reduce their speed to 60kph.



Steve Dolman & Andy Coombs

BRANDS HATCH

In the event of officials needing to clear the track, the Code-60 should maintain the hard-earned distance between drivers, in stark contrast to the bunching that often occurred behind a safety car.

With this in mind, it was as the championship's record number of Mark-3 Mazda race cars thundered onto the track to commence their qualifying session, that Paddock Hill claimed its first victim, instantly triggering a Code 60!

Following recovery of the stricken MX5, the entire field seemingly zoned into pushing ever harder with each passing lap, causing the recorded times to rapidly cascade – first into the 57 second zone, initially led by Richard Stylin, only to be pipped mere seconds later as Liam Murphy posted a momentary fastest lap of 56.250 seconds.

The rest of the field were not to be out-shone though as many more posted lap times under 56 seconds, seeing the top five separated by a mere two tenths of a second.

Jack Harding set the bar early on with a 55.380 seconds lap time, suggesting that a draft behind another competitor to get a "tow" was likely to be essential in hitting those low lap times – thus the tactics and teamwork began.

There was notable attention directed towards multi-discipline championship winner Rob Boston, who was yet to set a competitive lap time, but had evidently been judging his moment to strike, as the Doncaster driver instantly leapt from 30th to 2nd displaying a time of 55.191 seconds.

The top twenty-one cars were now separated by no more than a second,

with mere hundredths of a second relentlessly altering the rankings.

Due to the number of entrants the grid was split, with the top thirty-four from qualifying going into the "A" race. Any subsequently assigned to the "B" race would also share track time with the "B" grid Mark-1 MX5 drivers from the BRSCC MX5 Championship.

Consequently, those surrounding position thirty-four on the qualifying times pushed ever harder to remain in the "A" race, causing some to momentarily leave the track and careen through the gravel before luckily recovering and returning to the task at hand.

On such a small track it is extremely difficult to find significant lap-time gains, but that didn't stop the resurgent James Blake-Baldwin and Paul O'Neil as they pulled into the top ten along with the likes of Tom Roche and Luke Herbert who put himself straight back near the front!

As the lap times condensed further, the qualifying session was brought to a close with a final flurry of dust from Paddock Hill's merciless gravel traps.

The final results saw Jack Harding's impressive 55.145 second lap take Pole Position with Rob Boston and Luke Herbert snapping at his heels. Richard Stylin took the qualifying honours amongst the "Masters" class.

In the end though, almost incredulously, there was barely a second separating the qualifying times of the top twenty-five drivers - a testament to the level of talent on show in the BRSCC SuperCup and an early promise of the entertainment to come.

Paddock Hill



BRANDS HATCH

RACE 1

Proudly displaying their respective sponsors, a veritable sea of colour met spectators as the drivers lined up on the grid ready for the first race of the season.

With the "green flag" sighting lap complete, the starting lights of the gantry preceded the rising crescendo of thirty-four angry hornets launching with full force towards Paddock Hill bend.

An aggressive start from Boston achieved a brilliant get-away, as he and Harding barrelled into the first corner and up towards Druids with the rest of the field hotly pursuing having all safely negotiated Paddock Hill.

Swooping around Druids hairpin and down towards Graham Hill corner, Tom Roche netted himself Position-3 after a swift battle with Steve Roberts, while behind them proceedings were three abreast, seeing James Blake-Baldwin taking the outside line to combat Brian Chandler.

Losing momentum, Jack Harding had to briefly concede to a now charging Tom Roche who had some work ahead of him in the form of Rob Boston.

A brief error from Car #23 caused it to trail through the gravel at Paddock Hill, but Adam Bessell succeeded in keeping the throttle pinned to the floor and did well to escape back onto the track – although now in last place, he would go on to hunt down and pass several of his fellow competitors.

Meanwhile Rob Boston was building a gap up front, as a train formed up around Steve Roberts, battling to keep third place against pressure poured on from Jack Harding and Luke Herbert.



