

## Donington Grand Prix Late Summer Event Report September 2018

Remember Brands Hatch this July? The scorching 32C heat, the sun burnt grass? The day-long ice creams and cold Cokes? But now it's mid-September, it's struggling to exceed 16 C, darkness falls by eight, the Jurys Inn is advertising its Christmas deals and there's not a big queue for ice creams. But all is not lost, don't despair, chin up, there is still another weekend's racing to enjoy before the Autumn Equinox.

Less than a decade ago Donington was a basket case, and, if it had been in hospital, the doctors' notes would have been headed 'DNR'. Not for the first time Formula 1, and the silly ambitions it spawns, had managed to wreck an established race circuit, in this case a very beautiful one. When I visited in 2012 the place resembled somewhere Kim Jon Ung had used to test one of his nukes. It's a mercy that Tom Wheatcroft was not around to see it, as he would have wept at the mess made of his life's work. Scorched earth instead of grassy banks, and of the trees which had put the 'park' into Donington, there was hardly a sign. But after sterling work by Kevin Wheatcroft, Dr Palmer took over and his prescription has meant that Donington left A & E last year and is now well on the road to recovery. Phew...

I am here for the CSCC Donington Park Grand Prix Late Summer Race Meeting and the first thing I find out is that, for Saturday at least, the circuit being used is more petit prix than grand prix, as there are insufficient marshals to staff the Melbourne loop. An event beyond the club's control of course, but it does highlight the reliance we place upon the marshalling community. More on this later, but now it's time to wander around and see how the place is doing under its new management. The answer is 'pretty well', MSV's trademark red and white paint is much in evidence, there's a pothole free paddock, not a scrap of litter, customer friendly staff and there's even a new paddock café, the snappily titled Garage 39. Actually, I'd have gone for Garage 42 because, as Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy fans will recall, 42 is the answer not only to a decent cooked breakfast, but to everything else too.

One bacon and egg sandwich later, the first man I want to talk to is the driver of the Porsche 911 which had three-wheeled its way around Thruxton last month. Today the 911 is entered in both the CSCC Advantage Motorsport Future Classics and the CSCC Cartek Motorsport Modern Classics events, so who is the lucky driver? 'I'm John Cockerton, from Edmonton, North London, originally and now I

live in Hertfordshire with my wife and two daughters. I run a construction company, the Conneely Group, and we put envelopes on buildings - facades, glass and concrete.' It's John's first season - 'nothing at all before, apart from about three days at Jonathan Palmer's race school. I woke up one day and decided I wanted to drive the most difficult car ever built (laughs) ...' I had seen the IROC and Petty logos and wanted to learn about the RSR's provenance and so, John, what exactly is it? 'It's a homage, built from a 911 SC shell by SVP Motorsport, it's all race RSR spec and we're looking to get FIA papers on it next year. 3 litre, as it should be, with 915 box and we've got 317bhp on the rolling road. I'd like some more power when I'm chasing Tim Bates but for my skill set it's fast enough.' It turns out that John's father Melvyn, a huge fan of NASCAR king Richard Petty, 'did all sorts of mad things and had a perm at one point.'

So tell me about the three wheels? 'Yeah, and we got on to two at one point. I'd snapped the anti-roll bar but we've fixed it now and we're running coil-overs next year.' Thruxton was 'scary as hell but in the second race I started 22nd and finished 10th, so not too bad. I tested here on Thursday, I spun at Craner, the tyres had to go in the bin, I scared the instructor and we had to go for a coffee ...' I often ask my victims to share a secret with me, ideally the thing that will most surprise other people in the paddock, and although I doubt if John is often lost for words there's a pause - '... wow, excellent question ...yeah, I've climbed Mont Blanc. Twice. Did it for a bet.' And I bet you won't find many more likeable people in the paddock than John.



