

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Algarve Historic Festival: Hot Sun and Blind Brows



**The Algarve weather made it seem more like a holiday in mid-October than a racing weekend. While Britain shivered in plummeting temperatures as the first hints of winter set in, the large contingent of British competitors who made the long trek to the first ever Historic Festival at the new Algarve International Autodrome enjoyed calm, clear skies and up to 29 degrees C.**

In truth, the **Autodrome** is such an inspired creation that it could have rained all weekend and it would hardly have mattered. The new Portuguese circuit, about 4km long, rises and falls 106 feet through the rocky hills, presenting a tricky technical challenge of a kind not seen at any other new circuit we know. There are blind brows and steep drops, strung together by corners with complex changes in camber and the odd tightening double apex.



Designed mainly with modern bike racing in mind, the circuit was not aimed at creating a new venue for a **Portuguese F1 Grand Prix** – though the circuit owners have apparently secured FIA approval for that, just in case...

There are no boring chicanes and even the two slow corners offer an unusual challenge, thanks to the hilly nature of the place. The final right-hander is a very long affair, entered downhill and there's yet another blind brow just after the turning-in point, followed by a breathtaking descent as the curve continues into a dip and finally rises to crest the start-finish straight. It is a reminder of some of those famous ultra-fast corners once found (and, occasionally, still present) on the greatest circuits in history. It has an order of difficulty that makes one think of the **Nürburgring Nordschleife**, or even **Eau Rouge** at **Spa**, and it typifies the character of the entire **Algarve** circuit.



Some competitors took to it straight away. Others were, at first, a bit shaken. Few imagined that a brand-new circuit would be quite so difficult and exciting; and there was much scratching of heads as the drivers rose to the task of unravelling its secrets. Yet by the end of the weekend they – and the spectators – were unanimous in their praise. “What a fabulous circuit!” was the opinion of just one racer: in this case, the world’s most famous octogenarian, **Sir Stirling Moss**.

The **Algarve** is a long way from the usual Historic racing venues but the local spectators saw much of the best that the **HGPCA**, **Masters Series** and **Motor Racing Legends** have to offer. Despite the tortuous nature of the circuit, a few of the fastest cars were averaging well over 90mph.



For sheer speed and spectacular close dicing, the **Hall & Hall** family affair between **Rick Hall** and **Rob Hall** deserved a special award. Driving Le Mans-style matching blue **1974 Matra 670s**, they appeared to be in a class of their own in the **Masters** race which combined **Touring Cars** and **Prototypes** of the 1970s. Although Rob started from pole, Rick climbed from sixth on the grid to win by 0.126sec, the closest finish of the weekend. His average speed for the entire 14-lap race was 150.159kph (93.3mph).

Equally impressive was **Tony Smith** (manager of such names as **Genesis** and **Phil Collins**), who swept to victory in both **HGPCA Pre-1961 F1** races at the wheel of his **Ferrari Dino** – the last front-engined car ever to win a Grand Prix. He also ran his **Maserati 300S** in the two-hour, two-driver **Sir Stirling Moss Trophy** race, this time sharing with **Tony Dron**.







