

Simpson engine fire fails to halt Monarchs

Edinburgh Monarchs Academy fought off a spirited late fightback from their hosts to put daylight between them and bottom club Berwick Bullets on a chaotic night at Shielfield Park which ended with a scoreline of Bullets 38, Monarchs 51.

The meeting took its toll on both men and machines with mechanical failures, rider error and a fire all part of a hugely-entertaining if, at times, utterly chaotic encounter, *writes George Dodds.*

In Adam Roynon and impressive reserve Dayle Wood, Monarchs had two big scoring match-winners. In contrast, the lightning-fast gating of Connor Coles was the Bullets' main weapon but he only received sporadic support.

Danny Phillips survived a rash inside run by Jacob Hook which left him bouncing off the fourth bend fencing and careering down the home straight towards the starting gate, scattering track staff before he managed to get the powerslide under control.

Not so lucky was his captain Greg Blair whose handful of throttle as he threw the kitchen sink at Roynon in heat seven ended with the Scot suffering concussion and a damaged shoulder after thumping back first into the polyfoam barrier on the fourth bend back first.

He joined Monarchs' Kyran Lyden – who dislocated his shoulder for the second time in a couple of weeks when falling in heat one – and Mickie Simpson in withdrawing from the meeting.

Teenager Simpson failed to get away from the tapes in heat two and could only watch as his bike caught fire on the centre green (picture by *Taz McDougall*).

Even worse for the ex-Leicester rider methanol had soaked into the lower part of his Kevlars and then caught alight leaving him with burns to his lower leg and foot.

Jason Garrad's first heat fall causing a stoppage to heat one with Coles comfortably ahead of Clegg and there was an inevitability about the fact that in the rerun it was the Monarch who took the chequered flag.

Mason Watson then slid into the first bend fence while comfortably leading two, Wood and Simpson taking a 5-1 in the rerun.

With Simpson's bike succumbing to its fiery fate on the infield Jamie Halder then blew an engine to smithereens in four when comfortably placed.

That cost Berwick a point but the next engine to let go was far more costly, Coles apparently en-route to victory when a manifold failure left him cruising around the final two bends without power.

First Hook and then Wood passed him, the Monarchs' reserve by a tyre on the line, a finish confirmed by referee Graeme Hunter checking the transponder data.

Following Blair's evening-ending crash Edinburgh held what looked like a decisive 17-point lead after seven heats but the Bullets' refused to give up without a fight.

Phillips and Halder roared from the gate but Hook was on the charge, passing the former Kent man cleanly before lunging under Phillips, bouncing him off the boarding and earning a fairly clear cut exclusion, the Bullets pairing enjoying an easier run to the flag in the rerun.

Coles then became the only man to take a point off Roynon and with Garrad winning the battle of the additional rider the home side had pulled back eight points.

And they looked good again in 11, Watson and Halder leaving Clegg in their wake and on their way to a 5-1 when Halder's seat broke free forcing him to slow and letting Clegg through.

For once Coles was left trailing in 13 but he got out in the dirt and powered past first Clegg and then Hook, the Bandit in Monarchs' clothing suffering an engine failure which allowed Kieran Douglas to collect his third point of the night and close the deficit to seven points.

But any hopes of a comeback ended when Watson and Halder were on the wrong end of a heat 14 scoreline of 5-1 at the hands of Wood and Roynon.

The Cumbrian then avenged his earlier defeat by leading Coles home in race 15, a relatively straightforward end to a night which was anything but.

Kevin Little, Berwick's team manager, said: "You couldn't fault our battling qualities but, once again, we saw points disappear through mechanical failures and falls when well placed. It was a night when you couldn't afford to take your eyes off the action for a minute and I think the crowd certainly got its money's worth."

Bullets: Connor Coles 11, Danny Phillips 9, Jamie Halder 6+2, Greg Blair 2, Kieran Douglas 3, Mason Watson 6+2, Jason Garrad 1

Monarchs' Academy: Max Clegg 11, Kyran Lyden 1, Adam Roynon 14, Jacob Hook 9, Mickie Simpson 2+1, Dayle Wood 13+3, Mark Parker 1