

MOTOR RACING UK

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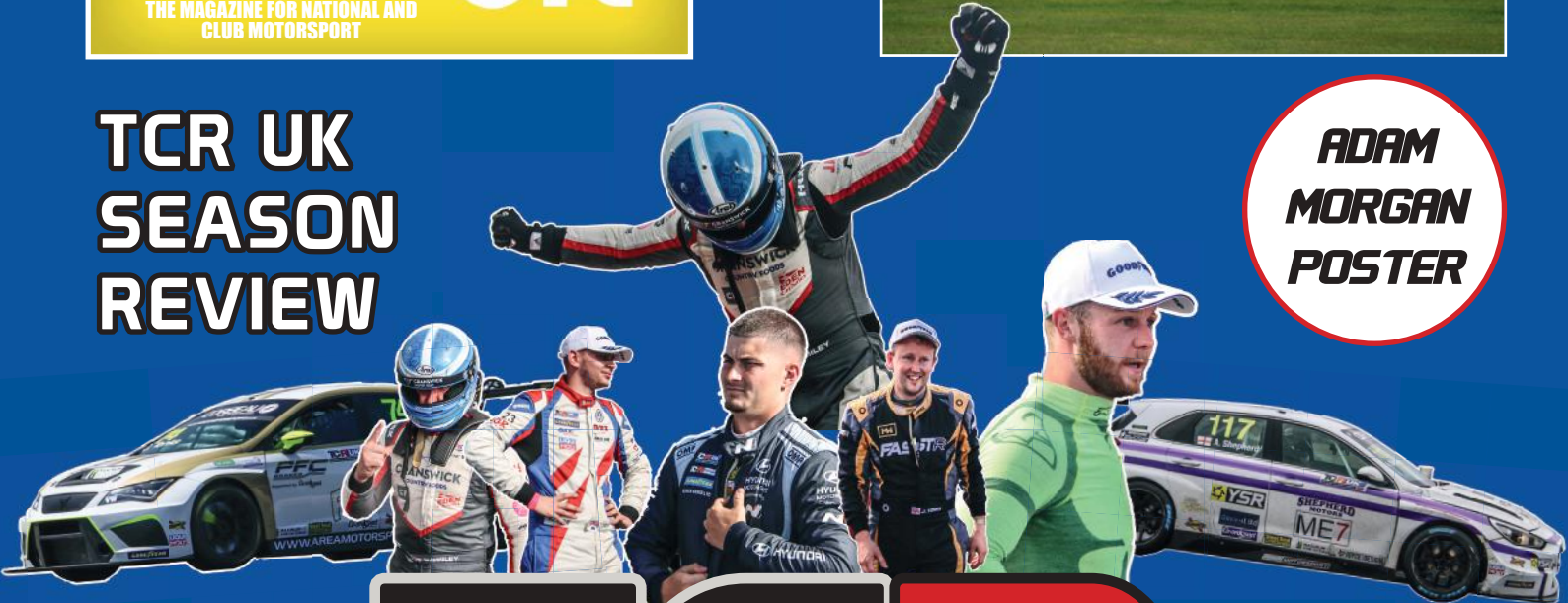
TCR UK SEASON REVIEW



FAREWELL TO PLATO



ADAM MORGAN POSTER



TCR



FIVE YEARS - THE FALL AND RISE OF TCR UK



OUT OF THE DARKNESS

THE TCR UK CHAMPIONSHIP ENTERED 2022 WITH A BUMPER GRID OF CARS, AND A PROMISE OF DELIVERING ON A FORMAT THAT HAS STRUGGLED IN BRITAIN. MICK PALMER REVIEWS A SEASON WHERE THAT PLEDGE CAME THROUGH.



It was predicted by many that Chris Smiley would be crowned the 2022 TCR UK champion when it was announced that he was teaming up with his former BTCC team boss Bert Taylor to tackle the series. That they were going to make a challenge for the title with support from Honda partner JAS in one of their FK8 Civics cemented that belief. When the season closed at Snetterton Smiley and the new team formed by Taylor - Restart Racing - had indeed placed themselves at the top of the standings, but in truth the statistics did not tell the full story. The envisioned rout did not happen. A large collection of easy poles and wins was not amassed. To the champion and his team the latter was not a surprise. Even though there was an air of confidence in the outfit there certainly was no public orations pertaining to claim anything of that ilk. They knew that it was never going to be a walkover. While some sectors of British motor racing might have glanced at the TCR field and made inaccurate suppositions, Smiley and Restart Racing did not. They knew that with the talent that was on the grid that nobody would walkover the 2022 championship.