This is my fourth CSCC meeting of 2018 and I'm still reveling in both the sheer numbers of cars and their diversity. My local circuit, Croft, had hosted a TCR round last weekend and rarely have I been quite so bored, enduring an interminable afternoon, with hours of track time but a pathetic ten car entry. Only eight turned up, one broke and the rest looked and sounded almost identical. But it's different here, as I admire everything from Mustang to Marcos, from Sabre to Seven and from Ginetta to Giulia. I will own up to once having owned two Alfas in succession and within the space of three years I had experienced both heaven and hell, but I'll always love the cars from Milano. Which is why I have to talk to Les May, who is driving his Alfa Romeo Giulia GT in the CSCC Adams and Page Swinging Sixties race. The Retford racer is another newcomer, today being only his fourth ever race. Les is retired and 'I tinker with old cars now and I'm racing the Alfa because it's a pretty little car, it holds on well and it's a nice introduction to racing cars.' The Giulia has raced in the same series before but Les hasn't yet taken it around Donington, his experience of the track being confined to getting his ARDS licence here. Les's highlight of the season so far has been Oulton Park 'because it's such an enjoyable circuit to race on.' And his secret obsession? Not so secret, actually, as an unmistakable shape adorns his trailer - 'I'm a Citroen DS nut, I've got eight in varying states of disrepair.' I ask, tongue in cheek, whether Les has the rarer than hens' teeth Decapotable and, Mon Dieu, yes he has. He's been building one for the last four years and it's none of your fibreglass old tut either - 'it's a millimetre perfect replica.' Les has enjoyed a warm welcome from the CSCC and finds them 'really wonderful, always happy to help.'



The car which has created great curiosity amongst many racegoers this year is the Sunbeam Rapier H120 driven by Paul and Andrew Lovett. I'd previously seen the fastback Sunbeam at an HSCC meeting and its surprise appearance, in a sea of Cortinas and Minis, had triggered a blizzard of comments. Over 50s would say things like 'my uncle had one of those in 1973' but all da kidz could say was on the lines of 'WTF is that?'. Paul is from Worcester and he's another retiree - 'I sold the business and the day job now is enjoying life, travelling and playing with cars. I love classic cars.' He sure does, as he had two cars racing at last week's Goodwood Revival, a '48 Connaught and a '62 Cobra, which were driven by some very capable hands including those of Nick Padmore, the successful Historic F1 driver. Paul has been collecting and playing with cars for years but he's another driver in only his first season. He tells me he wanted to bring

something different onto the CSCC Adams and Page Swinging Sixties Group 1 grid - 'it gets attention, people like it and I wish I had a pound for every person whose dad had one or who went to school in one.' The Rapier's Rootes Group cousin, the Hillman Hunter, might have won the London Sydney Marathon in 1968 but just how was the Rapier on track? 'The handling is surprisingly good, she's just dramatically down on power compared to every other car in the race. We're at the back, we can stay with them through the bends but when they get to the straight ...off they go. 'Next year Peter might upgrade the engine on the Rapier and 'we're going to race a Datsun Fairlady and my wife and Andy's partner can race this car'. I don't mind admitting that we don't see too many Fairladies parked up in Thirsk market place; the locals where I live are still talking about that MGB they reckoned they spotted back in 2008. Yet another fan of the CSCC, Peter especially singles out Hugo and Hannah 'for being great, just so friendly and they make it just so helpful, it's actually quite stressful trying to do the right thing when you're new to all this.'

Steve Chaplin is a more experienced racer, with twenty years' experience, and, like so many CSCC drivers, has a 'dad and lad' team, racing with eldest lad Adam. Steve races a Phantom Historic Clubman car and (lucky, lucky man) also has a Lola T332 F5000 car 'which I can only afford to race once a year at the HSCC Silverstone'. But today he's in something slightly more house trained than the bonkers Lola, a 1965 MG Midget, which is also competing in the Swinging Sixties race. Cue instant nostalgia from your reporter, as my second car was a Midget, and is distinguished in my car owning history as the car which consumed more oil than the combined efforts of the thirty odd cars which succeeded it.



Peter's MG looks the picture of health though and, although it doesn't take the two days recovery time needed after driving the Lola - 'it's still busy in there. It's a Haynes Museum built car, built in about 2000 and it had a class win in the MG Challenge three times on the trot.' After fixing overheating and brake problems the car is sorted, the engine (a 1330cc) has been rebuilt, now sporting a Weber and 'we've just put a Panhard rod on.' Steve tells me the car is lots of fun, reliable and - 'we're usually amongst it, not one of the quickest, but that's down to us...Adam went backwards down the Craner Curves last time we were here but I just love the whole flow of the circuit .... I still struggle a bit with Coppice though. CSCC? Wonderful, the staff in the office couldn't be more helpful.'

