

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Donington Historic Festival, 30 April and 1 May 2011: Review](#)



It seems there is room in the calendar for yet another top-level historic race meeting; or so it would seem from chock-full grids, 38 car clubs and 12,000 people that flocked to the first ever Donington Historic Festival.

Mind you, the Festival was blessed with good fortune, not least by the outstanding weather: non-stop sunshine that's a rare sight in the UK in late April. Even the small matter of a Royal Wedding on the Friday seemed only to enhance matters. It gave folk something to do in the anticlimactic Bank Holiday weekend which followed the matrimonial celebrations.

And then there's the revitalised Donington Park circuit, no longer a gigantic construction site but back to its former glory as one of the best spectator circuits in Europe. From the infield's magnificent natural (or at least JCB-enhanced) 'amphitheatre', there's a fabulous view of the racing; and what racing it was.



Take the Pre-63 GT race, with more than 30 cars of the calibre of Aston Martin Project 212, Ferrari 250 SWB and the eventual winner, Carlo Vogele's Ferrari 330 GTO. Or the Stirling Moss Trophy which, after the untimely demise of the Minshaws' Birdcage, saw a ferocious battle for victory eventually won by Bobby Verdon-Roe in that Goodwood favourite, the Tim Samways-entered Ferrari 246S Dino. From the same stable came the second-placed car – none other than 1959 Le Mans winner, the Aston Martin DBR1, piloted by Richard Attwood.



Sunday's Group C race was another highlight, despite the mechanical woes which saw the jaw-droppingly huge entry list of 26 sportscars fall to just 18 by the start of the race. We say 'just', but 18 Group C cars blasting round the twists and turns of Donington is a sight to behold – even if the spectators had to look further down the grid for neck-and-neck racing action. The overall win was a bit of walkover: not only did Bob Berridge take the chequered flag in his Mercedes C11, he also lapped every other car on the grid. AND managed a sub-one-minute lap in qualifying.



Aside from the racing, the success of a daring new venture such as the Donington Historic Festival comes down in the end to an almost indefinable 'atmosphere' – it either has it, or it doesn't. Many of us remember the final years of the Coys Festival at Silverstone, an annual event which was once unrivalled in terms of this magical atmosphere but, in its final throes, lost that crucial edge.



Whether it was the packed grids, the close racing, the spectacular and now revitalised circuit, the size of the (large but not TOO large) crowd, or the genuinely knowledgeable and enthusiastic spectators, it's hard to say – but the first ever Donington Historic Festival had the required atmosphere in bucketloads.

One of the few shadows on the weekend came at the end of Saturday evening's feature race, the first round of the new 1000Km for pre-1972 sports-racers, when Frank Sytner was taken ill at the wheel of his Lola T70

and as a result came off the track, making light contact with a tyre wall. He's now in hospital, receiving treatment and, needless to say, we send him our best wishes.



Dates for next year's Donington Historic Festival are yet to be announced, but there seems little to prevent this new annual event from becoming a 'must' on the historic motorsport calendar - for both competitors and spectators.

Text: [Classic Driver](#)

Photos: Donington Historic Festival

ClassicInside - The Classic Driver Newsletter

[Free Subscription!](#)

Gallery

Hide gallery

Hide gallery

Source URL: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/donington-historic-festival-30-april-and-1-may-2011-review>

© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.