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HERBIE DOES IT ON THE DOUBLE AT ROCKINGHAM

After three full seasons of trying, Herbie the Beetle and his long-serving driver Steve Chaplin finally made it on to the top step of the Volkswagen Racing Cup podium yesterday (Sunday) at Rockingham, and for good measure they won both of the day's races to scorch up the points leaderboard of the Hankook-backed championship.

Maisemore, Gloucestershire-based Chaplin, 44, had finished on the podium many times before but that first victory had always proved elusive. And last time out, at Oulton Park, the car took a battering.

But Steve showed his mettle in qualifying on Saturday, posting a time only three-hundredths of a second slower than that of the pole position man, his RP Motorsport team-mate and championship leader Joe Fulbrook.

In Sunday's first race it was Golf GTI driver James Walker who stole the advantage at the start, bundling his way through from sixth on the grid to unseat Chaplin from the lead at the Yentwood right-hander. Chaplin held station behind Walker for four laps before snatching the lead back from him at the Deene hairpin.

Fulbrook followed Chaplin's example in passing Walker next time around, the Bora driver then latching on to Herbie's tail and harassing him all the way to the chequered flag. Chaplin was more than a match for Fulbrook's attacks, however, and held on to take a popular victory by less than half a second.

"I think Herbie is more popular than me," said Chaplin on the podium. "It was hard out there with Joe harassing me all the way. It's our first win and it feels good."

"Steve and I had a very good race," added Fulbrook "I was catching him in certain places on the track and he was faster than me in other places. Fair play to Steve, he drove his socks off. We're over the moon and it's all good news for the championship."

James Walker finished close behind for third, with championship newcomer Peter Felix continuing to show strong form with fourth spot in his Golf. Richard Walker, James's father, placed fifth on his first outing in the Force 10 Motorsport Golf GTI, with Darren Blumson next up to make it two Beetles in the top six.

Another relative novice, Tim Snaylam, scored his best-yet result with seventh, ahead of former champion Paul

Taylor, Martyn Culley and Kieran Griffin. Kieran's younger brother, Liam, was in the wars again in his new Addison Lee Motorsport Scirocco, losing a bundle of places after a collision on the opening lap and fighting back to an excellent fourth - breaking the circuit lap record on the way - before mechanical problems sidelined him for the rest of the weekend. The Scirocco of Mike Kurton was a non-finisher also.

Just to show his first race win was more than just luck, Chaplin's Beetle did the double in race two, after a hard early battle with Blumson.

Pole-sitter Blumson led the charge into Deene Hairpin from the start, with Chaplin second and James Walker's Golf shooting past Felix for third. Although Chaplin was soon in front, Blumson regained the advantage as they braked for Deene on the second lap.

The top five were already beginning to break away, with Fulbrook's Bora piling the pressure on Felix for fourth. Kieran Griffin's Golf headed the next group, and began to make strenuous efforts to bridge the gap to the quintet.

Through Turn One on the next lap Chaplin hit the front again, and this time it was decisive. Blumson tried to re-pass around the outside at Tarzan, but his wide line allowed James Walker to snatch second from him.

Blumson soon regained second place, but, as Chaplin consolidated his lead, Fulbrook was the man on the move. He nearly squeezed past Walker at Tarzan on lap four, before exiting Deene a lap later with the place secured. Felix was next to challenge Walker and claimed fourth into Deene on lap seven after a couple of earlier attempts.

Fulbrook's charge continued and, after a couple of laps shadowing Blumson, he claimed second through Chapman Curve. However, he was unable to make any inroads on Chaplin's dominance. "Once I managed to break the tow from Darren, I knew I would be all right," said Chaplin. "Especially if Joe had as much difficulty getting past him as I had."

"I had to back off as the water temperature went very high," said Fulbrook, who finished seven seconds behind Herbie at the chequered flag.

Blumson, Felix and James Walker held station behind, with Aaron Mason's Golf completing the top six, the novice demoting Kieran Griffin at Deene with a lap to go. The Golfs of Snaylam and Richard Walker finished eighth and ninth, with Didge Dziurzynski 10th to give his new Mk IV Golf an encouraging debut after overcoming a legion of teething problems in qualifying and race one. Oulton victor Paul Taylor ended his race in the Yentwood gravel on lap four.

A deserving winner of the Milltek 'spirit of racing' award went to Rockingham instructor Doug Ross, whose Polo failed a lap from the end of race one and which could not be coaxed into action for race two despite hours of toil in the paddock.

The Volkswagen Racing Cup in association with Hankook is additionally supported by Augustus Martin, Ceva Logistics, ECM Vehicle Delivery, Milltek Sport, Mondial Assistance, KW Automotive, Superchips, Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles and Volkswagen Financial Services UK.