The Craner Curves, like Eau Rouge , Paddock Hill Bend and Becketts are all corners which almost define the circuit. Cue more nostalgia from me, as the first time I ventured onto a racetrack legally (best to draw a veil over my illicit lap of Silverstone in my badass Riley 1300 ) was here at Donington in 1993 , at the Jim Russell race school. As I bumbled through Craner in a Gp N Astra GTE, I knew I wouldn't be giving up my day job any time soon. And, just one week later, I watched in awe as Ayrton Senna speared through the same bends in his McLaren at over 170 mph. That was in the dry, of course, and it's to my eternal regret I didn't come back the next day to see Senna's greatest race. And Tom Wheatcroft's too. But think on this, if you get Craner right, whether you're in a Cortina or a Cobra, then you're in the footsteps of giants. As well as some talent-free nobody in a bloody Astra...

In the distance I can hear some rumbling that can only have come from a big block V8 but, as I head to the pit garages to investigate, I have to catch a quick word with Malcom Johnson, as his bright yellow Lotus Europa makes it feel as though the sun is coming out on this overcast morning . Malcolm is racing the mid-engined Lotus in the CSCC Adams and Page Swinging Sixties – Group 2 race, and, unlike some of the racers I've spoken to today, this Norwich driver has been racing for years - 'since about 1985. I started with an MG Midget, then raced in production saloons with a Sierra Cosworth, Thundersaloons, then Radicals. I got into historics about twelve years ago – MGBs , TVRs and the Lotus, which I've developed over the last six years.' Like many of us, Malcolm admired the Europa as a schoolboy, and describes driving it on track as a culture shock after the Radical but 'like a back to front Elan really, a bit heavier than the most lightweight Elans, but I can run with most other Elans.'



Time to move on and damn, I still can't trace the source of the big block rumble as who could walk by a Sunbeam Tiger without a close scrutiny of the 'gentleman's Cobra'? The Tiger was the car which started life as the rather limp-wristed Alpine but which then had a massive testosterone boost from a 260 cubic inch Ford V8 . It packed even more heat when the 289 c.i. V8 was used, this being the engine normally found in the front of a Mustang or the middle of a GT40. But the Tiger was an endangered species as soon as Chrysler bought the Rootes Group, the Mopar guys not being too impressed to find a rival's engine in their product line. Driver Stephen Pickering is another Swinging Sixties guy and the Leicestershire project engineer is running the full-fat 5 litre version of the V8 in the Tiger - 'it's not that powerful per litre but it's got a lovely smooth midrange. Being short wheelbase

it's (pause) quite fun to drive. Best bits are the straights and in the wet it's horrible. Anything above 110mph and it gets aerodynamically challenged.' Interestingly, one of the reasons Stephen is driving the Tiger rather than a TVR or MG is that 'we've had Sunbeams in the family for such a long time, my father competed in historic rallying with an Alpine and Rapier and I helped him prep them so I know my way round a Sunbeam...' And I bet there are very few people in 2018 who can say that, as the last Sunbeam was made in 1981. The presence of the Tiger, with the Lovett Rapier and also the Ellis/Seaman Talbot Sunbeam Lotus in the CSCC Advantage Motorsport Future Classics, might let me get away with a Francis of Assisi quotation – 'A single sunbeam is enough to drive away many shadows'. Which is only just true if we're talking about the 875 cc Stiletto ...