Two wins came the way of Smiley across the season. A win from pole position in the opening contest of the year seemed to fit the narrative that had been built, but that wasn't the way it

would play out. In both races supporting the British GT Championship at its traditional Easter meeting Smiley had to fight off a collection of drivers who would be in contention for wins right the way through the season. He reasoned: "There's all these fast young kids and all the people who spend a lot of time and money going racing, so there's going to be guys here that are fast. You can't underestimate that. I think if you look at any mainstream national championship, there's always the guys who are going to be fast in it. Anybody who underestimates any of those things before they go into it, I think they're badly mistaken."

The battle that Restart Racing and Smiley fought wasn't just against the opposition, but also against the march of time. "It was a big achievement I think for us coming into the season so late," he said. "We came in just before the start of the season - it was literally three days before the start of the season before we got the car, and went to Oulton Park, took that pole position and won the race, but it wasn't easy from there on in."

The Honda was a prime target for reigning in when it came to the BoP stakes. The car took a bit of a whopping in the middle of the year and it wasn't a straight clean run. Clutch problems at



Castle Combe, a struggle to get the car right for the second visit to Oulton, damage early on at Donington before the championship decider, it all added up in a negative fashion, but he kept plodding on until it came right again. “We had our ups and our downs,” he pointed out, “but at the end of it we won it, and it’s something to be really proud of.”

Popping up on the podium alongside Smiley in third place for that first race of 2022 was Isaac Smith. The former JCW Mini racer had made the switch to TCR at the end of 2021. “We were a front runner there (JCW Minis) all the time, but it’s hard to be noticed in that with how the TV is,” he said of the reason for the switch. “We should have won the championship in the Minis in the second year, but thanks to lack of budget I didn’t complete the year, so that was thrown out the window. We went and did the TCR taster at Donington in the Cupra, which was pretty average. It was a DSG car, and then we had a fuel issue. The fuel rail was getting almost no fuel pressure when it was under load through the compressions at Donington, so I may as well have just had a walk around! But it convinced us to go for that last round of the year.”

That Donington triple header returned an 11th, ninth and seventh place and convinced Smith to commit to TCR UK for 2022. With the

ethos of TCR partially being to make Touring Car racing accessible to more racers you get a few drivers who make a couple of starts without making much of an impact. Smith had a decent run at that 2021 meeting, but there were not many who would have considered him a title contender as the season ended, but roll on 2022 and the talent was there on display from the very start of the year as he geared up in not the newest VW Golf, run by RCC.

“Through testing and the media day everyone was throwing tyres at it and trying to make themselves look good, but we kind of just drove around, but that was my first day in the car and we had pace,” he pointed out. “The Golf is, let’s see. It’s a difficult car to make quick, but when it’s quick its strength is in the tight places. Like we went to Oulton where we were rapid around the place because there’s loads of challenging corners, but across the year it didn’t help with the compensation weight and stuff.”

It became apparent quite quickly that Smith hadn’t lucked into the podium. He kept racking them up one after another. He kept scoring points one after another. Had the championship not run to dropped scores rules he’d have taken the crown with a gap of 15 points due to finishing every race of the year in seventh or higher. But the rules did



stipulate the dropping of two results so it meant from the off that there was a different train of thought to consider.

“We planned stuff out throughout the year, but we had to play our cards very differently to what everyone else was doing,” Smith said of the challenge of going up against a more experienced opposition. “It’s tough when you’re up against the Honda. It has its own map for qualifying and racing. It completely changes that car in terms of set up, you can’t compete with that, but we got just about a 50% podium rate, but we didn’t get that win.”

