CLASSIC DRIVER

# Silverstone Classic, 22-24 July 2011

**The secret’s out: Silverstone and the BRDC didn’t spend £27m just to accommodate a paltry 25 cars for the British Grand Prix. The investment was essential if they were to host this year’s Silverstone Classic, with over 800 competing cars to be housed.**

Billed as ‘the world's biggest classic racing festival’, the meeting filled the entire Silverstone site with racing cars, displays, owners’ clubs and attractions. Both the new ‘Wing’ facility and original ‘National’ pits complexes were needed to house the competing cars alone.

A fleet of London Routemaster buses was drafted in to provide visitors with free transport around the huge infield area, filled with hundreds of classic cars representing 53 different owners’ clubs, karting demos, trade and accessory stands, a fairground, a traction engine display and a live music stage that rocked late into Friday and Saturday nights.

Out on the circuit, 22 races were staged over Saturday and Sunday, with qualifying held on Friday. Track action started at 9am each day, and Saturday’s racing concluded at dusk with the first Group C race providing a great spectacle as the cars circulated into the darkness, headlights ablaze. Japanese racer Katsu Kubota took the victory in his Nissan R90C, just ahead of Alex Buncombe in the Jaguar XJR9.

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Before that, the day had been filled with racing from Formula Juniors, under 2-Litre and ‘Big Banger’ Touring Cars, pre-56 sports cars, plus three races for Grand Prix cars ranging from 1930s models through to ground-effects era cars. A highlight of the day was the fantastic Formula Junior battle between the Cooper T59s of Sam Wilson and Jon Milicevic, ending with Sam taking the victory by 0.25sec. The Italian Historic Car race provided a grid punctuated with some rare machinery, including Ferrari 512, 412P and 250 GT Drogo, as well as a howling host of 275 GTBs and Alfa TZs. Nathan Kinch took the win in his Ferrari 512 after being hounded for most of the race by Bobby Verdon-Roe in the beautiful Ferrari 412P.

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The ‘star turn’ in Saturday’s race schedule had to be footballer Luther Blissett, who flipped his Morgan Roadster Lightweight into a series of three barrel-rolls on the first lap of the Celebrity Challenge race. Fortunately, Luther emerged unscathed, exclaiming, “I went over the rumble strip, the wheels dug in and over she went, three times in all, I counted them as they were happening. I never felt in any danger as I knew the Morgan was strong.” Luther did indeed seem to be very calm as he climbed out of the wreckage; which is more than can be said for the gasping spectators.

Sunday’s fun started with the Stirling Moss Trophy race, where Aston DBR1s did battle with D-type Jags, Lister Jags, a ‘Birdcage’ Maserati and Ferrari prototypes. Despite these heavyweights, the trophy went to the nimble Lotus 15 of Ewan McIntyre. Blue-riband event of the day was the RAC TT race for Historic Sports Cars, with veteran F1 driver and 1970 Le Mans winner Richard Attwood snatching victory in the Aston Martin DB4 he shared with Stuart Graham, passing the leading Ferrari GT of Hans Hugenholtz/David Hart when it was side-lined with engine failure on the last lap. The rest of the day’s racing was crammed full of everything from Ford Galaxies to Cooper-Bristols.

Without doubt, the lasting memory from the weekend has to be the E-type Jaguar. Silverstone Classic had been chosen by leading Jaguar clubs as their venue to celebrate 50 years of the E-type, perfectly timed as the first UK customer cars were delivered in July 1961. The response from E-type owners throughout the world was fantastic, with hundreds descending on Silverstone: everything from Lightweight to white-wall tyred, concours to well-used, Low-Drag to roadster… E-types as far as the eye could see. On Saturday they gathered, row upon row upon row, and at lunchtime the invasion started. More than 800 E-types took to the track, filling the 3.6-mile circuit, horns blasting, flags waving and lights blazing. This wonderful cavalcade was led by the legendary Jaguar test driver Norman Dewis driving a drophead version, allowing him to drive and wave to the spectators at the same time (not too bad for a 90-year-old).

Not to be outdone by this cavalcade, the racing fraternity gathered 52 racing E-types to do battle on the track. They raced each day and it was a sight to behold as they all rushed into the first corner. Jon Minshaw proved to be top of the class, with runaway victories in both races in his #33 big cat.

It’s often said that size is not everything and quality counts. Well, the Silverstone Classic has both.

**You can find many Jaguar E-types in the [Classic Driver car database](#).**

*Text: [Roger Dixon](#)*
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