



## Thruxton Thriller Event Report August 2018

The Thriller might have been my first visit to Thruxton but, back in the Eighties I did spend a little time in Wiltshire and, as I drove south from Marlborough for my third CSCC race weekend of 2018, I remembered what an unsettlingly odd place Wiltshire feels. There's Stonehenge of course, pagans both ancient and modern and, more recently, there's even been dark deeds from the Kremlin, allegedly. And whilst Thruxton may technically be in Hampshire, it's only the smallest of spits away from the spooky county whose inhabitants are called Moonrakers. Which, to this Leeds-born tyke, means that the ... err ... vibe ... feels a lot more Wicker Man than we'd get at Harewood or Croft, even at a VSCC meeting. It got weirder still when I saw a sign to The Wallops, which I assumed was some public school initiation ritual thing. Better not go there, so let's think instead of what is on offer from the CSCC menu this weekend. I will confess to a teensy bit of disappointment that the Adams and Page Swinging Sixties posse were otherwise engaged this weekend, but when there's a slot on the Brands Hatch GP circuit ... well, you would, wouldn't you?



But any disappointment evaporated as I drove into the Thruxton paddock on Friday afternoon and felt, even on this August dog day afternoon, that indescribable buzz of a race circuit. The last time I visited a race circuit for the very first time was thirty years ago at Imola, and whilst tifosi are a bit thin on the ground, and the locals at Thruxton drink more Bishop's Tipple than Lambrusco, I found out that there was one link to Emilia -Romagna's loveliest circuit, in the form of the guy who designed Prost and Senna's McLaren MP4/4 ... First impressions of Thruxton? Just like Goodwood, Croft, Snetterton and Silverstone we have World War 2 to thank for the circuit, but Thruxton still has planes parked up on the infield, and as I was to find out, even the commentary is delivered from the control tower. The more I explored the layout and realised just how scarily quick the corners looked, the more I was reminded of Seventies' Silverstone, but with a lower blazer count. There were echoes of Rufforth too, the long lost circuit near York, also an operational airfield, where the BRSCC used to set up the circuit on race day mornings by bolting on a few pieces of Armco, stringing up some rope and placing some concrete filled oil drums to mark out corner apices. Thruxton is permanent of course, but, just like Rufforth, parts of the circuit are so stupidly fast that spectators are confined to less than half its perimeter. This looked promising.



Time to walk and talk and, always having been a fan of Wankel power (quiet at the back) I had to talk to the driver of that svelte little Mazda RX7 which was entered in the CSCC Cartek Motorsport Modern Classics. This is a car which evokes memories of the raucous RX7s driven by Win Percy in the 1980 and '81 British Saloon Car Championship, and there are memories too of Barrie 'Whizzo' Williams, who raced an RX3 even longer ago. In the laid back early Eighties the tiny 2+2 RX7 was eligible to race against more conventional saloons, just as Porsche 911s had been eligible to race against Cortinas in the Sixties' BSCC. Don't know about you, but I'd rather watch either, than watch Jason Plato's BTTC Subaru Levorg (grovel, backwards, but you knew that already, am I right?). Alex Taylor is driving '...my dad Trevor Taylor's Mazda under the banner of Rassler Racing.'



