

2002 FIA European Truck Racing Cup Round 1 – Barcelona, Spain

Two Podiums for Stuart Oliver but Technical Trouble for Team Castrol Atkins

The opening round of the 2002 FIA European Truck Racing Cup, held in front of 30,000 fans at the Circuit de Catalunya (Barcelona) last weekend (May 18/19), brought mixed fortunes for the Castrol-backed MAN drivers.

Stuart Oliver made an excellent start to the season with two third places; enough to leave him second overall in the points standings.

Terry Rymer, making his truck race debut for Team Castrol Atkins, had a frustrating weekend in Spain where seriously reduced performance of his truck prevented him from showing his real potential. Delays in completing the build of his MAN meant that several problems that should have shown up in testing occurred – including

the fact that the team had been supplied with the wrong rear axle ratio, leaving the truck some 20km/h down on top speed! Steve Parrish was on hand to give advice to Terry and the team.

In the Saturday morning practice session both drivers were unfortunate; Oliver posted a lap time that should have placed him on the front row of the starting grid – but technical faults with the all-new official speed measuring equipment saw the British Champion unjustly penalised – and relegated to the back of the grid.





Rymer found that in addition to the axle ratio problem his engine had a complete lack of turbo boost. Despite these major handicaps he quickly came to terms with handling the six wheeler and secured 11th quickest lap time in the field of 23.

The rolling start of Saturday's Qualifying Race saw the MANs of Frenchman Noel Crozier and Lutz Bernau heading the pack – with plenty of close action behind them.

Oliver made rapid progress, climbing from 17th to 8th in the first four laps before sliding off under braking at the end of the main straight! After a short trip across the gravel trap he regained the track in 15th and fought his way back up to 8th only to repeat the off-track excursion at the same point three laps later. After another recovery charge he finally took the chequered flag in 12th place.

"I had a problem with the brake balance in the first outing – and basically had no front brakes. But we'll soon sort it out" said Stuart.

At the head of the field reigning European Champion Bernau took victory after a race-long battle with Crozier with Portuguese driver Serafin Silva completing an all-MAN podium.

Rymer, still lacking turbo boost, made a good start but his reduced top speed left him vulnerable on the long straights and he had to work hard to maintain 16th position at the flag.

Saturday's Cup race saw Bernau and Crozier fighting hard at the start with hard-charging Oliver moving up to eighth on the opening lap – and sixth on lap 2. He then faced a lengthy battle to find a way ahead of the Mercedes of Jose Rodrigues and finally emerged fifth at finish.

Rymer took the start, but although the team had pushed the engine rev. limit higher, his MAN was still only achieving 150km/h and with the continuing lack of turbo boost they soon realised he was unable to make any progress and pulled him into the pits on lap 7 before any damage was done. The mechanics then faced a late night tracing the boost problem to an intercooler pipe and electronics – raising their hopes for day 2.

Out in front the race was again MAN dominated with Crozier pulling off a last lap move to pass his German rival Bernau and Silva. The Phoenix of local hero Fernando Lopez separated this trio from fifth placed Oliver.



Sunday's Qualifying race saw on-form Oliver running third throughout, well placed to watch the renewed battle between Bernau and Crozier. The Frenchman finally emerged victorious – with Oliver just 5.5 seconds down at the finish – well clear of Austrian Egon Allgauer (MAN) with Silva completing the top five.

Rymer had improved turbo boost – and compared to the start of the previous day the team had worked hard to improve his best lap times by 5 seconds. He held 13th in the early stages and held his ground in a mid-field battle – finally losing just one spot to Antonio Conjero (Mercedes) to end up 14th.



The Sunday Cup race again brought a well-deserved third place for Oliver – who shadowed Crozier and Bernau throughout. This brought the final points tally for the British driver to 38 – and with Crozier not registered as a points scorer in the series Oliver ended the weekend second to Bernau in the overall championship standings.

Rymer's final outing of the weekend came to an end before the race had even started. A water pump on the starting grid saw all the coolant start to run out – so he wisely pulled into the pits rather than cook the engine.

Team Castrol Atkins now face another race – against the clock – to try and change the rear axle in Germany before continuing on to next weekend's event at Misano in Italy.

Despite the difficulties he faced in Spain Terry Rymer was very upbeat about his new team: "With the truck being completed so late we really had to treat this first event like a shakedown test – and in that respect it was successful because we've identified and overcome several problems. Obviously I need some more track time to get the set-up of the vehicle to its optimum – and hopefully in Italy we'll have the right axle to give me a higher top speed. "The whole team have really worked hard over the past few weeks and particularly so this weekend, helping me to find 5 seconds improvement in two days - so I'm sure that together we can soon be very competitive".

Points standings after Round One

	Driver	Make	Points
1	Bernau	MAN	60
2	Oliver	Castrol/MAN	38
3	Lopez	Phoenix	29
4	Rodrigues	Mercedes	25
5	Allgauer	MAN/Castrol	22
	Garrett	Foden	22

Next race: Misano, Italy – May 25/26