Still hunting the now silent big block I prowl along the line of pit garages, briefly admiring the nicely patinated Alfa Romeo 75 of Messrs Jay and Murtha which is racing in the CSCC Advantage Motorsport Future Classics – and how cool is it to have Martini stripes on the steering wheel? A few garages further east I find what I've been looking for, the car which probably occupies as much track space as the entire entry of Smart4Twos. What else but the simply enormous 1971 Mustang Mach 1, the pony car as big as a shire horse which is making everybody stop talking and start giggling? Martin Reynolds is the man who is driving the beast and he's from Kings Lynn. No surprise there, as V8s and East Anglia have long been synonymous, I suspect because of the number of USAF air force bases which lie to the east of the A1. Martin works as a construction engineer, has raced for twenty years, starting on Ovals with a Hot Rod, then chowed down on a Full English of Fords – 'Escorts, Anglias and Cortinas, then Legends.' The Mustang 'makes you smile' and has been a circuit car since its early days but Martin has only owned it for five weeks and today is its first time out, although he tested it a couple of weeks ago. 'It's a handful, but fun.' The capacity quoted in the race programme for the Mustang is 1300 cc down on the actual displacement, as this is no girly little 5.7 litre but a 500bhp 7 litre. Better not rain then? 'I've been told it's good in the wet, but I reckon it's a ploy to get me going.' And the Mach 1 isn't the only Mustang which lives at the Reynolds' house either, as there's a GT350 to complete the stable. The best thing about the Mach 1 for Martin is its ability to put a smile on his face and the worst is 'probably its fuel and tyre consumption...'; he's also concerned that the car fits the class but its tyres don't, not yet anyway. This is a car with racing history in both USA and Europe, 'hardly any brakes', NASCAR racer Joey Lugano's name on the roof and the last time I heard a sound like this I was at Charlotte Speedway for the Bank of America 500. Fittingly, I'm wearing the Bass Pro Shops Tony Stewart cap I bought from the Charlotte shop, even though I'm more sad old git than good ol' boy.

It's time to head out to the infield, but first a quick word with Brentwood man Peter Boyes, who is racing the 1964 FIA spec MGB he has owned 'for a long time now, we've campaigned it in various championships and the highlight was 2013 when we won our Guards class championship.' The 'we' is Peter and his son Jan and this weekend they are racing one of the eight MGBs in the CSCC Mintex Classic K Series. Over the years, Peter reckons he has broken every single component of the car but 'we love it, it's been a cracking experience and the CSCC are a really nice club, very friendly, easy going people and we have some nice racing. In other championships we were getting mixed up with much faster stuff like (B8) Chevrons and it was a joke, like chalk and cheese, I don't mind being lapped but ...'. I get an insight into just what Appendix K means for a car like an MGB – no overdrive, a single Weber, drum brakes on the back, standard block and about 120bhp with the better technology used on a rebuild. Not surprisingly, Peter would have preferred improved braking with rear discs in other series like the HSCC; however he likes the CSCC package where he's racing against similar cars and can 'have some fun and go home with a smile on our faces. And we're going to go to Magny Cours.' My mention of Ayrton Senna's pace in 1993 through Craner provokes a gale of laughter – 'he's our hero!' He likes adrenalin, does Peter, and now he's semi-retired he's supplementing his terrestrial kicks by learning to fly. And I just talk to people in race circuit paddocks, as my one experience of piloting a glider reduced my instructor to helpless laughter. Let's just say my hand/eye co-ordination better suited me to doing tedious legal stuff for a living.



No graffiti in the tunnel under the circuit, unlike Thruxton, but I'd pay a lot of money to see Jonathan Palmer's face if any did appear. When I emerge, there's another sign of the new order at Donington. Apart from the line of MSV flags snapping in the breeze, there's new sponsorship for the bridge arching over the track - it was last sponsored by a pie company I'd never heard of, but now it shows the BMW logo. My eyes (and ears) are caught first by the old school TVR Griffith 200 of Jon Ellison which is making progress brisk enough to bely the car's 53 years, old enough not to feature the 'ban the bomb' pattern Cortina rear lights which were used on later TVRs. I then watch how the Muirhead Seven is rehearsing race tactics already as it keeps pace with a 240Z, regaining the yards it lost down the straight by braking later into Redgate. I listen long enough to the gorgeous Marcos of Ben Gough and Iain Daniels to guess, correctly, that this is a Ford V6 powered 'wooden wonder'. You can never tell with a Marcos as, although more or less the same shape was kept for decades, there was a bewildering variety of engines, including straight fours from Ford, Rover and Volvo, Ford V4 and V6, straight sixes from Ford, Volvo and Triumph and V8s from Chevrolet, Rover and Ford. But tell me this - who ever decided to buy a Marcos and then thought that the lumpy old V4 from a Transit van was the answer?

During a break between qualifying sessions I browse the programme and (I'm not being paid to say this) its contents put the efforts of some others to shame; there is actually something to read and my inner pedant struggled to find a single typo. But one eyebrow does a Roger Moore when I read that the new CSCC Racetruck Open Series representative is Damian Hirst. I must catch up with him at Mallory Park and ask about his pickled shark artwork...