It’s reputed that Smith covered the season with a budget six times smaller than his title rival. In a way, across all Touring Car racing it was the story of the year, and in a way it does two other things. Firstly that was a provenance of the concept that Stewart Lines has been pushing for a few years now, in creating an environment for those who couldn’t hit BTCC numbers to have access to racing in Touring Cars. And secondly it shows that the TCR concept away from say the WTCR can provide a more level playing field. But none of that really makes up for not taking a win. “You kind of drown in your sorrows, don’t you?” Smith said of not hitting that target of the top

step. “Realistically, if we had Gen Two car it would’ve been a completely different story. Even if we got one just for the last round. But we didn’t. Even though I know I should have won one it doesn’t make up for not taking one.”

Joining the pair on that opening podium was Max Hart. The Irish racer in his third season in TCR racing was hot out of the oven when things got under way. He kept Smiley honest in race one and fought through the field from ninth to repeat the result in race two at Oulton. Following that he went to Donington and demolished the opposition by taking two wins from two. He was storming into the lead and looked to be the one to beat. His first two seasons were either up or down. Domination or fighting back through the field were the two options he had put on display. The unfettered speed for 2022 however looked like it had been married to the outright ballsy pace and derring-do he’d become known for. At the Brands Hatch triple header he mustered a eighth then two fifths with some more considered driving suitable of a contender. Then it all fell apart.

The second trip to Oulton saw a qualifying pace that was half-a-second faster than the second placed machine of Alex Ley. It counted for

nothing as the car was stripped of all times and sent to the back of the grid, with a 10 second start penalty. Post qualifying inspections found the manifold pressure was being exceeded meaning the car was operating outside of the BoP. There were retirements from both races, that was followed by double retirements at Castle Combe and Donington, which ruined what could have been a totalitarian crushing of the opposition and the title in one hand had reliability been controlled. As it was the Irishman was so dejected that he and Jamsport released a statement leading up to the finale to say that they had parted company with a mutual agreement. Read into that what you will.

That last minute change of pole position at Oulton was not the last time that the championship would find its pole position being changed as they were preparing to enter the assembly area. For the last race of the season Russell Joyce was hoofed from the top spot at the last minute after being found to have caused a collision in race one. These last minute changes were hard to take but were partially as a result of the system that had been developed when the championship ran on the Time Attack bill, which is a one day event. Squeezing practice, qualifying and a couple of races into a day might be okay for lower level club races, but TCR machines - as easy as they are to run - are still 'proper' racing cars,

and the running of them, and officiating around them, is not as simple as most championships. The decision to run in that format was simply down to growing the series. The Time Attack crowds are simply huge compared to the average British race meeting. Probably only behind BTCC and BSB (by my reckoning some events are bigger than British GT) so it was a price worth paying, but thankfully TCR has outgrown the need to be there. For next season, along with the Civic Cup it's back to proper race meetings. For this journalist that's good news, I've found the Time Attack/Drifting competition to be turgid and dull.

While Smiley, Smith and Hart laid early claims to the 2022 crown, TCR UK claimed a first in British motor racing with the second race of the year when Jessica Hawkins became the first female racer to win a Touring Car race in the UK. It was a pressured race with a couple of safety car restarts to fend off for the W Series racer. First Jac Constable - who was a last minute returnee after a bid to head to Power Maxed in the BTCC fell through - was attacking the FastR Cupra. It didn't last. Hart blew past Constable and harried Hawkins to the end of the race. Unfortunately she didn't repeat that across the rest of the season before exiting the championship early. Her Team mate Jamie Tonks also failed to finish the year, but he also struck gold for the first time in the



Jessica Hawkins became the first female TCR UK winner - Photo: Palmer



second race during the second Oulton visit.

“I knew it was coming. That sounds really stupid, but you have to believe in yourself,” Tonks said of the build up to that race. “I somehow found myself in a great position in that weekend. The car was working well, the team were telling me “you’re going to be at the front this weekend,” and it, it just felt really good and really natural.”

Prior to the win there had been signs of competitiveness. At the first Donington meeting fifth and fourth were achieved and pace had been on display at other points. “I felt we’d shown some really good pace in the rounds before and it all just come together really, really nice,” he said. “I enjoyed every minute of it. When the team tell you’re going to do it you believe it, but until you’re in that position you have that little bit of self doubt. After one lap I thought I was going to win that race, so I had 25 minutes of thinking about it and the last two laps were the longest of my life. I was talking to myself every corner reminding myself what to do!”

