

Caterham Roadsport Champs 2015 – Zandvoort, Holland (20/21 Jun 15) Race Report



As I write this report on the ferry heading back to the UK from Holland, it feels good to be back on a high after a disappointing weekend at Donington last time out. I headed out to Zandvoort, which is situated literally just off the beaches 30 minutes from Amsterdam, with much anticipation as I'd managed to gain some additional sponsorship (from the Motor Fuel Group and care of Patron Capital) the week after Donington. That meant instead of racing month by month and not knowing if I'd be able to compete in the whole series, I could now afford the entry fees for the rest of the season. I still need more support financially if I'm going to be truly competitive (tyres and testing time), but it was a great feeling knowing that I'd got some more support.

In typical fashion I'd set myself the lofty goal of securing two podiums from the weekend, but I knew that would be a difficult task because the majority of the field had two test days prior to the weekend (I only had one day) and some of the top guys had even been out to the track a few weeks previous as well! Arriving on Thursday night I met with my fellow competitors who had been testing all day and they told me how fast the track was, how difficult it was to learn and that I'd be up against it with only one day to test. My reply was simply "I only need one test day, as I want to give you all a fair chance!" A bit bolshie, but I like to play mind games and everyone knew I was having a laugh!

Although I'd never been to the track before, I'd watched a lot of YouTube videos and had two sessions with Rob at Rob Hedley Racing, who is a big supporter of Mission Motorsport and provided some great advice and support. I only had four 30 minute sessions on the Friday and I wanted to ensure I used the first two sessions to just get a feel for the track (and the car again!), with the aim of not trying to get sucked into racing everyone else! I had some brand new tyres that I was going to keep for wet track use, but they needed their 'skin' taken off, so I made the call to put them on for the first session, as it would force me to take it steady (brand new tyres are greasy as hell). What I wasn't prepared for was a downpour just before the session! It wasn't raining when we started our first session, but the track was in the awful state of not wet and not dry, so I was basically driving on a greasy track with greasy tyres...great!!! The conditions

certainly meant I took it steady, but the car was all over the place, so I lost a little confidence. The only bonus was the fact I had taken the shine off the new tyres, so that was at least something.

Prior to the second session I swapped my tyres back, so I had my old rubber on, and really got to grips with the track, posting some good lap times (half a second off the fastest time from the day before). My confidence was back and I was relishing getting back out on the track after lunch for the third session. Although the second session was dry, my tyres didn't seem to get as hot as they do normally, so I increased the pressure (cold) before heading out on the third session. After 30 minutes I came back into the paddock deflated, as my quickest lap was a second slower than in my second session. The back end of the car was all over the place, so I was losing time in the corners constantly having to correct the over steer. I checked the rear tyres and they were significantly over-inflated (hot), so I went back to the pressures I knew worked well in the dry. That clearly did the trick, as in the final test session I was flying and even managed to post the second over all fastest lap time, so I finished the day feeling really confident going into qualifying.

The track was dry for qualifying and everything went as well as it could. Half way through I knew I was on for a good time because my Racelogic VBOX was providing predictive timing and I'd managed a lap time that was 0.6 seconds quicker than my best test time during testing. I was even up on that time as well on a couple of occasions, but lost it when having to move through traffic. In the end I qualified P4, which I was really pleased with because second row on the grid is actually a nice place to be (a little less pressure than on the front row) and I knew I could actually go quicker than my qualifying time.

Race 1 of the weekend was late afternoon on the Saturday and I couldn't wait to get going. As the lights went out I made a solid start, holding 4th position through the first two corners. As we hit Hugenholtzbocht, David Webber, who'd qualified on pole and was leading almost stopped on the exit of the corner. Amazingly each car managed to avoid hitting the back of him and each other, but it meant I lost a place to someone behind me, but then gained a place overtaking David (it turned out that his knee caught the ignition barrel and turned his car off!), so I was still in 4th. As we completed the first lap, the first three cars were line abreast going down the start/finish straight and I saw the smallest of gaps between the right hand car and the pitlane wall. I breathed in and made it through the gap at 113mph, moving into 2nd place. Heading into the S-Bocht chicane towards the end of lap 2 I made it into first place, although I knew that wouldn't last long, as the start/finish straight provided such a big 'tow', it was hard to keep your position if the car behind you was close. For the next seven laps I mainly remained in 3rd, until I was able to overtake for 2nd coming round Tarzanbocht at the end of the start/finish straight. Now behind Olly Wigg in 1st place, I made the conscious decision that I'd tried to stick close to him until literally the last lap and then use the tow effect to overtake him as we came down the start/finish straight. The perfect plan, although I was about to learn my next big lesson...

Having kept an eye on the race time above the gantry on the pit lane, I'd wrongly assumed that we were on the penultimate lap, as I'd not seen the 'last lap board'. We'd pulled away from Alistair Calvert in 3rd place, so there was no one who could come past me. I eased off going into Arie Luyendijk Bocht before the straight, as I didn't want to overtake him on the penultimate lap. As we came down the straight I moved to about a car's length from him, when I noticed the chequered flag; we were actually on the last lap and my well thought out plan failed due to me not seeing the 'last lap board'! I was obviously pleased with 2nd place, but kicking myself as the win was for the taking. Even Olly said after the race that he thought I'd come past him on the last lap. Lesson learnt!

Race 2 on the Sunday wasn't until after lunch, so it was good to have the morning to relax and prep the car. I was on the front row for the start and kept that position through the first lap, but as we came to completing the it, we were stopped on the grid! Unfortunately one of the guys had crashed out, so instead of utilising a safety car the race was started again. Nobody likes to be sat on the start line (especially for 10 minutes), but I made another good start and held 2nd place for a few laps, but then slipped to 3rd due to the tow effect. On the next lap I dropped to 4th due to the tow effect again, then 5th on the next lap! Another lesson for me – how to make best use of the tow myself because I was not capitalising on it. The front five of us had pulled clear of the pack, then it started to rain. Nobody likes rain mid-race because every corner will have a different amount of grip, so you can't adjust your braking, turning and accelerating points until you've found where the grip is. A tricky balance between driving hard, but not too hard in case you completely lose it in a corner. Plus my wipers didn't work!

As we went through the S-Bocht chicane, the leader spun out, so it was clearly starting to get wet. I was up to 4th, but yet again I dropped a place at the end of the straight because I didn't stay committed to my line and gave way! Going into S-Bocht again I made it back up to 4th, then I finally got the tow right and made it up to 3rd coming out of Tarzanbocht at the end of the straight. I kept 3rd for a couple of laps, but then lost it to a hard charging Olly Wigg (who'd spun out on S-Bocht) when I gave way to him going into the Hugenholtzbocht hairpin and 4th is where I ended, with the first four of us crossing the finishing line all within one second! I'd just missed out on the podium, which I've learnt is the hardest position to finish because you're so close to the silverware.

Coming away from the weekend I had two good finishes. Without sounding arrogant, I was a little bit upset with 4th in Race 2, however if somebody had said to me before the weekend that they'd give me a 2nd and a 4th, I would have ripped their arm off! My roller coaster race series is back on a high and I already cannot wait for the next round at Castle Combe in July...

As ever, none of this would be possible without Mission Motorsport and Caterham, but I'd also like to thank the Motor Fuel Group (c/o Patron Capital) for their financial support. Furthermore, I'd like to thank Rob at Rob Hedley Racing for imparting his time and wisdom, and Racelogic for the continued loan of the VBOX data/video capture system.

You can watch the qualifying and race footage from my VBOX on my YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/stevesnaz/>