



# ACADEMY MUSTANGS: DONINGTON PARK 2-HOUR

The multi-class British GT Championship's first of two race weekends at Donington Park was full of action and drama

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**A** perfect late-May Bank Holiday weekend at Donington Park circuit served up an exciting endurance race filled with action and drama across both the GT3 and GT4 classes.

One of the important elements of the SRO Motorsports administered British GT Championship is a carefully calculated 'Balance of Performance' formula. Within each class, the cars are restricted to produce similar overall performance while retaining the individual 'character' of each car. That is why Mustangs, McLarens, Mercedes-AMGs, BMWs, Porsches, Aston Martins and Ferraris (smaller models) compete and be capable of comparable overall lap times, but delivered

in different ways. Some cars have faster straight-line speed while others are more corner-capable. The BoP 'lower' typically used to level-up the cars are weight, power (all intake volume) and ride height.

The Mustangs / Ford Performance GT4 Mustang has been notable for its corner stability and mid-speed. Superior traction, especially out of slower corners has been enjoyed by the Mustang drivers over four seasons of UK competition in places where other cars might struggle with grip. This applies particularly on track surfaces worn smooth by years of competition.

Since the Championship's last race visit, the Donington Park track surface had been re-laid

in November of 2022, the first time in twenty years. Though it was less noticeable at Silverstone in March of this year, subsequent track use had 'rubbed-in' the surface and some tarmac oils have evaporated. The net effect is improved adhesion for everyone but the change to the track surface affects the cars differently. For some cars this meant a relative improvement to corner exit speed. Combined with the 2021 season spec tyre changes, which also gave more benefits to the cars with less corner grip, the Mustang drivers would appear to have suffered a reduction to an important performance balancing factor.

With no way to improve their adhesion to the track, the Mustang drivers have to



Auton Motors. The Mustang was able to make it around in sixth after Evans skilfully extricated himself from the gravel for the second time in his GT4 career. That meant Cowley and Evans finished in third place in the GT4 Silver class. The race was won by Brown and Clark's Optimum Motorsports McLaren with two Audis and a BMW 118i making up the podium places.

Team Principal Matt Nicol-Jones said after the race: "It was a frustrating weekend. All the teams were quicker than last year at Donington Park. The category has moved on with the arrival of some new generation cars and we could do with a more even balance of Performance. I am hoping that SRO will figure out the true characteristics of these new cars and make appropriate adjustments and rebalance for Silverstone. Meanwhile Academy Motorsport and our drivers will continue to extract every last bit of performance available to us."

Since Donington, the outcome of an investigation led to the pro-race application of the pitstop contamination penalties. Academy Motorsport are heading into the halfway stage at Silverstone on June 17th in 3rd place in the team standings. Evans and Cowley are currently 5th in the GT4 and 2nd in the GT4 Silver drivers' points table. Moore and Nicol-Jones are 8th and 7th respectively in those same standings. **GT**

finishes their management of tyre and brake degradation with additional precision. Of course, it also means having to settle for a lower, single lap, qualifying position. Naturally, an experienced team like Academy will be mindful that the championship's endurance rounds provide more opportunities for skillful and refined racecraft and an even greater need for perfect pitlane team execution.

For Academy Motorsport it was a weekend of mixed success. On Saturday afternoon Will Moore and Matt Nicol-Jones had qualified in fifth position, with Erik Evans and Matt Cowley two rows further back in twelfth. Moore and Cowley started the race in #52 and #51 respectively and avoided the accidents happening around them to achieve P7 and P8 when the time came to change drivers. For the GT4 drivers, a safety car period coincided with their class pit stop window and virtually the entire GT4 field pitted at once. Disappointingly Nicol-Jones was unable to re-start in #52 after the pit stop due to a technical issue.

Erik Evans retained seventh position in a very evenly matched GT4 field until a wild late lap reshuffle demoted one of the Ginettas and Evans made contact with R Racing's

## 2023 BRITISH GT CHAMPIONSHIP CALENDAR

July 17 - Silverstone 1st Legged Practice

July 18 - Silverstone 1st Legged Race

July 19 - Silverstone 2nd Legged Race

All British GT Championship events will be broadcasted on BT Sport 1 and BT Sport 2