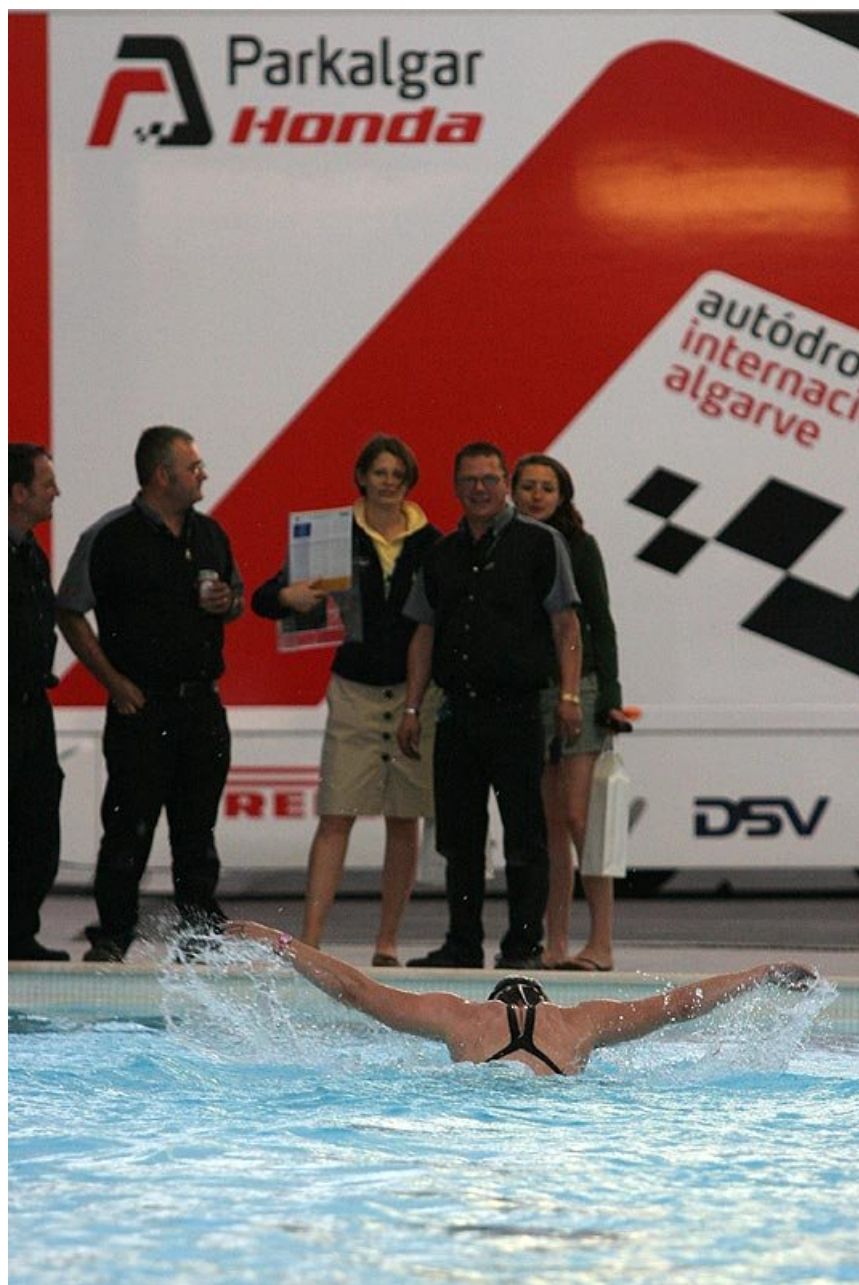
This feature race, organised by **Motor Racing Legends** and combining their usual **Woodcote Trophy** and **BRDC Historic Sportscars** grids, was particularly emotive, both for the fact that it finished at 7pm on the Saturday – by which time the sun had set in dramatic fashion – and because **Sir Stirling** himself drove in the race which bore his name, sharing his **1956 Osca** with **Roger Earl**. The little 1495cc car took second in class and 13th overall in a field of 32 starters. Fortunes changed at the front but the **Lister Knobbly** of **Barry Wood** and **Barry Cannell** emerged as the clear victor overall.





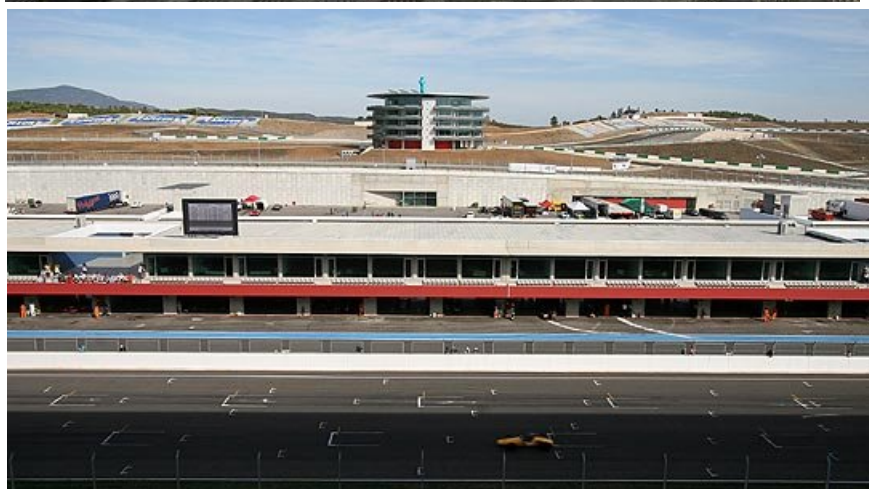
The racing throughout the weekend was close, technical and fierce (if still friendly) – and it's worth noting that the **Festival** drew more local spectators than the **A1GP** meeting earlier this year. Yet in that vast amphitheatre, the crowd still seemed small. There is no tradition of such events in the **Algarve** and the locals are just beginning to understand what they have on their doorstep. It's the big bike meetings which draw huge crowds from across the border in Spain but, with luck, the **Algarve Historic Festival** will grow in future years. The British competitors will certainly be more than ready to return to this superb new track.











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