

Bandits boss praises squad after draw with champions

SGB Championship: Berwick Bandits 45, Poole Pirates 45

Berwick Bandits team manager Gary Flint admitted to mixed feelings after watching his side draw with defending champions Poole Pirates on Saturday and said: "I don't know whether to see it as points won against a very good side or points lost."

But he added: "What I do know is that it was a cracking speedway meeting and that every one of our seven made a major contribution to the score."

In the end, a disintegrating clutch cost the FTS Bandits, powered by Keenwood Karpets dearly. Chris Harris had seemingly done the hard work passing the equally impressive and entertaining Danny King in Heat 15, moving into a second place which would have given the home side the win. Then, acrid smoke gushed from the home skipper's machine and that was that.

In contrast, Pirates celebrated as Richard Lawson and King's 5-1 rescued what had seemed a lost cause after a rejuvenated Ricky Wells and new Bandits' hero Jonas Knudsen teamed up to give Berwick a four-point lead going into the final heat.

Poole will argue that justice was done as when referee Willie Dishington called the first running of the race back and warned King for moving. Harris was cruising down the back straight after suffering an engine failure on the second bend.

An unsatisfactory start was called and Harris jumped on a second bike which had the power to drive inside King, no mean feat with the visiting captain in superb form himself, but it could not last the four laps.

Harris' original bike had blown away all opposition in the four heats it completed.

The first was the fastest four laps of Shielfield this year 63.8sec, nine-tenths of a second outside Dan Bewley's track record. Indeed, had he not spent the early part of the race checking that partner Theo Pijper had the better of Steve Worrall, he may even have posed a greater threat to the Grand Prix man's record.

A run of three shared races was broken when Berwick and then Poole enjoyed back-to-back heat advantages.

Wells struck first for a 4-2 over Worrall and Drew Kemp and then Harris and Pijper added a second 5-1 over Lawson and Ben Cook as Berwick opened up a ten-point lead.

Visiting team manager Gary Havelock used Worrall as the tactical substitute in Heat Seven with Flint following home King to restrict the damage.

A reserve switch brought better luck as Ben Cook won Heat Eight and, with Kemp finding his feet, Pijper could not make any impact.

Ben Cook was on the receiving end of a robust first bend from Jye Etheridge as he and Wells drew Heat Nine but, following Harris' exciting win over King, Poole took what threatened to be a match-winning lead.

Knudsen rode a superb first bend around the outside of Worrall and Kemp in Heat 11 only for Flint to hit the deck prompting the red lights to come on.

In the re-run, the Poole pair shot from the gate and won at a canter, Flint's chase not being helped when he lost his steel shoe.

Nathan Stoneman's uncomfortable fall into the third bend fence brought the red lights on again in Heat 12 with King well in

front. In the re-run, Etheridge shot from the gate and managed to keep the former British Champion behind him for three laps before he took a leaf from Harris' book and powered off the fourth bend banking and under the popular Aussie.

Harris had more work to do in race 13 and produced a pass to savour, christening yet another new passing line at Shielfield Park, this one high, wide and handsome only inches from the Polyfoam to fly around Worrall.

The scores were level after 13 heats but this classic Saturday night drama had an unforeseen twist.

Flint added: "We haven't had much luck this season, and most of it has been bad. Chris 'Bomber' Harris was absolutely brilliant all night and we knew that the destination of the points couldn't have been in better hands. Unfortunately, his bikes had other ideas.

"it was good to see Ricky and Theo back among the points after, by their standards, pretty barren runs. That certainly gives us confidence as we prepare to visit Oxford on Wednesday night and then claw back a 12-point deficit against Redcar in the Knockout Cup next Saturday.

"After three successive home defeats it was nice to change the momentum. A win would have been even better."

Bandits: Chris Harris 11+1(5), Theo Pijper 6+1(4), Jye Etheridge 5+2(4), Ricky Wells 11(5), Leon Flint 6(4), Jonas Knudsen 4+1 (4), Nathan Stoneman 2+2(3)

Pirates: Steve Worrall 9(5), Drew Kemp 4+2(4), Danny King 13+1(5), Zach Cook 2+1(3), Richard Lawson 10(5), Ben Cook 7(5), Nathan Ablitt 0(3)