James Blake-Baldwin was for the moment proving to be a nuisance for Herbert while simultaneously defending from the #76 car of Richard Wicklen coming on strong behind him.

Steve Roberts soon achieved the fastest lap only to be pipped by Roche as Blake-Baldwin tested a dive up the inside of Herbert, inadvertently leaving himself vulnerable to the attentions of Wicklen and those close behind.

The 2016 SuperCup champion, briefly drifting through Druids, provided an opportunity for Paul O'Neil and Richard Wicklen to make a move, only to be firmly shrugged-off in return.

The ongoing scrap for third place intensified and Roche began slowly reeling in Boston up front.

Separately, Murphy, O'Neil, Chandler, Greensmith and Stylin took significant chances as they jostled through druids - O'Neil seemingly focussed on avoiding the tussle and closing in on the leading pack.

Boston on a charge



Alec Livesley

BRANDS HATCH



Jeremy Crook & Duncan Harris

A robust test from Harding on Roberts into Paddock didn't quite stick, whereas the leaders were nose-to-tail; Boston soaking up the pressure from Roche.

A sudden challenge for the lead saw the Blendini driver late on the brakes and darting up the inside of Boston who instantly responded with an attempted, yet rebuked, switchback as Roche held firm.

Subsequent approaches on the green MX5 of Roche saw incredibly close action and a likely exchange of paint.

With the field beginning to separate out into distinct groups, Harding had a run on Roberts out of Clearways to push through and take third place.

A potential seven car battle for third place looked to be brewing as the quartet of Harding, Roberts, Herbert and Baldwin were joined by Murphy, O'Neill and Greensmith; forcing Roberts in particular to drive defensively.

A determined move from Harding on Roberts forced the latter to suffer an

ignominious demotion as first Harding, followed by Herbert and Blake-Baldwin, sensationally late on the brakes and two abreast around Druids, snuck past Roberts!

His misfortune did not end there, following a brief side-by-side skirmish with Murphy running wide at Graham Hill on lap 15, Robert's protesting machine veered off track at Paddock, where the canny racer piloted it back on track but now frustratingly down in 20th place.

Such closely matched lap times meant that any loss of momentum was severely punished.

Paddock Hill was where the action continued as Boston made a bold move to the outside of Druids to successfully take the lead from Roche only for the squabble to give Jack Harding the window needed to close in on the leading duo.

Mere inches between them, Boston maintained a solid defence as both

BRANDS HATCH



Paddock Hill - challenging



Track limits are momentarily stretched

came through Clearways towards the yellows flags waved at Paddock Hill, marking a beached and disappointed Ben Short, whose accomplishments within the top ten were brought to a sudden halt.

With less than a quarter of the race to go, Harding swiftly traversed around Roche and into second, causing Boston to seemingly make a bid to pull away from the now looming form of the blue and white #43 MX5.

An equally intense ruckus was raging in the closing laps of the race from fourth to ninth position as Blake-Baldwin, Murphy and Wicklen all locked horns for fifth.

Boston held firm against a final challenge from Harding as the inaugural race of the season came to a close and Boston tore across the line to claim the Chequered Flag.

Harding earned a hard-fought second with Tom Roche completing the podium and claiming the fastest lap!

The worthy victor of the epic battle for fourth was a relieved Herbert with Blake-Baldwin, Murphy, Wicklen, O'Neil, Chandler and Greensmith snapping at

the former's heels to bring home the top ten.

Although spread out, the racing was exceedingly close with the top thirteen posting sub-fifty-six second lap times and many of the remaining grid posting sub-fifty-seven seconds.

Due to such close racing, any small mistake would be hard to recover from, seeing the bottom five of the grid swapping with the top five from "B" race for the second round.

Accordingly in the SuperCup "B" race the proceedings were led from start to finish by a dominant Jeremy Crook.