I mention that his dad shares a name with the late former Lotus F1 driver - 'yeah, occasionally on a grid he has been called out as the Trevor Taylor and he's just opened the car door and waved to the crowd ... Dad's retired and I do an internet business and live in London. We've raced a lot, about twenty years ago Dad raced a GT40 and me a Lotus, but two or three years ago we started again and Dad bought this car from a friend. The car came from Australia where somebody had tried to convert it for drag racing, they gave up and somehow it got shipped over here. Then it lived in its container for two years at a friend's place until, after a few glasses of wine, my dad said he'd give two and half grand for it. It took us two years to get it to being a decent race car and our first race was at Spa.' Just the place to debut a new car, I suggest - '...disaster, couldn't even drive the thing, wasted trip but by the time we started with CSCC last year we'd worked on it and it was starting to be a race car.' I'm intrigued about the appeal of rotary engined cars, which only NSU and Mazda have been brave enough to produce in any number - NSU Spider/ Ro80 and Mazda Cosmo, RX 3/7/8 and that's about it. 'We really appreciate the fact it's a rotary engine and we've built a relationship with this crazy guy in Amesbury who's a rotary expert so we're risking Novichok poisoning every time we get something done to the engine. Last season the car was reliable but this year we've struggled a bit.' Time for facts and figures and Alex tells me the car weighs just under 1000 kg and has about 350 bhp 'on a good day.' It's turbocharged and so, unlike the stratospheric revs a non-turbo RX7 like Win's required, this one only needs to be revved to tenor, not soprano level. Mazda Wankel engines are notorious for their ear-splitting shriek and Alex tells me that on the inside it 'sounds great, like it means business.' A final word from Alex about CSCC events - 'Brilliantly organised, efficient, awesome crew, CSCC stand out as the best we race with, we've made good friends here and we just have a great time. Nothing comes close.' All unsolicited, CSCC people, and Alex even assured me he wasn't looking for a discount on his next race entry.



Before I am lured away by the siren call of nearby Lotus Elans I speak to Heidi, who Alex introduces as his team manager. Obviously, with a name like that, she must be Swiss - 'No, I'm Finnish, with a Swiss name. But they need a Finn in the team, you know what they say, if you wanna win you have to get a Finn. I am the grease monkey really, I change tyres, refuel the car, make sure the guys are where they need to be at the right times, and I do the pit board as well. All the crappy jobs!' So what's it like to be a woman in an environment that used to be so exclusively blokey? 'Oh, I'm a very macho girl! Yes, the fact is it's mainly men but there are a lot of women here as well and I don't mind the macho part, it's part of the attraction for me, I like the fact this is dirty, smelly, greasy, oily, it's grunt work ...and I love it.' Heidi hasn't lived in Finland since 2000, which must explain why she has said more to me in the last two minutes than most Finnish F1 drivers say in their entire career.

I'm still en route for the Elans, but who could walk past the sexy blue and white Triumph GT6, the car which seems to be following me around this year. I've already seen it at Brands, Croft, Cadwell, Oulton Park and Harewood and I found out why from Roy Davis - 'we're from Brisbane and came over in March for six months' racing and Colleen, my wife, is my pit crew.' Roy left his native Derbyshire in 1976 and emigrated to Australia, where he worked in civil construction - 'roads, dams, mining...'. The GT6 has made the journey in reverse to the UK and - '... started life as a Spitfire, first raced in '77, it retired in '86 and was on blocks until I bought it in 2005.' This once in a lifetime motor racing odyssey - 'has been very, very busy' Colleen tells me, with 16 races done already, with three still to go, with their last event being at Angouleme. Roy is driving in the CSCC Wendy Wools Special Saloons and Modsports race against the big banger machinery which excels at a fast circuit like this one. Roy tells me later that he was running out of revs at 200km/h, which is about 45 km/h faster than my mate's GT6 ever managed on the M62. The downhill bit, obviously.





It's time to pick an Elan, there's a selection entered in the CSCC Mintex Classic K Series, and right on cue here's the driver of a 26R to talk to. And you are? '...Anthony Hancock from Alresford and I'm racing this lovely Elan run by the great Tom Ebbs, in preparation for the Spa 6 Hours. I've always loved Lotuses, I've raced many different types but never an Elan - this is a first.' I, too, am a disciple of the Gospel according to Anthony Colin Bruce Chapman and, although I know it's going to be painful, I need to establish precisely how jealous I need to be of Mr Hancock. Very, as he has raced '...everything from an Elite up to the twin chassis Formula 1 Lotus 88B and quite a lot in between.' Another fan of the CSCC, his verdict echoes so many others - '...it's a wonderful club, clearly focused on exactly what people like myself are looking for. Relaxed but serious racing, and with a really good social

side.' Anthony then suggests I might want to talk to co-driver Steve. Reader, this is where I need to explain that I don't plan interviews or questions, as I find a spontaneous approach gets better results. And that's why I wasn't actually that bothered about talking to this random Steve, as one Elan driver's thoughts were all I needed. I decide to go through the motions, deciding I'd just chat politely and move on elsewhere as soon as was decent.



