

CLASSIC DRIVER

Donington Historic Festival, 5-6 May 2012

Lead

Arguably there could not be a more appropriate UK venue than Donington to stage a Historic event, writes Roger Dixon. With a history that dates back to the early 1930s, the track pre-dates the majority of British circuits by more than a decade.

“We can’t promise the same idyllic weather as last year,” stated the organisers in this year’s introduction to the Festival, and they were correct. Saturday’s weather was grey and cold but the on-track action was the exact opposite: proceedings were opened by the pre-War sports cars, which saw Bentleys, Astons, Alfas and Fraser Nashes battling it out in the ‘Mad Jack’ race.

Next up was a huge grid of 31 Historic F2s; the racing was exciting and took us back to a time when the likes of Hill, Rindt, and Brabham raced these machines. Following this, the pre-56 sports cars of the Royal Automobile Club Woodcote Trophy kept up the action with a varied field of 28 cars. It’s always a thrill to see C-types, D-types, Maseratis and Healeys driven at racing speeds and this race did not disappoint.





One-make series are somewhat rare in Historic circles but, judging by the events of the E-type Challenge, there should be more of them. Yet another grid of 30-plus cars barrelled into Redgate corner on the first lap and continued to fight it out for the next 30 minutes. Sandy Watson (car no. 80) and Alex Buncombe (car no. 40) exchanged the lead throughout the race, until the final lap when they exchanged paintwork instead – at the entrance to McLeans, leaving Watson in the gravel-trap and Buncombe taking the flag in a second-hand-looking Jag.

1966-85 Touring Cars were scheduled for the penultimate race of the day and these big-wheeled big bangers thundered their way around the circuit, with a comfortable victory in this two-driver event for Mark Wright and Dave Coyne in their RS1800.





Saturday's racing was brought to a close with a one-hour, two-driver race into the twilight for pre-72 sports cars. Unfortunately, a couple of safety car sessions interrupted the flow of the racing, but with a Ferrari 512, a couple of Porsche 910s and a 908, three GT40s, plus a host of Lola T70s and Chevrons circulating, it was a fascinating event.

Sunday dawned much brighter and warmer allowing spectators to enjoy the 54 car clubs that were displaying their cherished machines on the infield section. Or to go along to the Grand Prix Loop and watch the British Historic Kart Club demonstrate their little gems. Another round of the E-type Challenge started Sunday's on-track action, with Buncombe again victorious. Following this were the pre-1961 sports-racers competing for the Stirling Moss Trophy.



Third race of the day was another one-hour, two-driver affair, this time for pre-63 GTs. Yet another full grid

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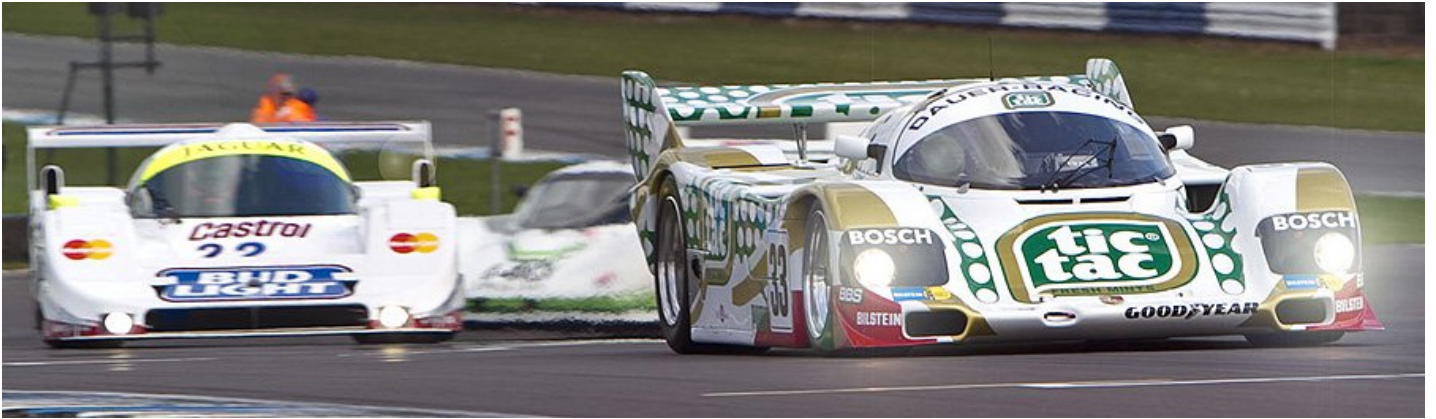
assembled for this one, peppered with Ferrari 250 SWBs, E-types, Porsche 356s, ACs and Astons. Pole-sitter and Le Mans winner Jackie Oliver in the Belgian racing yellow SWB Ferrari dropped back during the opening laps but soon regained his usual speed to take the lead from the Wood/McCabe E-type, before handing over to Gary Pearson who maintained their advantage to the flag.

For the next race, sports cars of a very different type filled the grid: the thundering Group C models with their gigantic rear wings and dynamic 'aero' bodies, vying for victory. Steve Tandy crashed out in spectacular style at the start, fortunately without damage to himself but leaving his bent Nissan R90 sidelined beside the Wheatcroft Straight for the duration of the race.



Drawing the meeting to a close was another event scheduled with mandatory driver changes, this time the U2TC for pre-66 sub-2-litre Touring Cars. Most appropriate, yet poignant, was the entry of Henry Mann with his Lotus Cortina bedecked in the distinctive red and gold livery of his late father's famous team 'Alan Mann Racing', synonymous with Touring Car racing in the 1960s. The race attracted a classic entry full of Alfa GTAs, Lotus Cortinas, BMW Tis and Mini Coopers, the close racing illustrated by the fact that three different makes took the first three places: 1st Lotus Cortina Voyazides/Hadfield, 2nd Alfa GTA Furiani/Stippler, and 3rd BMW Ti Oliver/Shaw.

We look forward to next year's Donington Historic Festival, now a permanent fixture on the UK racing calendar.



Photos: Roger Dixon

Gallery

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