I wander up to the chicane for the CSCC Gold Arts Magnificent Sevens, as it's a good place to witness the full gamut of cornering behaviour which the big field of Caterhams and the handful of MKs can display (no Westfields, by the way?). They don't disappoint, but they never do with their magic formula of decent power, finite grip, rear wheel drive, no driver aids and no silly aero trickery. My entirely random timing of cars through the chicane suggests that Sam Smith's R300 is as quick as it looks, both BOSS cars are ballistic and Messrs Ratcliff and Aikens won't be at the blunt end of the grid either. But if sideways is your thing, later on the MGBs proved collectively to be as mad as the proverbial box of frogs, especially when viewed on the entry to the right/left chicane. Locked up wheels, over corrections of over corrections, kerb hopping - they were wild and crazy, one and all.

One car I had spotted earlier was the oldest here, the 1958 Triumph TR3A of Zaheer ('everyone calls me Ed') Shah. I spoke to Ed during the lunch break and he told me that this will be only his second ever race, following 'some hill climbs in a TR7 24 years ago.' Ed has spent the intervening time serving in 7 Para RHA as an army surgeon and, after all those years jumping out of planes, he now gets his adrenalin rush from the Triumph he bought six weeks ago. He had planned on doing hill climbs again but was talked into doing a Bentley Drivers Club Day at Silverstone and '...oh, what a buzz! It's one way of adapting to civilian life.' Here's the thing, though, as the picture I have painted so far of Ed might make you assume he was the macho military stereotype that TV and film so love to portray. And you'd be quite wrong, for the actual Ed is softly spoken, wry and endearingly self-deprecating. The day job? He's a consultant urologist with the Worcestershire NHS Trust.

Ed has chosen the old Triumph purely for its nostalgic value but he insists that the main limitation is not the TR's vintage - 'but my skills'. Craner is the challenge you'd expect, and so is the 'dog gearbox, which I'm still struggling to downshift properly. But the brakes are great and so is the grip from the Yokohama tyres I'm using now.' It's no surprise to hear that Ed has had fast road cars, Porsches especially, but he emphasises that 'there's just no comparison between driving on the road and doing this.' The TR is registered LVS 499 - a Greenock plate - and if cars could talk, I wonder what tales this one could tell?



Time for racing but, as is now usual in my reports, I'm going to be more impressionistic than completist. So I'll tell you about what made the races memorable rather than talking about the top three and ignoring the rest, as TV coverage loves to do. I watch Saturday's racing mainly from the entry into the chicane, as you see plenty of overtaking and, for once, it's possible to see at least some of the track un-obscured by catch fencing. CSCC Advantage Motorsport Future Classics gives me the opportunity to see not only the Mach 1 Mustang in action but also the lovely ex Martin Thomas Camaro of Alex Thistlethwayte, that I'd first spotted at Thruxton. It's an interesting comparison, as the '68 Camaro is positively svelte next to the '71 Mustang's well-padded bulk and you can imagine the Ford's natural habitat being an Oval somewhere in redneck country



whilst the Chevy wouldn't look at all out of place at Spa or Zandvoort. Or Magny Cours, come to that. It's early days for the big Ford, and today it starts off by being locked in a little'n'large grudge match with the feisty little MX 5 of Jonathan Mitchell. Later on it picks a fight with a 3 series BMW. Further up the order I can't help notice the progress of Mark Chilton's '89 Nissan Skyline, and I can hear its tyres working hard from 100 metres distance - must be all those trick algorithms for which even an Eighties' Skyline was renowned. I haven't mentioned the Toyo Tires/

Watchdogapp.com Jaguar Saloon and GT Championship in this report yet and I have a confession to make - I've never been much of a Jaguar fan, having fallen under the spell of Colin Chapman, Jim Clark and the divine Lotus Elan at a very impressionable age. But, despite preferring a lissom Lotus to a jowly Jag, I don't mind admitting that the racing the big cats offered was one of the weekend's highlights, with Sunday's second race being spectacular viewing on the Melbourne loop. Two and three abreast, black lines of wheelspin, big slides, distressed bodywork, gravel excursions, flapping bumpers - the lot. The little group of us on the exit to Melbourne were well entertained and, whilst I might single out Kevin Dickens for being one of the most entertaining, you were all brilliant to watch. By the way, can we assume that Daniel Stewart is a Hesketh Racing and James Hunt fan from the diagonal red and blue stripes on his white 1990 XJS? But if memory serves me correctly, Master James was driving an Austin A35 van by 1990. Maybe the CSCC can entice an A35 van into the Swinging Sixties race where it could be a poor man's Breadvan Ferrari?