Just one look, that's all it took for me to double check my analogue Dictaphone was working properly as this Steve was the tall, laid back engineer from Salt Lake City who had designed the McLarens I had seen at Imola, half a lifetime ago - Steve Nichols. But hey, I'm not star struck, hardly at all, so how is the Elan? 'Yeah ... bit of a culture shock for me after racing Formula Ford 2000 and Formula 3, it moves around a lot, it sort of feels a bit unstable but I've made a fair bit of improvement today.' Does it need DRS then, Steve? - '....oh, that'd be ...(laughs). Actually the engine is really strong and it

revs to eight, and I'm only using six in the 2000 and F3 so it sounds like it's really singing. And yeah, when I was a kid Chapman was the hero and the first thing that got me into Formula 1 was the Lotus 25. Road and Track magazine had an article headlined 'Chapman's tubeless wonder' and I just thought it was exquisite. I've got a '72 Elan and a '62 Elite and there's so many iconic Lotuses - the 25, 33, 49, 79 and ...(big laugh) ...yeah, Chapman was quite a guy. But I just don't know why he put struts on the rear of this thing ...' I talked to Steve some more about his F1 career and his insights into [Keke] Rosberg ('a total one off'), Lauda, Prost and Senna were fascinating. 'Senna was so emotional, on the ragged edge, he'd be banned in current F1 ... The thing about Lauda was just his utter determination, he never ever, gave up, even with a faster team mate. And Prost, oh he was just a regular guy, no prima donna, no superstar, a lovely guy who was so easy to work with.'

Saturday morning was grey and breezy and it was time to do my mystery shopper routine at the Thruxton café. My verdict? It is almost embarrassingly better than those at some other motor sport venues I can (but won't) name. Here the staff are cheery, I can sit down at a clean and level table, I'm indoors, the breakfast is excellent (hash browns!) and they even trust customers with a knife and fork. Fifteen minutes later, one cappuccino down already, but I'm more than happy to join Messieurs Bole, Houvenaghel and Deboffe for more coffee because, Team Davis GT6 and Paul Tooms (who flew in from Texas) apart, this group of friends has travelled further than most. Christophe Deboffe tells me, in almost perfect English which makes me ashamed of my stumbling French - '...we have raced together for ten years and we are really happy to be racing with the CSCC here. It's the most ... ah ... beautiful organisation for the gentleman driver, lots of respect on the track, the marshals are so nice to us, it's like a holiday'. The friends race a Caterham en France, as they can't race their Hayabusa-powered MK Indys at home, but they can here in the CSCC Racetruck Open Series and this is their first venture to Thruxton - 'Oh yes (eyes widen), it's really high speed ... but we like it and we've already decided to come next year.' Christophe has his own environment company (nearly everybody else in the paddock seems to be in IT) and he and his copains look to be having the time of their lives, on and off track. Brexit permitting, I look forward to seeing them next year and, as I raved about the joys of Cadwell Park to Christophe, can we have a meeting there next season, CSCC guys?

(CSCC: We will return to Cadwell, but maybe not next year)



