



RENAULT SPORT

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HALE GOES TOP AFTER DOUBLE PODIUM AT BRANDS HATCH OPENER

- Successful opening rounds of 2010 Protyre Formula Renault BARC Championship at sun-soaked Brands Hatch
- Mitchell Hale secures maiden win along with podium to lead drivers' standings.
- Euan Hankey secures victory in thrilling round two.
- Impressive double podium for Joseph Reilly.

Fortec Motorsport's Mitchell Hale (Bristol) got his 2010 Protyre Formula Renault BARC Championship off to an impressive start after two polished performances during the opening rounds of the season held at Brands Hatch Indy circuit on 17th/18th April.

The 16-year-old former Ginetta Junior racer claimed his first ever Formula Renault victory with a win in round one followed by a third place in the second race of the sun-soaked weekend at the Kent circuit.

Antel Motorsport's Euan Hankey (Somerset) took the honours in round two while 18-year-old Joseph Reilly (Camden) produced two strong drives to claim a double podium with a third and second place.

The weekend's final podium spot went to SWB Motorsport's Luke Wright (Shaftesbury, Dorset) who secured second in round one while 20-year-old student James Birch (Rickmansworth, Herts) took both the Privateer Cup honours.

Hankey wins at Theodore's expense...

On a sun-soaked circuit, Hale took the honours at the front of the start grid for round two after lapping well within the lap record during Saturday's qualifying session. Hillspeed's James Theodore (Telford) drew up alongside the Bristol teenager with Reilly and 23-year-old Hankey on row two.

As the lights went out for the start of the 22-lap race it was Theodore who made the better start to lead the field into Paddock Hill Bend after an awful start by Hale dropped him down to sixth. Wright looked to have made a great start too but was deemed to have jumped the start by the Clerk of the Course and subsequently handed a drive-through penalty.

The opening lap saw all the drivers jostle for position with the order running Theodore, Hankey, Reilly and Anglo Motorsport's Kasper Krogh (Denmark) as they crossed the line for the first time. Keen to make up for a disappointing round one, Theodore quickly began to develop a lead over Hankey who was already being forced to drive defensively from an eager Reilly.

Despite his poor start, Hale was already making up places moving up to fifth by lap seven while elsewhere Fortec Motorsport's Josh Webster (Suffolk) and SWB Motorsport's Andrew Jarman (Northampton) were both running well in the midfield.

With a lead of more than one and a half seconds, Theodore looked to have little to worry about which certainly wasn't the case for Hankey who had to use all his experience to keep Reilly behind him. Then on lap 11 disaster struck for the 18-year-old race leader when mechanical failure forced him to pull up gifting his lead to Hankey with Reilly now in second. Behind, Hale had been able to work his way through the field to find himself in third followed by Danish driver Krogh who later revealed that due to current flight restrictions he'd been forced to endure a 15 hour drive to the circuit.

Out in front, Hankey tried to make his car as wide as possible around the 1.1986-mile circuit to ensure Reilly stayed in his rear view mirrors yet allowing third place Hale to catch and develop a three-car-train with all three in contention for the lead. As the top-three continued to battle, just behind Krogh had slipped down the order leaving Webster to take fourth and Hillspeed's Alice Powell (Chipping Norton) to move into the top five.

Hankey just did enough to hang on though and with the chequered flag insight he crossed the line to take the victory with Reilly a mere 0.649s behind in second. Hale, who also claimed the fastest lap of the race earning him two extra championship points, took a deserved third place with Webster in fourth and Powell rounding off the top five.

Hale takes maiden victory in round one...

The day's earlier opening round saw Theodore line the start grid as pole sitter with Hale alongside him on the front row and Reilly and Krogh on the row two. Due to a fuelling infringement during qualifying, privateer Birch was forced to start the race from the back of the grid.

Theodore made the best start as the lights went out closely followed by Hale, Reilly and Wright who had shot into fourth from seventh on the grid by the end of the opening lap. Krogh had been unable to make the most of his strong starting position dropping two places early on to lie in sixth.

The race had little time to play out though as the Safety Car was deployed early on following spins by Welch Motorsport's Jack Piper (Norwich) and Webster at Paddock Hill Bend. Racing resumed three laps later with the race distance extended to 25 laps. Theodore bunched the field up well to make a clean restart, his first behind a Safety Car, followed by Hale and Wright. A slip by Reilly meanwhile saw him drop to fifth behind Hankey as the field filed across the line.

As the top three of Theodore, Hale and Wright began to pull away, behind Reilly was making up for his earlier mistake showing great pace in his Fortec Motorsport run car and taking Hankey with a superb move around the outside of Paddock Hill Bend on lap 11. Just outside the top five, Powell was again driving well in sixth while in the midfield, Welch Motorsport's Kourosh Khani (London), Jarman and Antel Motorsport's Matt Draper (London) were all running strong.

Out in front, Theodore was starting to come under increasing pressure from Hale with just a few hundredths of a second now separating the two drivers. Then a slip by Theodore exiting Clearways allowed Hale to close as the two crossed the line nose-to-tail to complete lap 16. With Hale all over the back of Theodore car's, the Telford racer tried to go defensive into Paddock Hill Bend only for Hale to dart up the inside at the last minute with a great move to take the lead.

Hale then wasted no time out in front and quickly pulled away setting the fastest lap of the race shortly after. Meanwhile things didn't improve for Theodore who had now slipped to third place and into the clutches of a determined Reilly.

Taking note of Hale's earlier move, Reilly was now trying to make a similar pass on Theodore through Paddock Hill Bend to take the remaining podium spot with Theodore just closing the gap in the nick of time. Just two laps to go though, the North London racer was able to make the move stick with Theodore defending the inside line only for Reilly to surprise him by driving around the outside of the first corner.

The race though belonged to Hale who crossed the line to take his maiden win followed by Wright with Reilly taking a deserved third place. Theodore was forced to settle for fourth while Powell rounded off the top five. Despite starting from the back of the grid, Birch had driven a great race to finish 10th.

Commenting on his weekend, Hale said: "Round one was a really close race with James [Theodore] just making a mistake at Clearways to allow me to close and pass at Paddock Hill. After my poor start in round two I was determined to try and get a podium place so just kept battling and thankfully it paid off to complete a really good weekend for me."

Round two winner Hankey said: "I got a good start but thought the race was Theodore's until he just started slowing allowing me to take the lead. After that I had to work hard to keep Reilly in my mirrors which was made worse by the fact that one had been damaged. He kept coming closer but was never quite near enough to get by and I was able to hang on to take the win."

Commenting on his performance, double podium finisher Reilly said: "I'm really pleased with my move in round one around the outside of Paddock Hill and also the battle in round two with Euan and Mitchell. I was trying to attack and defend at the same time which is never easy. Overall it's been a great start to my championship."

Second-place in round one Wright added: "It was an amazing race helped by a good start. The Safety Car also worked to my advantage and it was just a case of taking each place as it came."

Rounds three and four of the 2010 Protyre Formula Renault BARC Championship take place at Silverstone National circuit on 8th/9th May.

2010 Protyre Formula Renault BARC Championship provisional drivers' standings – round 2:

1 Mitchell Hale	GBR	Fortec Motorsport	61 pts
2 Joseph Reilly	GBR	Fortec Motorsport	53 pts
3 Euan Hankey	GBR	Antel Motorsport	44 pts
4 Alice Powell	GBR	Hillspeed	40 pts
5 Andrew Jarman	GBR	SWB Motorsport	32 pts
6 James Birch	GBR	Driver	29 pts

Privateer Cup – round 2:

1 James Birch	GBR	29 pts
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