

CLASSIC DRIVER

Tony Dron at the 2008 Goodwood Revival



With four cars to race, including two of the greatest Aston Martins of all time, our correspondent had one busy weekend in the Goodwood sunshine...

You meet a better class of person at the back of the grid. So went the old joke, to console those off the pace, but at Goodwood entire grids can be top class. Before the meeting, my mind was focused firmly on the two priceless **Aston Martins** and the **Frazer Nash Le Mans Rep**. I hadn't given so much thought to the **St Mary's Trophy** saloon car race which is meant to be relatively lighthearted, isn't it?

Qualifying provided a sharp wake-up call. For once I'd been allocated one of the quicker saloons, **Adam Gittings' 1958 Zodiac**, and I soon realised that this was serious. Five of us were split by a mere 1.3 seconds and the grid was composed of multiple Le Mans winners, European and British Touring Car Champions, Monte Carlo Rally winners and F1 stars. Almost every one of us having notched up hundreds of victories, this was clearly no picnic.



Jackie Oliver (Austin A35) was on pole, next to **Anthony Reid (Jaguar Mk1)**, and the Zodiac completed the front row. Following Adam's advice, as the Union Flag fell I dropped the clutch at 1800rpm and the mighty old Ford rocketed away in front. Approaching **Fordwater** on lap two, Anthony charged past but seconds later the Zodiac was roaring back in front. With drag factors like bricks, these old cars leave a massive hole in the air, giving following cars the kind of 'tow' you wouldn't believe. This meant that whichever one of us was behind could overtake the other...

Anthony, of course, is somewhat younger than I am and still a modern Touring Car ace, competing mainly in South America now. Any alarm I might have felt about that was immediately dispelled by the precision of his driving on the very limit, not to mention his perfect manners. Instead of attempting to block each other we got down to one of the best dices I have ever enjoyed in 40 years of motor racing. Side by side through **Madgwick, St Mary's** and **Woodcote**, I had total confidence that we would never make contact.

This was such fun. Then, at **Lavant Corner**, I happened to be just in front when there was a sickening snap from the front left, followed by a leary slide. The steering became incredibly heavy but I forced it to the left

and ploughed off to a point of safety. The offside front hub had broken, discarding the wheel, so that was that. Pity. (David Beard's remarkable picture, above, captures the precise moment of failure. The wheel is seen coming off, a split second before the front left collapsed.) Anthony went on to win from Jackie by a whisker, with Andy Rouse just behind in a Volvo.



Racing the **DBR1** is always one of life's great driving experiences but it was a lonely affair this time. The seven cars ahead of me in the **Sussex Trophy** race were just too quick and the rest of the big field soon dropped out of sight, leaving me all on my own to enjoy listening to the wonderful engine. To my taste, the suspension is a bit too stiff across the front these days, making it twitchy and nervous. I found it hard work to really push in the fast bends and was disappointed that I couldn't take Fordwater flat out. Even so, this thoroughbred racer feels so sharp and so responsive that I enjoyed the experience enormously. I did manage to press on a bit faster in the race and, most important of all perhaps, brought it home in one piece.

Patrick Blakeney-Edwards was my co-driver in the **1950 Frazer Nash** for the 90-minute **Freddie March Memorial**, a most atmospheric event which ran into the darkness. This car has a distinctly pre-War thoroughbred feel in the way it hops and skips and hangs out its tail but it's light, small and immensely reassuring, so we had a ball, qualifying 20th and finishing 11th in a trouble-free run. Some of the driving in that race was not so good, however. People weren't behaving badly but many of them were clearly out of their depth, off the right line and apparently trying desperately just to stay on the track. They seemed unaware of other traffic.



For the big race on Sunday, the **RAC TT Celebration**, I was privileged to share a **DB4GT Zagato**, the famous **1 VEV**, with **Adrian Beecroft**. Beautifully, immaculately restored to roadgoing trim, it is relatively heavy, quiet and civilised. By road car standards, even today, this is a very fast car but I was quite shocked at the way the fully race-prepared TT cars could blast past at the end of Goodwood's straights. That said, Adrian and I enjoyed a fine race to 20th place, dicing it out with the odd **Stingray** and **250 GTO**. This great Aston is surefooted under braking, it handles superbly well and it didn't wilt at all in an hour of being pressed to the limit. For pure driving pleasure, it's hard to beat but, rather more than usual, I was relieved to hand it back without a scratch on its perfect bodywork!

Text - Tony Dron

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Zodiac photo by kind permission of David Beard

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