Before qualifying there was just time to inspect one of the bonkers little Smart 4 Twos which I had failed to find in the Brands Hatch paddock (were they hiding in the gents?) and it's a hoot. Driver David Nash has been racing Smarts since 2010 and this weekend he is competing in the CSCC Motorsports School Turbo Tin Tops, with Cartek Motorsport Puma Cup & Smart 4TwoCup and, yes, I have read novels which were shorter than this race title. David tells me that the Smart is pumped up by bespoke suspension and braking, safety kit and packs a different ECU. Which helps deliver 125 -130 bhp, and that fact alone is enough to make me want to watch one of these bad boys tackle Cadwell's Coppice, preferably in the wet. Not surprisingly, Smarts are kart-like to drive and -'once they start going round, they keep going round.' What's the day job, David? Got it in one, it's IT ... Later, I make sure I watch the posse of Smarts in the race and they are just splendid, head butting kerbs into and out of Club and then producing a percussive whoomp on the upshift on the way to Allard, to the delight of the crowd. I reckon that if Moby Dick, the legendary Porsche 935/78, was ever blessed with grandchildren they'd all sound exactly like a hard charging Smart. It is time to explore Thruxton properly and I head out towards the control tower, where I am to meet up with commentator Marcus Pye later. Just like Donington, there's a pedestrian tunnel but this one's got much better graffiti; my tenner says that you won't see Katie.xcx's tag down Goodwood way, and I'd be locked up if I reproduced some of the more ... umm ... adult slogans. But hey, we're nearly in Wiltshire, so what did you expect? As I walk across the grass towards the Jackaroo café I'm greeted by John Small who is the sort of guy for whom club motor sport is part of his lifeblood. John, a spectator, has come down from Reading and tells me he first came here for the Festival of Britain motor bike race, when he was just nine. That was back in the early Fifties and since then John has amassed about 1000 Thruxton programmes, which from '68 onwards also feature cars as well as bikes. John loved the 500 mile bike races, but has an obvious love of Formula 3 cars too and he's seen everybody who is anybody race here, from Surtees and Hailwood to Hamilton and Button, via Bill Ivy and Jochens Rindt and Mass. John is a lovely man and he is just as much a part of Thruxton's unique character as the riders and drivers he has seen here. And now I feel I should be swaggering into the Jackaroo Café to ask the NAAFI popsy for a cup of char and a wad. I'd be wearing my sheepskin flying jacket and would have just parked up my bullet- holed Spitfire, ready to be rearmed for my next sortie over the English Channel. There is such a palpable legacy from the last War here, with the control tower and Nissen huts adding to the time warp, never-never land feel. And come to think of it, hadn't I encountered a couple of daft Fokkers on the A303 this very morning?

A familiar voice interrupts my reverie -'You're a long way from home, again...' It's Motor Sport magazine's Simon Arron who is here to write up today's proceedings, with the report scheduled to appear in the November issue, which means late September for the rest of us. We chat for a while, to the chorus of straight six howls and V8 rumbles from the big cats' qualifying session for the Toyo Tires/Watchdogapp.com Jaguar Saloon & GT Championship. I can see already that, although the big Jags

don't always look too feline in the Club chicane, they are in their element over the rest of their lap, where their long legs can well and truly be stretched. I am taken by the almost vintage soundtrack of the pair of XJRs of Tom Robinson and Adam Powderham, where the familiar V8 backbeat is overlaid by the metallic scream of a supercharger. Judging by the wheelspin and black lines neither of these cars was lacking in the trouser department. And crikey, I really didn't expect to see a Daimler Coupe, immediately identifiable by its two doors and classy fluted radiator grille. As befits such a gentleman's carriage, David Bye's no.62 car is in a haughty grey and has fewer sponsor stickers than its more show off Jaguar cousins. Only 1600 of these Daimlers were ever made in the Seventies, so what are the odds of this one not only having survived, but for it now to be travelling faster than it ever did back in the days when it was somebody's pride and joy, washed and waxed every Sunday morning?



But the pace of the sublime 309GTI of Ricky Parker Morris makes the hairiest V8 Jag look almost stately, even if the birthday boy driver is forced to retire from the first race of the weekend, the CSCC Wendy Wools Special Saloons and Modsports. But there's nearly always a tomorrow in this sport, and today I can enjoy watching the majestic progress of Ian Hall's Darrian Wildcat T98 GTR instead. I'm old enough to remember seeing its distant ancestor, the Davrian Imp, race against the likes of Ginetta G4s but I would never have dreamed that, instead of the screaming 1 litre engine of the original, forty years later its Darrian successor would be packing the sort of heat only a 6 litre V8 can create. Ian was racing again on Sunday and, as I was to witness, things were destined not to end anything like as well as they did on Saturday.

