

This report was posted on the forum www.brakehorsepower.net by Peter but I am sure that our wider audience will enjoy it!

Ramblings from Silverstone

An account of the Bentley Drivers' Club race meeting at Silverstone on 22nd August 2020 by Peter Rafter, he of the "Pretty Red Car"

Please be advised that some readers may be offended by the language in this submission, which reflects not only the age of the correspondent but also the idioms of those days of yore. O tempus mores. If I have misrepresented any person or conversation or event I can only claim indulgence as I am genetically confused or more likely currently under the influence of an excellent claret, Hic.

Erewego. The time has come the Walrus said.....It is a truth universally acknowledged that here in Yorkshire the sky is bluer, the sun is golden and sparkles, the light is clearer, the landscape is more rugged, the Moors and Dales serene and enchanting, the views breathtaking, the heather blooms and the colours explode. The deciduous tree leaves have turned a dull green a tad too early this year, heralding the magic of the impending cyclical change to the autumnal colours, golds, yellows, orange, reds, purple and russet browns.

It is an oft-perpetuated myth that the inhabitants of this County are parsimonious and they breathe only because the air is free. It is said that the pious, ascetic and saintly folk gravitated to the region long ago, leaving the otherworldly, licentious mortals to fester in the southern counties. Inexplicably, there is no fortified boundary. It is not a haven of tolerance, but on High Days and Holidays we share our bounty (as in fine weather) with our neighbours, in this particular instance as far south as Northamptonshire.

Ah, the Twelfth of August. Last day for entries and also the beginning of the arcane culling of wild birds, substantiated tenuously in the interests of "preserving" ancient moors and peat bogs. Although, basted with a sweet and earthy sauce and accompanied by a classic Red Rhône my dislike begins to falter.

Ah, Race weekend at Silverstone. A faintly chilling wind in the morning modulating to a refreshing breeze in the afternoon sun. Following a period of eremitic self-isolation Alan House kindly offered a Ticket. Incomprehensibly, the grandstands were off limits. Had the organisers not realised that the pretty red car had withdrawn from the proceedings, and as a consequence social distancing for spectators would have been less of a problem?

At this meeting on track at the Silverstone National Circuit one is usually distracted into avoiding the multifarious cement covered oil trails deposited by the ancient vehicles brought out of hibernation in subservience to BDC.

The configuration of the circuit itself is not to everyone's ideal and threading through Brooklands and Luffield somehow lacks the challenge of the choreographed murmururation through the Craner Curves. Without Cope it would be vin ordinaire

In these strange times, and in the digital age, one is robbed of the ingrained rhythm of normal race days. By this I mean the trials and tribulations of the hardened racegoer: location of the nearest

toilets/ablutions; the nail breaking tangle with Trailers and retaining straps; is there fuel in the tank? The hunt for missing parts, foot pump and race gloves; the suppressed resentment of intruders who infiltrate the dedicated Morgan parking area; chewing the cud with friends and comrades in the queue for Signing on; the absurd “no starting of race engines rule” until the Stewards have had their morning coffee; the complexities and haphazardness or indeed anxiety of scrutineering (you search in vain Mr. Scrutineer, but as any fule kno its not a Bentley, the Morgan does not have an oil catchier tank); how to confuse the noise testers?; and lastly, the fruitless and impertinent race to beat Keith Ahlers to the assembly point for Qualifying,

As at Donington an unintentional consequence of the Coro regulations dictated that there was no nosebag on offer from the Thorne Academy Motorhome, and I had forgotten to ask Cook to prepare a luncheon basket. Coro! I often think the so-called experts now regulating our daily existence don't know their R's from their elbow (to the detriment and disadvantage of all). An end to the pernicious call for more restrictions

Belated thanks to BDC for holding the meeting. The first ever Morgan Challenge Race was at Bentley Drivers' Club Silverstone in 1966. Previously, I always enjoyed sauntering through the paddock held in thrall to the wonderful contingent of exotic machinery on display (and even more exotic personnel and attire). This year it was sadly depleted. Nevertheless, there was still an impressive array of pre war Bentleys, complemented in turn by a lovely Alfa 8C, a Frazer Nash, Lea Francis, Alvis, Aston Martin, Lagonda, a BMW 328, a MG K3, Riley and pride of place to 2 Morgan super sports 3 wheelers (Derbyshire/Cameron).

Vintage Bentleys are imposing beasts but to the tutored eye somehow lack the elegant lines of an Hispano Suiza and even the pretty red Morgan.

Strategically positioned at the entrance to the bacon butty server I espied and encountered Chas and Helen Windridge, Tim Pearce (a Past Master of the Guild of Guardians and the Society of Merchant Venturers), Robin Pearce (who was in paters' lovely AC), Simon King and progeny, Mrs Hon Chairman, Nigel Bradford (editor of Mog Magazine, former aero pilot, Naval Officer, whose frizzled locks almost managed to exceed my task of making Albert Schweizer look well groomed hirsuitly)) and USA exile Richard Fohl who was nursing a shoulder injury. Later I bumped into Mrs Plant and Shears checking up on their charges, both of whom upheld the family honour racing-wise, and Brenda Bryan who is the rock in the Paul Bryan enterprise. In attendance were also Ace photographers Bob Bull and Chris Dickens vying for prime spots for the races but also surreptitious paddock shots

I managed to intrude on many conversations and in the long intervals received most patience, understanding, and polite sufferance from both Kathryn Emberson and Helen Lancashire.