Tonks has an astute view of both his own year and all that was going on around him, and was able to offer succinct appraisals of his own year, and some of the things he observed as the title battle raged around him. “I wanted to be higher,” he said of his aims set at the start of the season.

“I did the first round in a underpowered car and I didn’t enter the last round, so to finish 11th, I think it was a good result, but if I’d put a couple of average point scores on there in the first and last round, I think I was on track for about fifth. Which is close to where I was hoping to be.”

The disappearance for the final round was related to the deal to bring the Hyundai Elantra to the UK for 2023, but there was enough of a performance through the middle part of the season to show that the win wasn’t an opportunistic fluke, even if parts of the year weren’t quite perfect. “I made plenty of mistakes, but we showed plenty of speed at times as well,” he reported. “Looking back, I’m certainly not disappointed. I think it proved to me, and proved to the family, and the team that with another year under my belt I’ll be a little bit wiser. At times I have to remember that I’m probably the most inexperienced driver on the grid despite being slightly older than the average driver! I think we made some rookie mistakes, but we showed we had the speed and I think that was the thing to take from it.”

Being a little later to the game than many of the other races on the grid means that Tonks has a different perspective on the racing. There might not be that singular focus of someone who was plonked in a kart with an arrow pointing to F1 at a young

age, but it has an advantage. It allows a different perception of what is going on around you which some of the younger drivers might err away from. "I think the standard of driving was so high," he answered when questioned about the level at which TCR UK is now operating and also offered this: "Chris (Smiley) was the fastest driver undoubtedly, but he also was a consistent driver, and to win the title now you've got to match that speed and consistency. I think on, on my day, and on a load of the other chaps days, we could match him. But that's not enough, you have to do it for 15 rounds."

Tonks wasn't the only driver to campaign a Cupra Leon for the first six rounds before ditching the car. Bruce Winfield arrived at the last meeting as a Hyundai i30 convert and managed to haul himself on to the outskirts of the battle for the championship with some late season flourishes at Castle Combe and Donington. He wasn't quite there however but his knowledge bank of how a title tilt goes did play in his favour from his previous experience. "2021 was good. It was my first season in a TCR car and to finish second championship was kind of unexpected," he said. "We'd hoped to be somewhere near the front, maybe on the podium a few times for that year. Winning a couple of

races and finishing second in the championship in the first season was great for us.

"We got rid of the the DSG car we'd been running and got a sequential Cupra Leon for 22, with a hope to do better again," he explained. "Unfortunately we had a bit of bad luck at the start of the season with a couple of punctures and stuff but everybody has their fair share, but it put us behind where we wanted to be."

Those early races where things didn't quite go to plan hit the overall goals for Winfield hard. Although the step up in tech with the new Leon did enhance the opportunity to continue to be competitive the championship had taken a step up from the one where he'd challenged just 12 months earlier. The Cupra did bring podiums and a win once the bad luck had been dispensed but it was too late in reality to topple the standings, so in preparation for 2023 the i30 was acquired for the final round, where there was a slim chance of taking the title if both Smiley and Smith encountered problems in both races. "The i30 seems to have a lot more front end, a lot more turning, it's a lot pointier. Because of the weather I didn't really get to show the potential of the car. I would have loved to have made the switch earlier with the potential I've felt in some dry weather testing we've had though."





A trio of drivers sat just below the real championship challengers, and all three missed out on the ability to really crack into the Snetterton finale for a number of reasons. Adam Shepherd made a huge leap forward, especially in the latter portion of the season where a number of podiums were taken, and that first win - which should have come earlier. An outstanding second visit to Donington gave him a first and a second with a considered drive, and it may have healed some of the hurt from Castle Combe where he checked out for the win but a last lap, last corner puncture dropped him to second behind Winfield. Shepherd made a genuine case for being the top driver for the second half of the year, but it came far too late after a challenging first half to turn it into a push for the title.

