

All The Joys of Spring - Morgan Aero Challenge Rounds One and Two

Snetterton 1st April A report by Bob Bull

April 1st. and Snetterton, time and place for the start of the 2017 Morgan Aero Challenge Series, now in it's 32nd year.

The cast of characters remained broadly similar to last season with a few additions and a few subtractions leaving a field of twenty five assorted Morgans to contest the two rounds on offer. We will see later that not all managed the task set.

However, before regaling readers with the stories of derring-do, and fine excuses I must turn to more serious matters.

There you are strolling idly around the paddock surrounded by friends and (Morgan) family when a stranger confronts you with the peremptory demand; "Are you Bob Bull?"

Instinctively one recoils; have I offended or slandered his good name in previous reports? Nervous glances are cast over the shoulder looking for a shady lawyer with a fist full of writs, or a burly policeman dangling a pair of bracelets. Maybe I owe money, and can I see a couple of tattooed heavies clutching baseball bats lurking in the background?

Luckily on this occasion it was simply to speak kindly of my writings, however, for the rest of the day I was on edge, shiftily sneaking around the various motor homes.

The point is that when seeking reporters the adverts never mention this aspect of the job, so beware before volunteering and make sure you have a clear conscience.

Round 1

So back to the racing which, had a familiar look following qualifying, with a certain Keith Ahlers taking pole from the ever present Phillip Goddard. In third place was the best advert for Scottish independence, young Elliot Patterson, no longer driving an old banger, but equipped with a nice new ARV6 in a somewhat grim shade of grey. Andrew Thompson was prominent and the rest formed up in some sort of order depending on their ability, car, or plain reliability. Interested parties can no doubt find details on some web site.

Come the end it was Mr Ahlers taking a comfortable win ahead of the above named in the same order as at the beginning, and for interest one had to look further down the field. Main excitement was provided by Tony Hirst in his 'works' Babydoll, Greg Parnell, sans roof, and Tim Parsons, who battled madly for most of the race, until Tony made a break and pulled away leaving the other two to fight it out to the flag. Well not quite, as Tim decided that with a lap to go he had had enough and did a 'slowing down lap', only to discover that the race was not over, thus Greg coasted home comfortably ahead. No doubt to his relief, having had little respite since the start. Roger Whiteside drove well for fifth spot, likewise Andy Green in sixth, with Dominic House next along and an enthusiastic John Milbank leading in Phil Thomas, Simon Baines, and the afore mentioned trio being the only runners to complete the full 10 laps.

Sharlie Goddard led home the lapped runners ahead of Peter Cole, Craig Hamilton-Smith, Phillip Tisdall, Brett Syndercombe, Thomas Daley, Paul Bryan, Peter Rafter, Michele Bailey with Steve McDonald suffering fuel feed problems classified last while passing through the pit lane. Sadly James Carter missed a braking point (he could not remember where) and ran into the back of Tony Rivers making them the only retirees.

Phil Thomas was handed a five second penalty for consistently being a bad boy, and using more of Snetterton than is permitted by the rules.

For some reason that escaped my notice Dominic House was voted Driver of the Day, collecting a bottle of plonk for his efforts.

Round 2

One might almost just write 'ditto' for this report, however, while Keith lead across the line on lap one, it was a by the mere proverbial whisker, as Phil lunged up the inside of the pole man into the first corner, being passed only on the finishing straight. Thereafter it was business as normal and 'ditto' reigned for the top six.

Simon Baines drove a lonely race for seventh, while Tim Parsons got the better of Greg Parnell this time around. Phil Thomas managed the full distance but, Steve McDonald, Craig Hamilton-Smith, Sharlie Goddard, Tony Rivers, Philip Tisdall, Brett Syndercombe, Thomas Daley, Paul Bryan, Peter Rafter, and Michele Bailey were all lapped by the flying leader. Dominic House stopped after just 1 lap, and John Milbank and Tony Hirst also failed to finish. Reason unknown in all cases.

As the prize giving ceremony proved, the Aero Challenge has more classes than Cambridge University so a number of the folk mentioned in this account clearly won one of them and or made fastest lap, but time and space do not allow for a full paean of praise.

Quotes and Ramblings.

Keith Ahlers made his debut in the Morgan Challenge at Snetterton in 1993, and recorded his first win at Brands Hatch in April 1999, and his wins today were numbers 90 and 91 in the series, and who would bet him not adding a few more this season.

"Could never relax knowing that Phil would take advantage of any mistake."

"He made a fantastic move into the first corner, there was nothing I could do."

Keith was also proud of having won two FIA Historic titles with Billy Bellinger in 2016, and was overwhelmed to stand on the same stage as a Formula 1 World Champion, Toto Wolff, Jean Todt, and Bernie Ecclestone.

Phil Goddard;

"He braked into the first corner, you don't brake into the corner on the first lap."

"It was great fun to see Keith in my rear view mirror."

Roger Whiteside;

"Made my fastest ever lap at Snetterton. That's a result."

Phil Thomas on his 'track limits' penalty:

"Could not keep the car on the race track, I tried to blame the factory, but they wouldn't have it."

"Greg was a hero."

Tom Daley;

"Happy to be home in one piece, and the car"

My thanks to all for their very friendly welcome, and willingness to share their thoughts and excuses with the Media. Tea and toast at Jan's Pantry provided replacement for a missed breakfast following an early start. Many thanks Mrs Knight. Oh! And Jerry for his kind invitation to share his luxury motorhome.

Paterson the elder would like to unseat Keith at the top of Class 'A' so watch this space. Anyone got a nice V8 available?

Another serious matter to consider involves Health and Safety, Human Rights, and Child Labour Laws.

During the presentation of awards it was noticeable that a very young child was forced to shift heavy boxes, and distribute alcoholic substances even under the gaze of his parents!!! What next, will the poor wee chap be climbing up chimneys with a brush?

James Gilbert ace photographer is running the London Marathon, and has an invite to the New York event. Good luck with that James, sooner you than me.

Finally our thoughts and prayers must be with Cameron(?) who suffered heart problems and was taken to the Norwich hospital by ambulance. We wish him well, and a swift recovery.

Yes! I am Bob Bull.