

KARCHER FORMULA FORD TRACK ATTACK

Whincup Racing's 2002 Formula Ford campaign got off to a roaring start at the Australian Grand Prix, our newly acquired Van Diemen RF01 proving to be the class of the field.



Looking absolutely resplendent in its Valvoline Cummins Repco livery, the 2001 championship-winning car repaid the efforts of our crew chief, Sonic Motorsport's Michael Ritter and our mechanic, Andy Gilbert, by claiming pole, a victory and a runner-up spot and along the way shattering the lap record numerous times. The Albert Park circuit in Melbourne not only gave us the opportunity to thoroughly test the Garry Rogers Motorsport-entered RF01, but it also enabled our team to shine through in front of the assembled Formula 1 circus and clearly demonstrate that we are now a force to be reckoned with in the upcoming national FFord Championship Series.

We were lucky enough to have all our sessions during the first three days of the meeting held in the dry, which meant I could make full use of the Graham Ritter-prepared motor and really explore the car's performance envelope. Unfortunately, though, a race two coming together with my team-mate, Marcus Marshall, spoiled what looked to be a potentially perfect outing. That incident aside, we had a fabulous three days of racing and proved to our satisfaction that this year's Title is within reach – and, even though this was not a pointscore round, we headed home feeling optimistic about our prospects for the new season.

PRACTICE & QUALIFYING (Thursday, February 28)

After developing an appreciation for the outright speed of our car during the morning practice session, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that we'd topped the order with a 2:09.175 lap of the high-speed 5.3km circuit that rated as the fastest lap ever recorded for a Formula Ford.

Marcus was next, with a 2:09.878, which meant that our two-car team was already the dominant pairing, even though it was still early in the proceedings. Qualifying was even better, the increased pace of my car



reflecting the fine-tuning efforts of the crew between sessions and resulting in a 2:08.08 that stood as the pole time for the first race later in the day, the time being eight-tenths quicker than the nearest of the opposition.

RACE ONE (10 laps)

As things turned out, the first race was something of a heart-stopper and New Zealand driver Fabian Coulthard almost cost me the win. But, after we'd swapped the lead on one occasion, I managed to take back the lead and then hold him out.





The race then went right down to the line, where I managed to taste victory by the narrowest of margins, the time-sheets recording the winning gap as only one-hundredth of a second.

Following the race, during which I'd recorded a best lap of 2:08.199, Michael and I sat down and conducted a post-mortem to try and get an understanding of the car and determine its negative aspects, as I had a slight turn-in oversteer problem. We'd already made advances over the set-up Will Davison had run last year when he won the Title in this car, but the set-up was then further altered to resolve all the areas of concern. I should point out, though, that we weren't really talking about really dramatic changes, as the car was obviously already a pretty good package when compared with the opposition.

RACE TWO (10 laps, Friday, March 1)

The changes made the night before quickly proved to be right on the money, as the car was now a bullet, but I have to admit that I was rather sceptical about what Michael was doing at the start. While we'd won the first race and the car was quite good, I found the confident way he completely changed the car to be a bit scary, even though he was more experienced than me and felt that the move to a different set-up wasn't a big deal. Anyway, he was right and the car was unbelievably quick, opening a gap at the start and leading by about 150 metres. But, because it was so fast, it also created a negative situation, as it was so hard to drive and was very slippery in the rear.

I struggled to keep the car from oversteering and ended up spinning while leading on lap 2, the slight mistake on my behalf resulting from a lack of confidence in the car, which had slightly too much mid-corner speed. After quickly recovering from the spin, I spent most of the race trying to catch the lead pair, Coulthard and Marshall. As I came across the line to start the last lap and passed Coulthard, Marshall had opened up a bit of a gap, so I set off to catch him and was on him halfway through the lap. Down the inside I went at Turn 10, but overshot my braking marker and then realised I was in trouble – carrying too much speed, I tried to avoid him, but touched wheels and went into the sand trap and that was the end of the race for both of us.

RACE THREE (8 laps, Saturday, March 2)

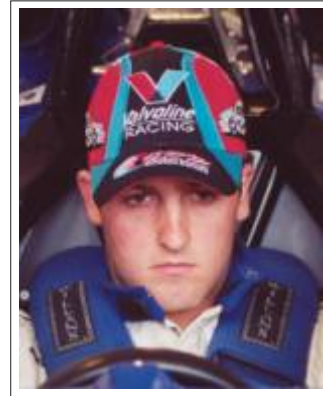
I have to thank Michael and Andy for their hard work during the previous evening, as I was able to grid up in 24th spot knowing the car was absolutely fine again. Making a conscious effort to keep my nose clean and not touch anyone, I made a good start and then set off, determined to make up as many positions as humanly possible by the end of the race. Before I knew it, I was chasing down Nick Agland, who was in third place and, while passing him, I set the fastest time of the race, a 2:08.448 on lap 4. But,



despite giving my all, I ran out of time and couldn't catch Coulthard, who started on pole and went on to take the win ahead of my rapidly closing car.

Without the support of my sponsors, the weekend would not have been such a resounding success for Whincup Racing and I would therefore very much like to thank Valvoline, Cummins, Repco, L&O Electrics, Yale Asia Pacific, K W Doggett Paper Supplies and Harrop Engineering for their support.

See you all at Goulburn's Wakefield Park on March 29-30 for the first round of the 2002 Championship Series.



Jamie W
Jamie Whincup

