

CLASSIC DRIVER

The 2012 Monaco Grand Prix Historique

Lead

Once every two years, the 32,000 inhabitants of the Principality of Monaco generously give over the streets of their world-famous Grand Prix course for an additional racing event, this time dedicated to cars that raced there from 1929 to 1984.

And as you will see in the photographs, that also includes sports cars from 1953, the year when the Grand Prix was for two-seaters.

The format of the weekend is a simple one. On Friday, after setting up in the harbour-side paddock and a drivers' briefing at the Credit Suisse Drivers Club, competitors are allowed free practice all afternoon. The circuit closure, together with the weekend exodus and non-native commuters, has the effect of paralysing traffic for miles around.





Accompanying auctions by Bonhams (Friday), Coys (Saturday morning) and RM (Friday for motorbikes, Saturday for cars) add to the excitement, with hard-core racers over for the Historics tempted by the many competition cars in the sale. Saturday is devoted to long sessions of timed practice as – as everyone knows – a good grid position is key to success on the tight, difficult-to-pass street circuit.





The racing, on the Sunday, was blessed with generally good, real Côte d'Azur weather - although pity the competitors in the last race, for the fastest (1973-1978) F1 cars. Just as the preceding race was in its final stages, the heavens opened for a downpour that lasted into the evening. It was hairy stuff, and when the like of Bobby Verdon-Roe in his McLaren M23 spins a couple of times you know the conditions are treacherous.

A quick summary of the grids reveals: 'A' for pre-1952 Grand Prix cars, ERAS, Alfa P3s and Bugattis; 'B' for the classic 1950s (up to 1961, in fact) Maseratis and Coopers; 'C' is the 1953 sports cars; 'D' is 1500cc, rear-engined cars from 1961 to 1965; 'E' the first 3-litre machines such as the Lotus 49, March 701 and Ferrari 312 up to 1972; 'F' has the fastest grid, real 'Hunt/Lauda' stuff from 1973 to 1978.

Finally, that proving ground of future talent, F3, is represented by category 'G' - always very fast and closely contested. Just as it always has been.



Highlights of the 2012 event? Alex Buncombe performed like the pro he is in the ex-Fangio C-type Jaguar, beating John Ure (Frazer Nash) and last year's winner Carlos Monteverde, similarly Jaguar-mounted. It was

great to see pasta magnate Paolo Barilla behind the wheel of an F3 car. Likewise the ever-young Arturo Merzario, and Manfredo Rossi di Montelera driving – what else? – a Martini-sponsored Tecno.

It would be nice for the event to alternate with the similarly wonderful Le Mans Classic (to take place from 6 – 8 July this year). That apart, you can't fault the Monaco Historics, one of the world's finest historic race meetings.







Photos: Classic Driver

Gallery

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