Andy Coombs made a superb start by surging from sixth to second within the first lap while an entertaining brawl ensued between Jim Hart and Alex Miller.

Unfortunately for Hart, an apparent mechanical fault took him out of contention and automatically promoted the remaining five drivers into the second hotly contested "A" race.



Luke Herbert leads the train

BRANDS HATCH

RACE 2

Heading into round 2A of the Brands Hatch event, it was clear that everyone had learnt a great deal about their fellow SuperCup drivers during the previous race. Consequently polished tactics and a broadly high level of talent provided limited position changes within the top ten, but none-the-less delivered a high pressured pursuit throughout.

As the entire grid fired themselves down the now familiar drag-strip towards Paddock Hill, it was at Druids when Tom Roche challenged Luke Herbert for third place, forcing the Clio Cup past-master to defensively hold the inside line yet frantically avoid contact with Harding in second!

Once again, taking advantage of the squabbling, Boston began to rocket away up front as the now unflappable Harding spearheaded the leading pack in pursuit.

Be it innate experience or by some unspoken word, the leading quintet appeared to settle down and work together to prevent a seemingly predictable victory.

Mark-1 MX5 Championship graduate, Jake Bailey, delivered a notable ambush during lap two on Richard Styron.

In response, the wily Porsche Boxster veteran - enjoying his first weekend with the Mazdas - was not to be out-done and soon had his revenge on Bailey as he upped the pace to immediately return the earlier favour!

Another MX5 Championship alumni is its 2015 champion, Brian Chandler, who was also displaying a staunch defence against mounting challenges from Paul O'Neil of BTCC association and Jonathon Greensmith.

Once more multi-tasking, SuperCup Champion James Blake-Baldwin was closing the gap to Roche as well as holding back the advances of Liam Murphy and Richard Wicklan, all forming part of a nine car train catching Boston with excruciating increments.

As the race reached its mid-point, Jack Harding set a new fastest lap, closing the gap between the leaders.

By lap twelve, Blake-Baldwin, seemingly driving the widest MX5 ever built, provoked an impatient Murphy to try his



Jack Harding was on form



Aldo Riti sideways with Jim Hart

BRANDS HATCH

luck on the outside of Druids only to be edged wide, giving Chandler all the excuse he needed to dive up the inside line and nose his bonnet out front in a wheel-to-wheel downhill charge.

Fate and the inside line through the Graham Hill bend saved Murphy, but Chandler had renewed his attack as they ripped into Surtees.

Much to Jonathon Greensmith's chagrin, he found himself jousting with Steve Roberts as the latter sneaked by only to be closely followed by Richard Styrin - to add insult to injury, Mike Comber and Carl Garnett made their presence felt relegating (a no-doubt frustrated) Greensmith by two more places on lap fifteen.

Seven minutes left on the clock and a brief off-track experience for Ian McDonald punctuated the huge queue forming behind the defensive racing demonstration from Blake-Baldwin; while Harding, being just a few tenths

quicker, threw everything including the kitchen sink at Boston in a bid to take the lead!

Paul O'Neil capitalised on Brian Chandler's ordeals with Murphy, not only overtaking the "BC Cars Motorsport" driver, but drawing alongside Blake-Baldwin in Murphy's wake and ultimately netting himself sixth.

Demonstrating the continued parry and thrust within the mid-pack, Sam Tatler chose that moment to reclaim eleventh and execute a come-back move on Steve Roberts, but could not quite break through the resolute Richard Styrin to nail a top ten position.

In the closing laps Roche had made up significant ground on Harding, seizing an opportunity at Druids to keep the door open for an inside line overtake on Graham Hill bend. The ensuing melee saw Harding nearly at track limits as the duo gunned both



Sam Tatler

BRANDS HATCH

protesting MX5s down the back straight, the inside line occupied still by Harding forced Roche to the outside of Surtees where he managed to turn his resisting machine through the corner.