I resolved to explore the rest of the circuit on Sunday, and passed the rest of Saturday afternoon watching the 200m of track between entry and exit of the Club Chicane, spending some time in the luxury of a proper covered grandstand. You already know who won what and all that facts and figures stuff, so let me now just summarise the biggest impressions made on me by the cars and drivers racing that afternoon, starting with Nigel Tongue's Megane F1 26R. This car may have styling only its mother could really love but it doesn't take long to see why the Megane was so adored by road testers -it turns in to Club with an alacrity that doesn't belong to most front wheel drive cars and it works its tyres hard enough for their cries of help to be heard 100m away. It deserved its accolade as one of the hottest of hot hatches, at least until the advent of the even lairier Civic Type Rs and AMG A45 we hear banging and parping round the bypass today.



Lots of elbows out battling in the CSCC Cartek Motorsport Modern Classics race, but the best scrap wasn't for the podium positions, it was the Hethel/Stuttgart punch up between David Sharp's yellow Elise and the Jonathan Dawson/'Skid' Scarborough battleship-grey Boxster. You guys were too busy to notice, but, from where I was standing, all eyes were on you, every lap.



Hethel was also represented in the CSCC Mintex Classic K race by a whole posse of Elans and ... err... Bradford on Avon by the brace of Marcos 1800s. But you can always rely on Detroit to make some noise, you know the one, that special noise only a big bent eight can really deliver. The Mustang of local driver Alex Thistlethwayte was only rarely not in a slide of some sort especially on the very unorthodox, if effective, lines its driver was taking into Club. And another slide master was the Ford Falcon of Andy Edwards and Stewart Lyddall, which ended its race by kissing an Armco barrier, and it wasn't a first date sort of kiss either, but y'all wouldn't expect anything too chaste from a good ol' boy Ford, now would you ?



To say that Autosport's Marcus Pye is the enthusiast's enthusiast doesn't even begin to do justice to his devotion to his subject. This classical music loving journalist, racer and commentator is Wikipedia made flesh when it comes to our favourite sport and he makes me feel like a dilettante. He attends - 'between 30 and 40 race meetings a year and what's not to like? I'm just a kid in a toy shop.' I can talk reasonably knowledgeably about some of the near forgotten racing car marques of the Seventies but Marcus is the guy who is happiest when he is drilling down into the bedrock of chassis numbers and tyre compounds. Murray Walker famously was the man on the mic who sounded like his trousers were on fire but Marcus Pye is the opposite, strolling in to the control tower five minutes before he's on air, cool as you like, then keeping a lap chart with one hand, flicking through driver notes and programme with the other, one eye on the timing screen and the other on the track. God knows how he does all this while languidly talking through every incident and place change on track, interspersed with background of driver and car, and without ever missing a beat. He is a treat to talk to after the racing ends, telling me how, out of his hundreds of visits to Thruxton, the one which still means the most was - '28 October 1973, BARC Championship Final ... my first day, it was just so special, and Tony Hazlewood set that 100mph lap with the DAF V8. And years later, I drove the DAF at Mallory and Donington.' There isn't the space to cover our chat (Marcus can really talk) but there's no doubt that the 'lad from South London with no family background in racing' has done good, having driven an astonishing 500 different race cars, with one highlight being pulling 190mph in a 3.5 litre DFZ engine F3000 car about five minutes' walk away from where we are sitting. He loves CSCC events - 'especially the can-do attitude and the fact it regards all its racers as customers.' I see him next morning, he's lying down in front of the DAF V8 and George Whitehead's WRA Anglia to get a moody picture and he is grinning from ear to ear like it's Christmas morning. DAF custodian Stephen Hazlewood tells me that the car - 'comes alive with speed...it's noisy, rattly but it's an absolute dream.'



As Saturday night is disco nite down Amesbury way I decided to reward my lack of sleep with an English Breakfast that was not so much full as Olympian, leaving me running on full tanks when I sneaked into the marshals' briefing session. Adrift in a sea of orange overalls I felt as though I'd gatecrashed a reunion of Guantanamo Bay inmates ... But this was west Hampshire, and clerk of the course Robert Williams was explaining the finer detail of Code 60 protocol, before radios were handed out amid much of what young people call bantz, innit. The Lady in Orange is Donna Vernon Lawes from Southampton, whose day job is data analyst for Bacardi, and she has been marshalling for - '...about 15 years and I'm a trainee post chief. This year we have been to Thruxton, Brands, Goodwood and we're at Silverstone next week.' Best and worst of marshalling Donna? 'I really can't think of any worst, maybe the weather sometimes? We just

love it, especially at club meetings like this - it's fast paced, good mixture of cars, there's a real team camaraderie.'

