

Ramblings from the Ardennes

A report on a Spa weekend with a difference 22nd - 25th June

By Peter Rafter (driver of the "Pretty Red Car")

Mercredi.

Almost 30 degrees. Scorchio! How Mike Bell managed to smuggle his massive pantechnicon past the overbearing and officious red shirted guardians of Europe's finest motor racing venue is a mystery. There was little happening on track but a helpful Belgian CSCC official with an admirable sense of humour offered to show me where the Podium was located. (Ahem!)

Jeudi

Outside temperature plummets to 12 degrees but inside temperature rises at Signing on and separate Equipment Inspection (fashioned to cause frustration and delay).

The Morgans have been assigned a special paddock location at the Blanchimont gate, adjacent to the sewage farm (despite this a few opted to camp. Incroyable.)

Practically all the usual Morgan suspects trickle into the circuit at various times of the day. Mr Sargent making his annual visit. Mr and Mrs Emberson arrived in a stunning blue Aero, sans bicyclette (according to the Syndicat d'Initiative the circuit has been used several times in the Tour de France cycling race. In 1980, the circuit was part of an individual time trial stage.). Mr and Mrs Orebi Gann in their soi-disant electric red car "of the future". Mr Thompson was interim sheepdog for his progeny as his good lady went about her business,

Alors, 50-minute track sessions were available at 180 Euros, cash only. (In God we trust, all others pay cash.)

Vendredi.

Qualifying, not only for the Ardennes Challenge races, but there was also Morgan interest in the Spa One and Three Hour races

(Plant/Lees/Sargent/Sebba/Parsons/Houses/Thorne/Whiteside/Bryants), and other races (Van der Croft and Conway).

Amongst the Crossles (no complaints but would MGB have been more appropriate?) there was a Morgan spread from 1959 to 2018— not bad?

It wouldn't be Morgans without attendant gremlins, which afflicted at varying degrees throughout the weekend Orebi Gann, Emberson, Lockett, Fohl, Thorne and Houses (Electrical, ECU, Fuel, Alternator, gear selector, transponder etc).

An inexplicable absence of scrutineers between 12 and 3 pm added to anxiety for those who had booked afternoon testing sessions.

Later, in the town Spa there was a wonderful collection of Old Timers (drivers and cars) on a shepherded tour "Paris to Amsterdam" (including the new Morgan racer David Wenman in a 1929 Chrysler - its best to pass over his debacle and evacuation of a chunnel train en route). The Brands Hatch clique were in good form at the hotel Silva in Spa picking up the baton set by the Morgan factory in 2015.

The Morgan factory this year had hired a "mansion" for staff, drivers and the Wolverhampton University team (had somebody failed to connect a water supply?) Luckily Mr and Mrs Thomas were celebrating a wedding anniversary and who needs water when there is champagne?

Samedi

!3 degrees! (classified as a heat wave in Sheffield). Lets quickly pass over the recalcitrant on the naughty steps at the Drivers briefing

Race. Who can but marvel at this circuit? Its keynote corners, elevation, continuity. F1 Drivers aside, when seasoned campaigner Jack Bellinger enthuses then it must be special. It has developed over the years, from some 15 km to its present 7 or so. It will still tweak here and then but always retaining the integrity. Rightly so.

Repetitive deafening loud bangs. Is it the Glorious !2th? No! Just Barry Sumner firing up his steed. A bearded wonder patrolled the paddock pencil and paper in hand soliciting quotes for a distant paparazzi. He will have no doubt already identified the "Medical " bent in the Morgan paddock, including a consultant Dermatologist, 2 GPs, one specialising in Drug research, a (Ph.D) medical Supply, a Veterinary slant, and Anaesthetist support. Despite this, one who had cut his finger proudly vouchsafed the properties of electrical insulating tape over medical plasters.

Welcome visitors to the Morgan paddock included Chris Williams and Jerry Knight, First race on the card. For the actual racing one should read the race reports, However, Oliver Bryant posted an impressive time.

There were even Smarts racing!

The Morgan prize giving as ever a welcome appreciation of all concerned and collective reinforcing of the special bond.

Dimanche.

Fervent activity in the paddock with the installation of data loggers in some vehicles—this being ideal with anticipated good high power data etc (strangely they avoided the pretty red car!).

A Lunchtime nosebag was the previous evenings Morgan get-together leftovers, but still welcome.

Some Intrepid drivers left in anticipation of the Le Mans Classic

(Goddard/Thorne/Emberson/Whiteside) to join the other Morgan entrants in the Biennial July festival. Bon Chance.

Lets hope we won't have to wait long for a return to Spa.

Off to Le Mans, I omitted Monsieur Sebba, whose finely tuned journalistic talents will regale us with all the action, rumour and scandal. j'espère.

At Spa t'was a warm and friendly paddock with Messieurdames Baines, Bryan and Thorne in comfortable motor homes. The Goddards motor home seemed slightly smaller than Chatsworth House.

Frantic fettling by the ever-busy preparers, factory WUNI/ Gateson/Thorne/Brands Hatch plus famille Sumner. The one and three hour entrants luxuriated in the F! pit garages where the drains were less malodorous.

An unexpected precipitation one night but fortunately daytime dry track conditions. Three club sports on track (but not all the time).

I am still drying out from the evening sessions orchestrated by the BHM mafia (Parnell/Syndercombe/Lockett/Jamie).

And what you all want to know is "I didn't go faster!!!"

À l'année prochaine?