Jac Constable was expected to be a front runner when it was announced that he'd return to racing in TCR. With two wins under his belt in 2021 he was in the mix to make an in-house switch with his Power Maxed team to the BTCC. As a development driver for the Vauxhall Astra based concern it appeared that he was in the

running to line up alongside Michael Crees but on the eve of the season when it was announced that Ash Hand had taken that seat Constable committed to a second year in a Cupra Leon. It was a mixed season. Two wins and two podiums were not enough to get him really into the meat of it and ultimately the year, despite a fifth placed finish in the final standings, was a disappointment.

The leftfield result of the year was Alex Ley. In an Area Motorsport i30 N the 17-year-old looked handy with a sixth place on his debut in race one at the Donington GT support event after missing the opening round. Running in fifth and dropping to ninth counted for nought when he was given a DSQ and four points on his license for causing a collision in race two. It looked to be more of the same at Brands the next time out. Sixth then 19th, but the only triple header of the season gave up a surprise as he became the youngest winner in the short history of the championship in the closer. It wasn't a fluke. After inheriting pole thanks to Max Hart being penalised at Oulton, Ley calmly raced to a second



consecutive win. Another win at Castle Combe followed and a string of points finishes saw the youngster finish the season in sixth, with three wins - the most from any driver.

A number of drivers lower in the age range have realised there is only so much time you can spend in the support sectors of the BTCC without moving up if you want to progress. The cost inhibitive nature of that championship is one hook point of TCR UK and for Brad Hutchison after a couple-and-a-half years in the Mini series it made sense to jump now in an Audi. As with many of those drivers there is a longer game and immediate returns aren't always wins. It's a curve to the top that they look for, and for Hutchison that's what he appeared to deliver. "We didn't really have any goals to be fair," he exclaimed about his aims for 2022. "We sort of wanted to be at the front end, like top five, and I think qualifying wise we were, but we had way more mechanicals than we wanted, but definitely towards the end of the season we got the car where we wanted it."

If you plotted a graph titled 'Brad Hutchison

- first-half progress' you'd have seen a pleasing trend heading up before the clunk came. "I think it was about Donington when it went a bit downhill," he explained. "The engine went in qualifying and we had to qualify and run the two races on the same day - it put us out - completely out. I mean the pace was there in testing and everything across the season and we were alright, in that we were quite happy, and it really clicked at the end of the year.

"We went to Snetterton and it was wet, wet weather and we thought oh, we're not too sure what to do with the car in wet weather, but we did what we thought was right and it worked a treat. So the back half the season went really well apart from the mechanicals, and the first half of the season wasn't bad but we know the car now we know what we need to change to get it to work and how I like it."

Another young entry to the series, in a third Essex & Kent i30 N, was Scott Sumpton. It was a tough fight to keep up for most of the season and Sumpton looked to be out of kilter at times across the year, but it was not a write off. "I enjoyed last season" he contemplated when quizzed on what he gained from 2022. "I think I've learned stuff at every single round. Even when I wasn't at the track I was able to learn stuff about the cars. I picked up a lot from watching races back - I just kept on learning. It was really a learning year, but there was lots to take in for next season. I think I always expect highly of myself. Sometimes it's difficult to always hit those expectations, but I think that I did the best that I could, and it'll carry over to 2023."

While Sumpton was on a steep learning curve his team mates were expected to be at the front of the field. Heading to Donington for the 2021 championship decider it was a foregone conclusion that Lewis Kent would take the crown - which he duly did for a second time, but his second defence of the title did not go to plan, and for his brother Bradley, who looked on the cusp of turning into a de facto front runner, it went a bit awry to say the least.

For the younger Kent it was what some would refer to as a 'character building' season, others would consider it to have been an unmitigated disaster. The outright speed and silky smoothness was there, and when he was on track he looked to have grown into a much more balanced driver after his bombastic arrival the previous season, but it seemed like he'd



developed a habit of walking under ladders. “It was really tough at times, especially when we had the pace,” he noted. “At Donington we scored our only two podiums of the year and I know I’m better than that. After two wins in 2021 we thought we’d be challenging for the championship but it just didn’t happen. I didn’t lose any pace, it just didn’t work out well.”

Those Donington podiums - a second place in the third race of the year and a third in round 13 were indicative of what could have been, as was a pole position at Brands Hatch, by the seemed to be thwarted by unreliability and penalties. “It was more than disappointing,” he reflected. “You can’t win a championship if you DNF nine times in 15 races - there were races where we didn’t even get on the grid.” Spotting the younger Kent in finishing positions was a ‘Where’s Wally’ exercise and the 15th placed finish in the final standings was one of the shocks of the year. If any driver had final totals that did not reflect the reality of their ability in 2022 it was his.