Harding held tight to second place but Boston had got away!

O'Neil put the final hurry up on the new "train leader" of Murphy as Rob Boston, once again, hurtled past the finish to accept his second unequivocal victory in the 2017 MX5 SuperCup championship.

Harding in second, led Roche, with the indefatigable combination of Herbert, Murphy and O'Neil crossing the line mere moments before Wicklen, Blake-Baldwin, Chandler and Styrin claimed the last few slots in the top ten.

On this occasion, position changes were perhaps less dynamic than is customary, but the undeniable opinion of the crews and spectators alike was that it had been a great deal of fun to watch!

The SuperCup "B" race boasted Ben Short within the line-up. Normally found in the top ten of the "A" race, his MX5 had momentarily doubled as a "JCB" in the gravel during the "A" race, forcing him to set his crosshairs firmly on the tail bumper of David Willoughby in Pole Position.

With six other SuperCup class MX5 drivers determined to surpass him, Short nailed the launch he needed to quickly take the lead and escape any possible drama.

But drama unfolded nevertheless, as Aldo Riti became waylaid by no less than four of his fellow competitors on the first lap, only to be followed by Colin Bysouth who suddenly and inexplicably dropped to the back of the

grid, having to endure the entire field of Mark-1 MX5s passing him by.

However, the Mark-3 MX5 proved to be two seconds faster a lap than its Mark-1 cousin; an asset on one hand for the rapidly recovering Bysouth, carving through the field, yet a complication for Short who was contending with slower traffic.

In reality, he had little to worry about, boasting lap times a whole second faster than his pursuers.

Four laps from the end of the race, disaster struck for David Willoughby as he inadvertently became another "Paddock Hill" victim, burying his MX5 deep into the gravel trap.

Inevitably, Ben Short claimed the Chequered Flag and the fastest lap with Steve Dolman second and Jim Hart third.

Gregg Catton and a relieved Aldo Riti, who had an apparently possessed Colin Bysouth bearing down on him towards the later stages of the race, were subsequently promoted into the third and final SuperCup "A" race of Brands Hatch 2017.



Round 2 victors (From left) Jack Harding Rob Boston and Tom Roche

BRANDS HATCH

RACE 3

As the drivers formed up on the grid for the final "A" race of the event, there was tangible excitement at the prospect of the battles to come with rumour of both Tom Roche and Jack Harding utterly determined to prevent Rob Boston from achieving a clean sweep victory.

The excitement was justified, with the top of the grid boasting Rob Boston (former SuperCup champion) on Pole, Luke Herbert (former SuperCup champion) on second, Roche fourth (2016 MX5 Championship title holder and SuperCup veteran) and Richard Styrin in fifth (three times Porsche Boxster champion).

Another thunderous start saw everyone successfully clear Paddock Hill with Boston, Harding and Roche making an especially quick getaway.

The marauding pack saw Herbert try his luck early-on against Roche, Styrin briefly forced onto the grass and light contact as the competitors ploughed through Graham Hill bend towards Surtees – Boston, once again, began to pull a small gap.

Abruptly, the proceedings were put on hold, as the Code 60 protocol was put into play once more from a race-spec MX5 having careened into the rockery at Paddock Hill.

Two laps passed as the danger was cleared, followed shortly by the green flag, signalling the "all clear".

Boston was surprisingly ambushed by both Harding and Roche as they split either side of him to respectively take first and second place.

An ongoing scrap between O'Neil, Chandler and Styrin formed part of the eight car train hoping for a chance at

the lead, while Blake-Baldwin and Tatler were made acutely aware of Garnet looking to make a move.

Meanwhile, Boston was dealt another blow as Herbert stormed through into third despite the former's fastest lap.

Looking to recover and press an advantage, Boston's reflexes were put to the test as he rapidly aborted a committed overtake due to the deploying yellow flags from Bailey's entrance into the gravel.