As I head out to explore the delights of Allard and beyond, the past catches up with me as I spot the ex Martin Thomas, Ovaltine branded Chevy Camaro I last saw 40 odd years ago, and today it is being driven by Alex Thistlethwayte in the Advantage Motorsport Future Classics race. I am still wondering why the Ovaltine marketing gonks thought that sponsoring a muscle car racer would boost sales of the bedtime drink whose typical consumer was either under 10 or over 70. Hmm, got me there guys, but no matter, as here's Clerk of the Course Robert again, and I blag my promised ride around the circuit with him during the church break. Even in a sensibly driven Audi I am even more taken with this place, and I can't decide if Thruxton is two tight corners joined by either a long and winding straight or a single multi apex curve. Either way, I love it and I am surprised by the odd cambers and the fact that there often isn't just one obvious line. Judging by the amount of black tyre marks spearing into the scenery I am possibly not alone in feeling this way.





I spend the next few hours watching from Allard to Noble, via Campbell, Cobb and Segrave, which in soulless F1 speak would be turns 1 to 5, and I know which I prefer. The elevated perspective gives me a good view of busy hands steering a variety of machinery in the CSCC Tintops. It's easy to see why so many still worship the Integra Type R as a living god, and all three examples look feisty and sound even feistier, an octave or two above the pack of rorty Clio 172s and Fiesta STs, but hold on, what the hell is this? It looks vaguely like a non-turbo Impreza but the programme tells me that it's actually the near forgotten Proton Persona Coupe, driven by Richard Field and ... err ... Richard Jason Field. It's an Alain Prost of a car, looking undramatic and sounding forgettable but somehow it seems to be one of the quickest cars on the track. Later on, it lit up the race itself with a wonderful late charge to the front, only to lose out in a last minute

kerfuffle with Russell Hird's Integra at the Club Chicane, but the Proton still managed to finish only 0.059 seconds behind last lap winner Steve Simpson's Peugeot 206 RC. Wow, and this race also featured one of the fastest and certainly the longest off track excursion I have ever seen, so cheers, Andrew Windmill in your Civic Type R lawnmower.

I watched the CSCC Gold Arts Magnificent Sevens opening laps of qualifying, and the entire field seemed to be pushing the envelope harder and earlier than everybody else, with 'dabs of oppo' being applied every lap. The thuggish sounding, big power Class H cars were a highlight, with speed that wouldn't disgrace a single seater, and a pack of Sevens was also out in the CSCC Racetruck Open Series race. I don't know what the creators of this series were smoking when they wrote the rules, but when such odd bedfellows as a Caterham 420 R, a Golf Mk 4, a wheel waving ex Richard Petty IROC Porsche 911, a Seat Leon Eurocup and (but of course) a TR6 and a Lotus Cortina are racing each other you really can't help but smile. Great scrap between the Parmar/Robinson Caterham 270R and the Stephen Grove Elise by the way. I had to leave before racing ended on Sunday and I was walking slowly back towards Allard, soaking up the sights and sounds of the CSCC Wendy Wools Special Saloons and Modsports once more, I was reminded why the signs say that motorsport is dangerous. Suddenly, Ian Hall's Darrian was sliding to the outfield in a shower of sparks at a speed which made me hold my breath. Something from the car even set fire to a patch of grass, a good 100m from where the car had eventually come to a halt, and the grass was still smouldering as the race ended. The Darrian thumped the Armco, hard but, with the marshals' help, Ian was helped to safety, looking winded but in one piece, and I wish him well. Quite a shunt and quite a weekend. And Thruxton now features in the latest addition to my bucket list because what I really really want to see now is a big power, low downforce car tackling the run out of the Complex. A Lola T70 or Cobra would be fine - and did I mention that it has to be in the wet?



Thanks for inviting me, and I hope to see you at Donington on 15/16 September.

**John Aston**

