

CLOSE RACING IN SUZUKI SWIFT SPORT CUP CHAMPIONSHIP

If the frantic race pace at the opening round at Pukekohe is any indication, expect fireworks from the brightly coloured Suzuki Swift Sports at Ruapuna. Now in its third season, the Swift Sport Cup Championship has matured into an exciting, highly competitive one-make production based saloon car series.

Local lad Cody McMaster has won the Championship two times on the trot and while he might have finished third on points after Pukekohe, the Christchurch driver is a sure-fire favourite. Cody was fastest in qualifying, and looked set to win the first heat at Pukekohe before he was given a time penalty for allegedly jumping the start. Wanganui's William Bamber was also penalised for beating the lights, leaving victory to Matt Gibson from Ben Dallas and Alan Dunkley.

McMaster made amends in race two, leading from start to finish from Bamber who was little more than one tenth of a second behind after ten laps. Indeed, barely 3.5 seconds covered the top six Swifts in this race. Then in the reverse grid final, Cody started from the rear of the pack, before being hit from behind in an incident that pushed a guard onto a rear wheel and resulted in him finishing fifth. He was aggregate third but is happy with the race pace of his new car and is sure he can put himself into the championship lead on his home ground at Ruapuna.

Will Bamber drove like a veteran racer at Pukekohe, despite his tender years - he celebrates his 16th birthday this Sunday, November 29. Bamber's win in the third race of the opening round, plus second and fourth placings in the other two events gave him overall victory for the meeting. Last season Will finished only 10 points behind McMaster for the season, and he a driver to watch in the LG sponsored Suzuki.

Aucklander Ben Dallas, 19, is lying second on points followed two seconds and a third at Pukekohe and he was a model of consistency. Eighteen-year-old Matt Gibson won the Castrol Swift Sport Cup Scholarship for this season and took out the first race at Pukekohe before scoring a fifth and a seventh to finish fourth overall in round one. Series coordinator Paul Burborough says Matt is highly focused on winning and has already shown he is prepared to go the extra mile to achieve his ambition to win the championship.

There was nothing between the leading contenders in the first round, so expect exciting competition at Ruapuna. Whangarei's Scott Harrison climbed unhurt from a spectacular multi-roll in the third race at Pukekohe, but will be back this weekend. The car and its safety equipment did a great job protecting him in what was an amazing testament to the strength and integrity of the Swift design.

Not only is the Swift racing fast and furious, but the class is a boon to young, up and coming drivers. Watch out for 19-year-old Katherine Collins, a Christchurch university student, who provides a feminine touch to the series. Triple X Motorsport is mentoring some of the young drivers at each meeting, and this weekend Michael Paaymans, AJ Lauder and Alan Dunkley are expected to benefit from advice given by experienced tin-top racer Angus Fogg.