With another Code 60 seemingly avoided, Paul O'Neil was on the move having removed himself from Brian and was hunting down the impatient Murphy, apparently held up along with Boston behind the Roche/Herbert battle.

The quarrelling gave Harding the chance he needed to build a small lead.

While Tom mounted a staunch defence, Boston jumped the curbs and found himself pushed bumper-to-bumper by Murphy only to



Boston clips Paddock Hill chasing Roche



The code 60 protocol comes into play



Alex King tackles Paddock Hill

BRANDS HATCH

later be millimetres apart again, as both engaged late braking manoeuvres into Paddock Hill.

By lap eleven Brian Chandler found himself part of a group three abreast through Paddock, before pitching his machine around the outside of Druids to successfully pass O'Neil, who in turn had to fend off the immediate onslaught from Blake-Baldwin.

However it was not to last, when two laps later, Chandler was knocked sideways through Druids and dropped down to tenth behind Sam Tatler.

Soon after, in a twist of irony, past Junior Rally-Cross champion Aiden Hills had a brush with the gravel at Paddock Hill, drawing on his past experience to expertly float his MX5 across the gravel and re-join the race; the dusty distraction serving as a cloak for Greensmith to ramp up the pressure on Blake-Baldwin.

If Aiden's experience prevented a Code 60, so did O'Neil's, when a suspected mechanical failure sadly took him decisively out of the race; the canny driver parking his stricken Mark-3 safely out of harm's way from any errant SuperCup missiles!

The relentless action saw drivers often two abreast into most corners, with Paddock Hill seemingly becoming the favourite point to overtake; aptly demonstrated by the intense skirmish between Chandler and Stylin, joined by a storming Blake-Baldwin as he surged into seventh.

Although the top six fought desperately into the closing laps of the race, the top three were so evenly matched that it proved impossible to knock Harding from his leading position, breaking Boston's dominance by seizing the Chequered Flag for round three of the BRSCC SuperCup.



Aiden Hills

Herbert and Boston made worthy podium companions for Harding, followed by a renewed Greensmith ahead of Roche and Murphy.

The final five of the top ten were led home by the 2016 SuperCup Champion, ahead of a solid performance from Sam Tatler, Brian Chandler and Richard Stylin.

The events of Brands Hatch were brought to a close for the MX5 SuperCup as the final seven competitors assembled for the third "B" race.

Colin Bysouth had shown impressive pace when recovering in the previous round and delivered on that promise as he took an early lead, charging ahead with the fastest lap and building a gap from Simon Orange who was comfortably maintaining position in second place.

Alex Miller experienced an unfortunate hiccup with the gravel, but Jeremy Crook put in consistent times while in pursuit of Simon Orange to achieve third place; ahead of David Willoughby, Duncan Harris and Ian McDonald.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

It is often said that racing is less of a pursuit and more of a lifestyle choice – this couldn't be more evident by the field of highly experienced drivers and multiple champions along with ongoing or returning veterans alike, all keeping motorsport alive and kicking within the championship.

None of this would be possible though without the generous support of the championship sponsors, "Clapham North - Services, MOT and Tyres", "DPA Technologies" and "PRG Trailers".

Not to be forgotten either are the herculean efforts from the team support crews, extended families and the vital army of track marshals.

As this new season commences, they all receive the championship's sincere thanks and gratitude.

No event is without its trophies, not just for those on the podiums, but those provided by "FIX AUTOS".

The winners of the Masters Trophies will be presented during the next event, with the "Best Improver" award going to Simon Mason and the well-deserved "Overall Winner" award presented to Richard Stylin.

Mazda Owner's Club are presenting the "Star of the Meeting" accolade, of which the winner will also to be announced at the next event.

After only three completed rounds, the bar has been set astonishingly high in expectation of the titanic battle to come for the coveted title of "2017 BRSCC MX5 SuperCup Champion"!

NEXT EVENT: SADWELL PARK