

Oulton Park 18th May

A report on rounds three and four by intrepid reporter Peter Rafter

Oulton Park, Anno Domini 2019. Secreted in the heartlands of Cheshire, a County ostensibly infested with overpaid premiership footballers from an adjacent Metropolis, lies a gem of a race circuit. It is hidden a short distance from the Cheshire Polo Ground should one prefer equine pursuits as opposed to the alluring aroma of Castrol R. Many of our older brethren will remember the Gold Cup meetings of the 1950-1970s, a non-championship Formula 1 race held annually.

During the Second World War, Oulton Park's grounds were used as one of the staging camps for US Army units under the command of General Patton prior to the Normandy landings in 1944. American World Heavyweight Champion boxer Joe Louis put on several exhibition bouts for the troops garrisoned at Oulton Park. The fights were staged within the vicinity of the Deer Leap section of the modern circuit

Good that the enduring and absorbing tussles of the contestants in the Morgan classes are held in such a respectful and amiable way, with scowls instead of fisticuffs.

Gracious hosts for an exotic meeting were the VSCC. In attendance were a wonderful array of voitures, past and present (Delahaye, Bugatti, Invicta, Alvis, Riley, Frazer Nash etc. "Patina" being the order of the day, embellished with lavish coatings of oil and tar. I was astonished to see a 1921 GN Vitesse GP car (do the arithmetic). It was encouraging to see multiple Morgan 3 wheelers in the VSCC ranks with youthful aspirant drivers. Tony Lees, who has form in the Morgan series, was observed struggling to explain to a bewildered observer the canine nature of the gear arrangements in his charming Cognac The VSCC Lady President even provided a nose-bag for waifs and strays (Jack you were spotted).

The programme dictated Morgans first in practice, first race and then an interval of only some 6 hours or so for before the second round, clearly so that incumbents could explore the delights of the paddock, catch up on lost sleep, socialise, exchange pleasantries, recount tales of journey delays, or just wander zombie fashion throughout the complex. I encountered many zombies throughout the day.

As a consequence of multiple supplications, incantations and other tions the weather remained mercifully dry. Paul and Brenda Bryan displayed a shiny new trailer, a replacement as their previous had been stolen (beware).

I had forgotten how technical the circuit is with rapidly changing gradients, blind crests and several tight corners. It flows, albeit with numerous alternative lines. It can be a tad bumpy and difficult in the wet. There were patches and trails of a white dust liberally applied to conceal recalcitrant engine droppings.

There were some absentees who were otherwise engaged at HSCC Silverstone (Tisdall/Orebi Gann/House/Plant/Pearce/Garland/Pomeroy). Kath Sherry was spotted in another race in an MG. Greg Parnell was searching his home garage for a lost gear. Our series paparazzi/scribe and scrutineer may still be locked in the horrendous traffic jams on the M6. Dr. Laidlaw was fresh from an outing at Zandvoort the previous weekend.

Obviously scoping it out prior to its inclusion in the F! calendar. We had a super race there some seasons ago.

It is best to pass briefly over Qualifying other than to report that James Sumner, who has shown pace this year, regrettably buried himself in the tyre wall at turn 1 after failing to correct a repetitive oversteer/understeer sequence. Big Ouch! The Hurst/Hamilton Smith club sports were astonishingly quick. A swarm of Wolverhampton University students, sustained by Mel's burgers, appeared to totally dismantle and rebuild the factory club sports at every opportunity, perhaps in anticipation of a visit later in the day by the Morgan Motor Company MD. Elsewhere Andrew Thompson suffered brake and body hindrances.

Race 1. The front of the grid (Ahlers/Goddard/Whiteside) disappeared into the distance chased optimistically by Andrew Thompson and Simon Baines, with the rest of the field safely in play (that is as far as I could discern from my remote position at the rear of the grid). Such is the design of the circuit that one can see how far one trails behind the leaders. Unfortunately, Chris Springall who travels from France to participate in the series and who over the winter surreptitiously changed the colour of his car from green to cream, was forced to take a racing line other than he would have preferred and ended up in the armco and a disappointed retirement. Ouch! Craig and Tony continue to impress with the closeness of their racing and, with the intervention of a jump-start penalty from the local boy, Craig secured the class win. The ensuing train highlighted many individual duels with impressive best lap times to be relished. Steve Lockett secured Driver of the race.

Class Winners were Ahlers/Thompson/Hamilton Smith/Thomas/Bellinger/Lockett/Laidlaw/and Richards.

Race 2. The usual suspects at the front blasted away. Multiple duels and close racing in the pack kept the spectators entertained, who at this late stage were embalmed in swathes of warm attire/fleeces. Phill Thomas/Jack Bellinger/Brett Syndercombe followed by Kelvin Laidlaw/Peter Sargeant, then Young Richards /Peter Cole with Paul Bryan not far behind. A pretty red car and Richard Fearn bringing up the rear. Steve Lockett suffered brake damage and Sharlie Goddard failed to start despite a strong showing in race 1. Young Richards (to differentiate him from Pater Richards) deservedly won driver of the race. Class wins as per race 1 with Tony Hurst reversing Craig's win. Subject to confirmation there were possible lap records for Messrs Thompson, Thomas and Hamilton Smith,

Many attended the post race award ceremony normally held against the intrusive backcloth of a cacophony of asthmatic unsilenced engines. Nevertheless there was generous applause for the respective winners. I had thought of proposing that the liquid rewards for Driver of the day should be shared amongst the accompanying throng of happily clappers attending the awards ceremony. Do you agree?

As entrants rushed away at close of play, Messrs Sargeant and the intrepid owner of the pretty red car were left stranded in an empty paddock with flat batteries. Note to self, must pack jump leads next time.

Peter Rafter
Pilote of the Pretty Red Car.