

A mixture of the Old and the New at Oran Park Raceway in Championship battle

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There was a bit of everything during the third round of the 2009 NSW Formula Ford 1600 Championship last weekend at Oran Park Raceway (Narellan, NSW) with Leigh Burges and Garry Watson fighting it out for the winning honours.

At the completion of the weekend it was Burges that managed to come out on top and his clean sweep of qualifying and all three races rewarded him with the NSW Championship lead. However, despite Burges winning in all of his starts he was certainly kept honest by Garry Watson, who was driving in the Historic class but was actually up there contending for the outright lead, and he ended up finishing in second place for the round aboard a car that was first run way back in 1971 and built by David Mawer from Mawer Engineering.

Tough weather conditions, a mixture of wet, greasy and dry conditions around the 2.62km circuit, played their part over the weekend. In the end, the cream rose to the top and consequently Burges re-claimed his outright lead in the NSW Championship point standings over arch rival and previous joint championship leader Daniel Lewis.

Although the weekend didn't start in the best of fashion, after a crash early on Friday morning in practice, Burges returned to the circuit in qualifying on Saturday morning and showed no effect from the crash posting the fastest lap in the qualifying session, a 1:13.8793 second lap, ahead of Watson (1:14.5719), Lewis (1:14.6467), "Rookie of the Year" points leader Adam Leung (1:15.5243) and in fifth Grant Doulman (1:15.6039). Doulman was making a cameo return to the NSW Championship driving the Anglo Australian Motorsport prepared and owned RF92 Van Diemen.

In the opening race, under wet conditions, Burges paced the field for the entire six lap distance after he had started from pole position. At the fall of the chequered Burges took out a comfortable victory and defeated Watson and Doulman in second and third place respectively. Lewis fought back from an earlier spin to finish in fourth ahead of Tim Berryman. Berryman, driving a Reynard in the historic class, made a solid return to Formula Ford competition with his fifth place finish.

Greasy circuit conditions faced the competitors on Sunday morning for the second race and it was Watson that led the opening lap before Burges powered ahead and from there he was never headed. Watson showed that despite the age of his machinery that he could mix it with the front runners by once again finishing in second place. After a disappointing opening race Lewis managed to work his way up to a third place after battling with Doulman for the opening half of the race. Doulman crossed the finish line in fourth place behind Lewis while Leung placed fifth. Jason Liddell recorded a DNF in the second race after he spun off the circuit and bogged himself in the mud.

Burges completed his clean sweep of the weekend when he took out the third and final race in impressive fashion. Once again, Watson got the jump over Burges off the start line and led the field on the opening lap, only to have Burges demote him back to second at the beginning of the second lap. For the remainder of the 10 lap race Burges was unable to shake off Watson from his rear vision mirrors and the pair kept in proximity with one another all the way through to the finish. Towards the closing stages Watson had to contend with Lewis who was attempting to take second away from him but in the end Watson had enough speed and skill to claim second ahead of the determined Lewis. Finishing just outside the podium finishers was Doulman and Leung in fourth and fifth place. Unfortunately the sole DNF of the final race was Berryman who was forced to retire due to mechanical issues and it spoiled what was a competitive return to Formula Ford.

After suffering engine failure at the last round of the NSW Championship; Derryn Harrison returned to the circuit once again on the weekend and he finished an up and down weekend with a sixth place finish in the final race.

â€˜Rookie of the Yearâ€™™ contender David Chitty had an interesting weekend as it was his first experience racing a Formula Ford in the wet conditions and he managed to finish all three races and bring home his RF98 Van Diemen in one piece. Chitty was pleased with his weekend overall and counted it as just another valuable learning experience.

Aside from the front running form of Watson and Berryman in the historic class the likes of Cas Galjaardt, Stephen Weller, Norm Vesty, John Pymble and Martin Dunlop fought amongst one another. Galjaardtâ€™s results were strong and consistent enough for him to maintain his lead in the NSW Championship point standings for the Historic class.

The fourth round of the NSW Formula Ford 1600 Championship is to be held on the weekend of July 4 and 5 at Sydneyâ€™s Eastern Creek Raceway and it is expected to feature six competitors travelling over from Western Australia to show their worth.