The introduction of the Hyundai Veloster N with Lewis Kent to the championship was a bit of a calling card pointing to the massive transformation that the TCR UK championship

was going through at the beginning of 2022, and where it is leading to right now. In the previous couple of years the Hyundai i30 and Cupra Leon have been the staple machines that the championship has relied upon to set down its roots in the British racing landscape. The odd Golf or Audi and the DW Green Giant Astra have mixed it up a bit, but the Veloster was a statement machine for driver, team and championship. Would this piece of Touring Car exotica be a revelation or a curse?

To begin with it was a bit of a ‘fair-to-middling’ situation. Kicking off the year the car scored points but wasn’t on the ultimate pace as the team tried to get their heads around it. “We struggled a lot with the car,” Lewis admitted. “Purely because of how it was set up through the year. I think we stretched ourselves a little bit thin by taking another car on board and having three cars in the team.”

The initial underwhelming performance of a car deigned as the face of the coming revolution, combined with a struggling Bradley in one i30 N, and Sumpton in the other put the squad into a new position. The initial season of TCR had been a learning year, but 2019 to 2021, and the



growth from one to two cars had seen numerous wins and two TCR UK titles, but three and a new machine was tipping things just over the edge. “It put a bit of strain on all of us,” Lewis added. “For myself I felt like I could have probably performed a little bit better through the year. I felt like I had a year of just under performance. Again, that was mostly because we were stretching ourselves. I was trying to concentrate on the car more than and the driving myself and it just got a bit out of hand after a while.”

By E&K standards the first two rounds may have been a little meandering, but a reprieve at their home track at Brands did lift hopes a little. A win and two podiums for the Veloster did have eyes looking to the team thinking that the nut had been cracked and the balance of the series would shift, but that didn't happen. Next time out at Oulton the aggressive style of Lewis

bit back in qualifying as he tried to make up for some of the blank spots in set up that they couldn't quite nail. With a one day meeting it was a tough ask to jury rig the front end, and race with an engine that was glitching a little. Leading race two he became an easy target as he dropped to fifth, and that over-driving to rescue some of the performance added a penalty to drop down to 11th before a string of poor results would follow. “I honestly think it was just because it was a brand new car to us,” he stated about the struggles with the Veloster. “We had to relearn everything within two months over all that we had learned over the last four or five years with the old car. The i30 is pretty much 85% the same as the Veloster, but there's little things in that set up that changed a bit, so we struggled with just trying to get our head around a different way of running the car. It all sort of held us back. The car

A third title was out of reach for Lewis Kent - Photo: Palmer



Smiley took two wins in 2022 - Photo: Palmer





didn't let us down, it just held us back at the start of the year but towards the end of the year we started to get a grip."

It wasn't a dejected Lewis Kent that was in the paddock from that point on, but there was an air that things were just out of sync, and that running through races was not going to give answers. It already looked like the Veloster would require some off-season fettling to get what was needed from it. There was an element of shots in the dark as Lewis admitted that what they really needed was to bring a data engineer in from outside as they were taking their understanding of the i30 and trying to guesstimate what the new car needed to make it competitive everywhere. "I was still happy with the two wins. I was still happy with my performance," he acknowledged. "We had four podiums, so it's not a bad season along with finishing fourth in the championships. It's still good going but you always want to be the best, you always want to be winning, and I wanted to keep the number one on the side of the car really badly. In the end we won the last race of the year. Even though the one before should have been called off when we were in the assembly area."

The championship showdown. It should have been about the finale, but the weather became the talking point, as Lewis Kent alluded to. Seven drivers were in contention mathematically as the championship headed into Norfolk to crown a

new champion at Snetterton. The weather was forecast to be very wet. With a tight timetable, and a guests of the interminable, meandering quasi-qualifying Time Attack series there was not much give to demand a running order that suited the series, so TCR just had to get on with it. Or not. Opening practice was wet and Adam Shepherd saw his slim title attempt slip away into the turn one barriers causing a red flag, and a scramble to put the front of his i30 back together. But he managed to pull eighth from the bag in qualifying behind Smiley on pole from Hutchison, Bradley Kent, Isaac Smith, Newsham, Winfield and Lewis Kent.

