

CLASSIC DRIVER

Young Guns: Eight-year olds to race at the Goodwood Revival

Lead

Have you noticed how racing drivers – just like policemen – seem to get younger every year? Well, hold onto your bus passes and prepare for a shock, because this month's Goodwood Revival (14-16 September) welcomes a new race event called the Settrington Cup.

It features the youngest grid of drivers ever assembled at the historic West Sussex racing circuit... with an average age of eight years old. The budding race drivers will be piloting a full grid of Austin J40 pedal cars in a two-part race – featuring rounds on both the Saturday and Sunday of the Revival – on a short circuit of the main Goodwood grid and pit-lane. After a Le Mans-style running start, the young heroes will be pedalling hard for some 220 yards – which equates to about one tenth of the full Goodwood circuit – including tackling the challenge of a chicane on the start/finish straight. Sounds like hard work, but don't confuse the J40 with low-price, modern-day children's pedal cars which take much more muscle-power to stir into action. These beautifully engineered machines are (I'm told) a relatively easy delight to pedal.

The fiercely fought race result will be decided on aggregate timing – with the prizes presented by none other than Sir Stirling Moss. Meanwhile, when not racing, the J40s will be parked in their own half-scale period wooden paddock shelters. They're definitely worth a look, since the Austin J40 holds its own place in British motoring history.

Production of the pedal car began in 1949, at the dedicated Austin Junior Car Factory in Bargoed, South Wales, which was funded by the British Government. Run on a not-for-profit basis, the plant was intended for the employment of disabled coal miners, with 250 men assembling both the J40 pedal car and the racy Pathfinder (loosely based on a single-seater competition Austin Seven). Production ended in 1971.

Photos: Goodwood

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