I watch Saturday's last two races, the CSCC Race-track Open and the Mintex Classic K Series, from the new grandstand overlooking the top of the Craner Curves, which has good and bad points. The 'good' is that you can see at least half the circuit and the 'bad' is that you can also understand why the runoffs at Redgate and, especially, the Old Hairpin are visible from space. Call me Mr Dinosaur with rosy tinted specs if you want, but if run offs of less than half the size were deemed acceptable for the F1, F2, F3000, Group C and DTM races I have seen here why (oh why) are we lumbered with these vast acreages of gravel now? And yes, of course I wouldn't be moaning so much if I was completing a 360 degree spin in the Ferrari 250GTO I drive in my better dreams ...Run offs and catch fencing apart, it's still a nice place to spend a September afternoon and enjoyed the Racetruck Open race, which featured some fairly robust 'elbows out' action from one of the Clios and AN Other through Craner.



I ended my Saturday with the glorious spectacle of Alasdair Coates' Shelby Cobra bellowing and sliding its way to victory in the Mintex race. I saw my first Cobra when I was a schoolkid and, fifty years later, the combination of Home Counties style and thunderous Detroit muscle has never palled. If Alasdair ever needs a navigator I'm first in the queue. There's a poignancy here too, as the race is held in commemoration of the life of CSCC stalwart Philip Rothwell. I never met Philip but I know his family are here today, and I would be hard pushed to think of a more glorious way of celebrating a life than the sight and sound of a Cobra in full cry on a soft September evening. The Cobra elegy was enhanced by the supporting cast of Elans, MGBs and the rest, and how splendid it was to see the Aylett/Farrall Diva GT, the little Camberwell racer which seemed to feature in nearly every Sixties sports car race. As I drifted back uphill to the paddock the Sixties' theme took an unexpectedly mellow direction as I detected the distinctive smell of what I believe is called a jazz woodbine, m'lud. Not a CSCC member I'm sure...



Sunday, early, but this guy has beaten me to it as he's in the pit lane, already suited up in his orange overalls and he's about to get into the big red pickup, laden with firefighting kit. It's Brian Bennett from Derby - 'I've been working here since Donington reopened in 1977, driving the fire vehicle since '84 and I've enjoyed every day. My day job? I work here on circuit maintenance ...' Now that is what I call an enthusiast. I ask about his highlight of the hundreds of races he has attended and instantly he replies - 'Without a doubt the European Grand Prix; I did the chasing lap and it was an experience I'll never forget.' Brian obviously knew Tom Wheatcroft well and describes him, with an affectionate smile, as 'a complete character in himself, nobody like him. My wife is chair of the Donington Park Racing Association and we'd always invite Tom to our dinners - he always spoke what he felt!' I asked how things had been after the GP bid crashed and burned - 'I didn't think it was ever going to come back but you hoped, and that hope has come true. We're back on the right track now.' It's a privilege to have talked to Brian as he really is part of Donington's DNA.



Thanks to some last minute recruitment of additional marshals the full Grand Prix circuit is in use on Sunday. I spend my time watching on the exit of the Melbourne hairpin, then move over to what has now become the Fogarty Esses before I finish my weekend back at the hairpin for the opening laps of the CSCC Cartek Modern Classics race. This meant I was only able to witness qualifying for the CSCC Motorsports School Turbo Tintops with Cartek Motorsport Puma Cup & Smart4Two Cup, which I will talk about at the end of this report, sadly with a heavy heart.

