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### **HARRISON'S DEBUT VICTORY AT MANFEILD LEAVES SUZUKI SWIFT SPORT CUP CHAMPIONSHIP WIDE OPEN**



PHOTO BY: Geoff Ridder

Overcoming the adversity of a spectacular crash during the season opener at Pukekohe, Scott Harrison won the fifth round of the Suzuki Swift Sport Cup Championship at Manfeild on February 13/14.

As a rookie driver in the one-make saloon car series, the 21-year-old carpet layer from Whangarei always regarded this season as a time to gain racing experience.

After emerging shaken but unhurt in a dramatic multi roll-over accident at Pukekohe last November, the prospect of actually winning the championship must have been far from his mind.

Yet going into the final round at Taupo on March 20/21 Harrison, along with William Bamber and Ben Dallas, each have a chance of taking out the closely contested Swift Sport Cup.

In the most recent battle on the Manawatu circuit at Manfeild, Harrison showed great form, winning two qualifying races and finishing sixth in the final reverse grid event.

Right from practice Scott revealed his pace would be strong. He set the fastest qualifying lap time of 1 minute 25.271 seconds, almost half a second faster than Aucklander Dallas. Wellington entrant Grant Ryan was third, followed by Craig Innes (Taupo) and A.J. Lauder (Thames).

Chief protagonist Bamber is usually the man to beat and Manfeild is virtually home territory for the ambitious 16-year-old Wanganui youngster.

William's car had braking problems during practice, culminating in a sixth place grid ranking. Still, the Swifts were displaying their usual close form, with a mere six tenths of a second separating the top six cars.

A heavy downpour just before the start of the first Manfeild race was seen as a bonus by Bamber who shines in the wet. Harrison stormed away to win by 2.7 seconds in the Triple X Motorsport entered Swift, with Innes second, Bamber third and Bramwell King fourth.

Aucklander Alan Dunkley secured the fastest lap time of 1 minute 29.022 seconds - 4 seconds slower than the practice times on a dry track.

This race was disappointing for Ben Dallas whose car had problems with its anti-lock braking system, a handicap that resulted in the Aucklander finishing a lowly tenth.

For the second qualifying race, Dallas made amends, finishing a strong second, barely one-tenth of a second behind Harrison who not only took out the event but also set fastest lap of 1 minute 25.231 seconds. Innes finished a consistent third, with Dunkley fourth and King fifth.

This time it was Bamber who was out of contention. On the final lap he overstepped the mark in an attempt to pass Dallas, briefly leaving the circuit in an excursion that relegated him to eleventh.

Keen to elevate his leading points position, Bamber started from seventh grid position in the final reverse grid race, while Dallas was in ninth spot at the start.

"It was a very tough battle to move through the field as the grid is now all reasonably equal in pace which is making for great racing," said William.

With five laps to run, Bamber moved into second place, but couldn't quite catch eventual winner Mike Turley (Auckland) who took the chequered flag and his debut victory with a 1.9 second advantage. Dallas came home fourth, behind A.J.Lauder, while Harrison's sixth place was sufficient to give him his first-ever championship round victory.

Innes and Grant Ryan had a coming together, resulting in suspension damage to the Taupo driver's Suzuki and more substantial damage to Grant's car. Ryan was taken to hospital for a check-up and was later discharged.

Bamber finished second overall at Manfeild, narrowly beating Dallas, while Turley was fourth ahead of Bramwell King, Castrol Suzuki Swift Sport Cup Scholarship winner Matt Gibson (Wanganui) and Lauder.

With the final round at Taupo still to run, just 29 points separate Bamber and Dallas in the struggle to secure the third Swift Sport Cup Championship. Bamber has amassed 911 points, while Dallas has 882 and Harrison is on 731 points. The twists and turns of the Taupo circuit will determine the outcome of the hard-fought series.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

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