



Need For Speed European Drift Championship – Round 1 Oulton Park Circuit

A new points system and plenty of new drivers ensured the opening round of the Need For Speed European Drift Championship was going to send the crowds wild. Rain early on added to the drama as the Oulton Park circuit ensured the early knock-out sessions were unpredictable for the tail-happy drivers. When the tyre smoke settled at the end of the day though, it was Phil Morrison in his 2JZ-powered Nissan S15 who proved he had the speed, angles and sheer guts to slide himself to maximum points.

The day started out with just one qualifying battle, as the fifteen remaining drivers survived the luck of the draw to gain automatic places in the last sixteen. And it was Phil Morrison who had to pull a big angle move on the unfortunate R32-driving Gary Hughes, turning seventeen entrants into sixteen and ensuring he had a chance to progress further.

That sixteen soon became a final eight though. Steve Evans in his Toyota Starlet fell off the track in both his runs to hand James Russell a pass to the next round, while the hard-charging Paul Conlan saw off Ian Harrison and his Nissan Skyline thanks to some impressive speed through the bends. Newcomer to the series Lex Drew in the Santa Pod R32 found a determined Alan McCord stuck to his rear bumper through the first run and just couldn't keep up with the Silvia's V8 grunt in the second to end his day early. The interesting pairing of Steve Will in his E36 M3 Turbo and Pete Barber in a FD RX7 were next up, the Mazda looking good but not needing to pull off a massive performance to go through as Will twice took the BMW off track.

Meanwhile Andrew Cooper was another driver to find a sticky Silvia on his rear bumper during his first run which helped Morrison's ascent into the final eight, but the real surprise was yet to come. Dwain McKeever, a 13-year old newcomer from Northern Ireland found himself paired with the 2007 Champion, Brett Castle. It was a baptism of fire for the teenager and after a good first run, Castle astonishingly made an uncharacteristic mistake and came off the course sending the youngster through to the quarter finals. Kieron Cameron also had a spin to send Declan Hicks through, as did Paul Cheshire who did well to keep his S14A from hitting the tyre wall as the SVA Imports 350Z of Mark Luney charged past him into the next round.

While McKeever had time to celebrate before the final session, the circuit also had time to dry out. And unfortunately for the young 180SX driver he also had the time to

contemplate how to deal with Morrison in his next pairing, a driver whose Driftworks Silvia seemed to be the main source of atmospheric rubber pollution on the day. McKeever did his best to keep up on the first run but had an off, and when leading in the second overcooked it on a right hander and span into the path of Morrison. The S15 driver reacted quickly, mirroring the spin to avoid a collision then pulling a smoke filled 180degree spin to get across the finish line first. One of the closest pairings was next up as Luney faced Hicks, with only a few moments of straightening by Hicks in the first run being the difference between success and failure... and unfortunately for him in this case that lack of angle meant the failure rather than success.

The elder Northern Irish driver Conlan did one better than his teenage countryman, showing his speed behind the wheel of the 2JZ powered S15 as he stuck to Russell's rear on the first run, then catching him up into the first corner of the second run and forcing Russell into a series of small errors. Speed wasn't lacking in Barber's battle with McCord either which helped bag the RX7 driver the advantage after their first pass, but too much speed was his downfall on the next as he careered onto the grass after the first corner, resulting in a Nissan-only semi finals.

Morrison versus Luney proved to be a crowd-pleaser, Luney mirroring the S15 perfectly on his chasing run. But Morrison managed to match him on his, adding even more angle into the equation to just edge his way into the final. In the other semi it was two S15s, the 2JZ power of Conlan against the V8 growl of McCord. Another close-run duel that saw both drivers straightening a little on the first to make things even heading into the second pass. There was little to choose from between the two here either, but it was judged that Conlan's high tempo charge at McCord's rear forced him into taking less angle into the middle section of the course, meaning McCord was destined to face Morrison in the final.

And what a final it proved to be. Morrison looked unbeatable on his lead run, showing off not only big speed but also big angles which McCord did his best to follow. Going all out in the last run, aware he needed something huge, McCord threw his S15 into the course with just as much speed and angle as his opponent had. But Morrison wasn't going to be left behind and stuck like glue to McCord, matching him move for move to just edge that run and ultimately just edge the win.

So with the first points of the 2009 Need for Speed European Drift Championship now handed out, the drivers will head to the rollercoaster ride that is Knockhill. It's a daunting circuit, yet for many of the drivers it's right up there amongst their favourites and you can bet they will all believe it's their opportunity to make Morrison's victory a short-lived one.

ROUND 1 RESULTS

1 – Phil Morrison (Nissan S15 2JZ)	100pts
2 – Alan McCord (Nissan S15 V8)	75pts
3 – Mark Luney (Nissan 350Z)	60pts
4 – Paul Conlan (Nissan S15 2JZ)	50pts
5 – Declan Hicks (Toyota Soarer GZ)	40pts
6 – James Russell (Nissan Skyline R32)	35pts
7 – Pete Barber (Mazda RX7 FD)	30pts
8 – Dwain McKeever (Nissan 180SX)	25pts
9 – Brett Castle (Nissan S14A)	15pts
10 – Steve Evans (Toyota Starlet)	15pts
11 – Kieron Cameron (Nissan S13)	15pts
12 – Steve Will (BMW M3 Turbo)	15pts
13 – Paul Cheshire (Nissan S14A)	15pts
14 – Lex Drew (Nissan Skyline R32)	15pts
15 – Andrew Cooper (Nissan S14A)	15pts
16 – Ian Harrison (Nissan Skyline)	15pts
17 – Gary Hughes (Nissan Skyline R32)	10pts

Round 2 Kicks off at Knockhill Race Circuit in Scotland, May 17th

NEED FOR SPEED DRIFT 09
EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Round 1 - Oulton Park 25th April
Round 2 - Knockhill 17th May
Round 3 - Silverstone 31st May
Round 4 - Santa Pod 11th July
Round 5 - Snetterton 11th October

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