There were 2 Morgan races plus the bonus of the Traditional Techniques Trophy Race, the latter mollifying the frustration from the interminable interval between the first and last race scenarios from the quirky scheduling.

Post Donington, welcome in this year of grace to Craig Hamilton-Smith (and Ian from the factory), Bill Lancashire, Peter Sargeant, Stephen Lockett, Chris Bailey and after a prolonged absence Tom

Andrew and Jim Mountain. Also and with some trepidation to the lap times Oliver and Graham Bryant.

Praise to Wolf who repaired the Fearn Club sport damaged at Donington, and the Marshalls who make these events possible.

Lastly Jack Bellinger who managed to resolve his gearbox problems and still sport fashionable shorts.

A 28 Morgan car grid for Qualy. Conditions Dry, bright, and a slight wind sufficient to upset the F1 cars but not the Bentley bricks. In a short session a sedentary spectator sees only a limited and often only a fleeting aspect of the intense racing as the pack stream by. In longer sessions and races as the field spreads out it can be confusing and difficult to monitor track positions as the faster cars thread through traffic on multiple occasions. However, from the sidelines the Lancashire/ Bryants/ Will Plant/ Whiteside train through Brooklands and Luffield was fascinating both visually and acoustically.

Race 1. Authoritative race reports will hopefully be showered on Mary by her coterie of correspondents, but non finishers comprised Bret Syndercombe (exhaust?), Graham Bryant (Puncture), Sharlie Goddard (electrical), John Milbank (spark), Hon Chairman (?) and Tom Richards (over exuberance in the search for gravel). Young Will hounded the race leaders at every opportunity. Andrew Thompson chased the more powerful from runners.

Richard Thorne, Leigh Sebba, Alan House and Mark Shears were in a confusing Fiscar Qualy that included a Jack Fairman, Innes Ireland and Mike Hawthorn Challenge race. An eclectic mix of cars, (Jag/Allard/Aston, Lister, Jowett, AC) all extremely covetable. The Morgans impeccably presented. Alan could not race (precautionary but hopefully not extensive wallet damaging engine issues,) and in the Race Richard behind the faster cars led Leigh and Mark home.

In olden times (a glimpse of stocking as the song goes) I had often remarked that if I closed down one bank ie, 4 of my 8 cylinders i could enter the Techniques Trophy. However, the format of the race at the BDC meeting included 70's 8 cylinder cars which, after the initial confusion, ultimately explained the presence on the grid of not just the usual suspects (Casablanca) but of Messrs Richard Plant, Kelvin Laidlaw, and Jack Bellinger in period plus 8's

In an enthralling race Richard Plant eased masterfully away from the field and was not to be challenged followed by Craig, Hon Chairman, ever improving Sumner Scion, James, and the following train of Bellinger (Senior and Junior), Emberson, Laidlaw, Andrew, Ian Sumner, Bryan, Whiteside, Gurney, Gateson Senior, Bevan, Sebba, and the Baileys (interesting pillow talk there). DNF Cole in Cupie Doll. Bellinger junior, having earlier in the day together with Simon Orebi Gann qualified on pole in class at Brands Hatch magically appeared to carve his way through the field in his own self built (but only for his children) 4/4. Did you pay for the helicopter Jack? Full praise for an event that preserves the spirit of the race and yet helps the lesser powered cars where, in the challenge series they can be overpowered within 3 laps.

A subdued Techniques presentation (with full apologies for the absence of cold beers) where Brian Gateson whispered his interpretation of his own race before acknowledging the exploits of the rest of the field. Son James in attendance all videoed by Tracy on her phone.

Big applause for how Mark Shears sprang, metaphorically, from his white flat rad directly into the Burgundy beauty to participate in the following Techniques Race. For the record Mark omitted reference to your hirsute scion as he was in a foreign marque.

Morgan Race 2.

Quaint Qualy rules relegated both Oliver Bryant and Mark Butterworth to the back of the grid. Moreover, restrictions on the pit wall for starts deny us all the intricacies and drama of the race start. As we stand in the pits we hear the cacophony of the engines for the start but stand in oblivion and can only surmise the ensuing formation. Arrgh.

I can only presume the pit wall ban is a fear of us dropping our coffee cups, telephones and cigars onto the track through the portals in the fence, or alternatively, causing a distraction to the drivers. Is there another way of making the start visible to those in the pits and elsewhere.

As the race unfolded and whilst we tracked the inevitable progress through the field of Oliver, there were a number of puzzling DNFs, (water hose, Lancashire who had shown exceptional pace in both races) Mark Butterworth puncture, Goddard/Tisdall/Chris Bailey???. In between there was engrossing racing as befits the series with due respect to all entrants, a mark of our ethics and heritage

PS

I do hope Messrs Thomas and Parnell are well and follow the series.

PPS

Simon (SIFAB) you must have a better explanation for wearing your pyjama bottoms the whole day,

You can wake up now Jack.