Almost universally in retrospect the opinion from those who were to go out and attempt to find tarmac below the incoming tide was that the first race of the day should not have taken place when it did. "I wouldn't call that wet," was the opinion that Isaac Smith shared. "That was like a monsoon! They should have delayed it. On lap one behind the safety car the amount of people that were actually off the track was stupid, but they ran it for some reason."

"I couldn't believe, to be honest, that they were running the race," added Bruce Winfield. "We came around after the warmup lap and across the start finish straight going flat out and it was just puddles everywhere. It was like standing water on a road." Bradley Kent shared his belief

that “it’s not funny at a hundred and fifty miles an hour,” with brother Lewis agreeing that “it should have been delayed at least, we knew it was going to ease off.”

Chris Smiley agreed with Lewis Kent about the timing, but grasped the quandary the organisers had. “I think race one probably shouldn’t have been started when it was,” He affirmed. “I think if they’d had a wait of half-an-hour, I think the track would’ve been better. But it was the final day of the year. They only had so much time before it got dark and they were under pressure. So I get why they started it, you know? The conditions were the same for everyone, but they weren’t ideal. Race one was very wet and race two was more of a greasy wet than a proper wet.”

Whichever way you cut it the only way realistically that anyone other than Smith or Smiley could win the title would be if they took each other out in both races. Thankfully the culture in TCR UK racing isn’t one where that many ‘Touring Car moves’ come to the fore. The pair were clean and respectful, as were those around them on track - but nobody bent over to give the duo a free pass. Smiley smashed race one from pole and Smith followed from fourth to second and put pressure on his rival, feeling he figuratively had one hand behind his back. “Snetterton, that was 100% a Honda track, and one where we really struggled in qualifying with

tyre pressures and cambers,” Smith recollected. “So we completely changed the car for the race. Everything was thrown out the window. It was ‘Do this, do that and off we go again.’ When it came to race one, it was rapid. We got the fastest lap and pulled two or three seconds onto the back of Chris. It wasn’t enough to catch him and pass, but we caught him, and in race two we came up from seventh.”

For the last race of the year, the decider, the reversed grid had Smith in ninth and Smiley tenth. It was a tense build up with both drivers positioned next to one another in assembly. The Honda driver was for the most part left alone to focus, with his team at a distance and his window down. Smith was ensconced in the Golf with his helmet on, finding his zone while the car was swamped with team members. It was as electric as the storm that had raged thunder and lightning and apocalypse like rain prior to the faceoff.

Smith needed to get away from the Honda from the off. He needed to be past cars quick with the hope that they’d hold up Smiley. He needed the Irishman to be caught up in traffic and a few cars to be stuck between them at the flag to take the crown. It started off well. The Golf driver got away ahead of the championship leader. After the first lap he’d risen to sixth and there was one car between them. After two tours he was in fifth



The title came down to a last race battle - Photo: Palmer



with two cars separating them. The next time across the line it was fourth, with one slotting into fifth ahead of Smiley.

“We had to be quite forceful,” Smiley said of the toe-to-toe battle. “I wouldn’t say we had to be dirty, but we had to be forceful to just make sure that we kept going forward because we needed all the points we could get.” The pair were hot on it, taking risks on the damp and slippery track. The duo motored past Alex Ley to take third and fourth. With three laps to go Smith knew his only hope was to find way past the leading pair of Lewis Kent and Jac Constable and pulled the pin for one last chance with an all or nothing attack. Unfortunately for the Golf it led to the car bouncing across the outfield exiting turn one as Smiley lapped up the third place that was placed in front of him meaning he just wound down the last few laps to cross the line as the 2022 TCR UK champion.

The prediction that the BTCC race winner would walk in and cruise to the crown had proven unfounded. It was a fight all the way to the final flag of the year. Each and every driver had faced moments of triumph and despair. The series had risen beyond the challenge of building a strong grid that would provide not just the opportunity for drivers to compete and battle in a high level Touring Car championship, but one that could catch the imagination.