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Lochgelly Raceway

Following a relatively pleasant afternoon, the skies clouded over as start time loomed as drivers, teams and fans gathered at HRP Lochgelly Raceway for the first major championship of the 2016 Scottish Stock Car Season – the LJM deSIGNS Ninja Kart European Championship.



The Ninja Karts are a formula designed for 6-11 year olds to take the first tentative steps on the path to a career in short oval motorsport and are by far the biggest formula for this age group in Scotland and the UK. Drivers came from all corners of the Ninja Kart world to descend on HRP Lochgelly Raceway for the inaugural running of their European Championship and a fantastic entry of thirty-three cars arrived to do battle for the right to wear the red and yellow chequered roof for the next year.



Drivers from all promotions had been seeded into the heats to determine the majority of the championship grid but two places on the rear of the grid for the big one remained up for grabs as the evening started with a last chance race with a very healthy 12 entrants. This race was started in graded order and Northern Ireland's Bobby Henderson took advantage of the expected chaos that the damp conditions would bring to find himself ahead of the chasing pack. With Henderson looking comfortable it was Lochgelly's own Callum Brown, encouraged by what seemed to be the entire stadium, who started making inroads into Henderson's lead and, with the will of the vociferous crowd behind him, Brown managed to perform a fantastic move to slipstream the 988 machine of Henderson out of the last corner to cross the line for a hugely popular win for one of Scotland's original Ninja Kart drivers in his final year in the formula. The smiles on the parade lap said it all for what was a great way to kick things off – Henderson held on for second place and the final qualifying place for the main event later in the evening.



The seeded drivers would race in two heats to determine their starting positions for the main event and they were lined up in a random grid draw for the first event. Ratho's Harry Robertson surged into a healthy lead pretty quickly and it was a lead he was not to give up despite a couple of stoppages as he took the flag ahead of England's Kasey Jones and West Lothian's Robbie Armit – it had appeared that one of the pre-race favourites, Polmont's Charlie Hardie, was going to claim a good finishing spot but he spun out on turn two before being collected by another kart which put paid to his hopes in heat one. The second heat saw the drivers lined up in the reverse order from that of heat one and it was another Scot, West Lothian's Ethan Doull, who claimed victory ahead of England's Toby Parfitt and a resurgent Charlie Hardie following his exploits in the first race took a fine third.

A B-Final was ran for those who had not succeeded in qualifying for the European Championship itself and it was Anstruther's Callum Beaton who claimed his first win from the red grade ahead of Lucy Millar and Northern Ireland's Megan Murray.

The time had come, under the cover of darkness and heavy rain-filled skies, the entrants for the LJM deSIGNS Ninja Kart European Championship made their way on to the tarmac at HRP Lochgelly Raceway for the first-ever running of the event. England's Kasey Jones has claimed pole position but the young Scots were well represented at the sharp end of the grid with the likes of Robbie Armit, Declan Honeyman and Bailey Millar all in strong challenging positions. Following an early stoppage for Lennon Grant who had made contact with the safety barrier; Jones went into an early lead with Alloa's Declan

Honeyman in close proximity. Honeyman pressured the young English pilot for a few laps before taking on the lead of the race as he managed to move ahead of the chasing pack. Honeyman was flying despite the heavy rain that was falling and drove with a maturity far outweighing his tender years to cross the line well clear of Jones to claim the title of LNJ deSIGNS 2016 Ninja Kart European Champion! Jones held on for a fine second place ahead of Charlie Hardie who had started the race well down the grid in around 18th but managed to claim the final podium spot as he finished in a hard-earned third place. A great night of racing from the youngsters who all performed fantastically well to underline their incredible potential.



The Ninja Karts were joined last Saturday evening by three supporting formulas which provided some great action. The Stock Rods were back on track following a couple of weeks off during which a few HRP drivers travelled over to Northern Ireland with Chris Lattka enjoying the best of the results having successfully defended his Irish Open and Irish Masters titles. There was also visiting interest as World Champion Dean O'Dell had made the trip north from his Bedfordshire base. However, it was National points and Scottish Champion Siobhan Martin who claimed the first win of the night ahead of a fast moving Brian Keir and Jonathan Lattka. These three drivers would repeat their positions in the second heat as they seemed to cope better than other with the wet conditions that dogged every race during the evening. The feature final was another excellent race suitably underlining the quality of drivers at HRP and despite Martin's best attempts to claim a hat-trick of wins. It was Kelty's John-Lee Green who took his smart-looking Corsa C to victory ahead of Martin and Keir who enjoyed another excellent night in his Stock Rod after making the transition from ProStocks during the winter.



The 2.0 Hot Rods also saw visiting interest from England in the shape of National Champion Gavin Botfield from Hampshire but it was the return of European Champion Kenny Purdie to the track that raised the greatest number of smiles on the terraces. Neither champion had the pace to contest for the win in heat one with Purdie taking fourth and Botfield eighth as Jock Campbell underlined his recent good form to take the win ahead of points leader Robbie Burgoyne and Billy Bonnar. Lochore's Bonnar is one of the most experienced drivers on the track and he put that experience and craft to good use in heat two as he took the chequered flag ahead of Falkirk's Burgoyne and Dunfermline's Gerry Hendry. The feature final was run in dreadful conditions for the rear-wheel drive, high-powered hot rods but it was points leader Burgoyne who came from the rear of the grid to head the field at the end of 25 laps to take the win ahead of Purdie and Hendry on a good night of hot rod racing.



The final formula on track last Saturday at HRP Lochgelly Raceway was the Superstox, the formula has been in sparkling form so far in 2016 and another good field of cars arrived to do battle including Mike Deeley who was making his first appearance in his own car and also European Champion Matt Carberry who had made the long trip north to test his new RCE machine. The first heat saw Scottish Champion Stuart Gilchrist take a hard-earned win ahead of National Points Champion Barry Stephen and Kenny McKenzie as the driver battled the conditions, and each other, in the quest for victory. Gilchrist has been in incredible form of late but, despite a highly enviable win record, he has been made to work hard for victory and 2016 debutant Adam Low made the former World Champion work hard to catch him in heat two which Gilchrist eventually managed to do but Low held on for an excellent second place ahead of Allan Gibson. The feature final was another great race to watch with plenty of pushing and shoving going on throughout the large grid but, once again, it was Gilchrist who underlined his liking for racing in the wet with the win and another faultless hat-trick of wins on the night. Bryan Forrest, a driver with a self-confessed loathing of wet conditions, took an excellent second place ahead of Tony Lattka who continues to settle back into the seat of his HCD machine after a late start to the season.

A great night of racing despite the conditions doing their best to dampen the spirits of those on both sides of the fence. The HRP Lochgelly Raceway staff deserve a huge amount of credit for keeping things moving while they themselves were getting soaked!

Next week sees the first of four huge HRP Speed Weekends as major championship action continues at Scotland's most-modern and friendliest short oval motorsports facility HRP Lochgelly Raceway. For the fourth year in succession the National Hot Rod European Championship (sponsored by Dechmont Forklift Trucks) will take place at the well-appointed circuit with a great entry lined up. The Classic Hot Rods will make their competitive Scottish debut too while the 1300 Stock Cars will enjoy two days of racing with the Ministox joining the fun on the Sunday. Racing gets underway at 5pm on Saturday April 9th and 1pm on Sunday April 10th – do not miss this one at HRP Lochgelly Raceway!!!