The Melbourne Loop gives by far the closest viewing at Donington and my due diligence work on the CSCC Gold Arts Magnificent Sevens reveals that one of the very raciest looking cars is the MK Indy driven by Stephen Riley. It's a bike-engined car, of course, and in the slippery conditions it is rarely pointing quite in the right direction and is keeping the driver very busy. Great to watch and, whilst most corners at most circuits have one obvious line, with maybe a wet weather one too, Melbourne's geometry has encouraged creativity in just about every race I've seen here, from DTM to F3. Today gives the Sevenista the broadest palette to work with. Late and early apices, wide and narrow lines, on and off the kerb, you name it. More than the occasional half spin and lock up too ... Lunchtime rain meant that the Sevens were racing on a drying track, and if you wanted to show somebody who'd only seen racing on TV exactly how intense live racing can be, you could choose no better series than this. I guarantee that, unlike this weekend's Singapore Grand Prix, you won't be snoring before the pit stops begin. The number of race-suited drivers also watching the Sevens tells its own story. Great recovery drive from Peter Ratcliffe, by the way as, after his early spin at Coppice, he pips Mike Aiken for third at almost literally the last minute.

The RSV Graphics New Millennium crew don't spare their horses either, with Michael Cutt (a regular at my local, Croft) pushing his M3 E36 hard and, whilst the Lotus V6 Cup of Christopher Griffin looked smooth and unflustered, the pace of this car was impressive. I'd have like to have heard a little more of that snarly V6 though as, compared to some of the rowdier Porsches and BMWs, the surprisingly large Lotus is almost quiet. And what does it say about the once dominant UK car industry that, in this New Millennium field, the only (almost) British cars competing today are a solitary BMW Mini and a Ford Mondeo and those eternal survivors, Lotus and Ginetta? It'd be a thin grid without BMW and Porsche.



No shortage of variety in CSCC Tin Tops as I counted fourteen different models in the huge grid, including the understated Proton Persona GTi of father and son Field which had made such an impression at Thruxton. I found Richard senior working on the Proton and wanted to find out more - 'I'm from Head Racing Developments in Ely. My typical day is spent stripping and building engines, petrol, diesel, cars, vans, everything really. The car was the right price, we know it was quick and reliable in its day and we've spent three and half years getting it where we want it. It raced in '97 in a one-make series; they had about 160 bhp and we're running about 220 now. It's a really

good cornering car, and that's where most of its benefits are, it's not about straight line speed at all. The long wheel base helps, and it's got independent rear suspension, unlike a Corsa or Clio, and it turns in so well, doesn't understeer and it loves the wet. Today? Top five and we'll be happy. Craner is flat for us, no hassle and the Yokohamas we're now using have made a big difference. And at Mallory, Goddards should suit this car really well.' Finally, Richard, what about Thruxton? 'Well, the ending was a bit disappointing as we should have had the win.' It's clear that the team still has very raw nerves about their last race, which they lost by 0.059 seconds, and they feel they have come under much closer scrutiny since the car has moved up the grid. It's not the place of a hack like me to comment further, but I wish the team well for the future as I am left in no doubt about their drive to succeed and the hard work they have already invested.

Some heavier metal is out in the CSCC Cartek Motorsport Modern Classics, and I must make a point of talking to Tom Brenton soon, as I love the fact that his car looks much like any other Sierra (if you can still find one) but spits out yard-long flames and sounds like a Cobra. The New Beetle of Team Severs isn't what it seems either, as this rare RSi model doesn't feature the default VAG turbo four, but the very tuneful VW VR6 instead. Ever heard the term 'wischening'? If you haven't, it was the term popularised, and maybe even invented, by the legendary journalist Denis Jenkinson to describe the most effective way to corner a Porsche 356 or 911. And whilst it may have been easier to do with Sixties' crossply tyres, you can still witness wischening in action if you watch drivers like Miles and Piers Masarati in their brutally quick 964 Turbo, the car which won the close fought race.

John Hammersley is making his return to the CSCC Motorsports School Turbo Tin Tops in the Megane and I am conscious of the fact that I have yet to talk to him properly, while my own timetable has stopped me reporting on the series properly this weekend. Normal coverage will be resumed at Mallory.

And now I must end this report on the most sombre of notes. I like to finish my reflections on a racing weekend on an upbeat theme but I simply cannot do that today. I have just learnt that Puma Cup driver John Bateman died on Sunday night, after falling ill during the final race of the weekend. I had seen John race at Brands and Oulton this year and it is to my great regret that I had yet to talk to him. But I do know that John was a popular and respected member of the CSCC and the wider racing community. I am sure his loss has affected everybody who is involved with the Club, as well as so many others in the sport. But now it is his family and close friends who deserve all our thoughts and I offer my own condolences to them.

John Aston

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