



## Brands Hatch Event Report July 2018

Brands Hatch is the Danny Dyer diamond geezer to Silverstone's Jacob Rees Mogg, the man whose manners may be exquisite, but who some call the Member of Parliament for the 19th Century. I've loved Brands' laid back feel ever since July 1972, when I'd taken the midnight bus from Wakefield to London, then the Green Line bus to Wrotham, to see Emerson Fittipaldi win the Grand Prix. But I hadn't returned since those dastardly toffs from Towcester way stole the Grand Prix in 1986, because what could ever rival the sight of 1200 bhp F1 cars shrinking what is now called the Brabham Straight to a couple of heartbeats? I was going to find out, as Mr Director Smitheram had asked me to scribble some words about the CSCC's Brands Hatch Bonanza. It involved a 550mile round trip and 25,000 steps on my pedometer app in 30C heat, so was it going to be worth the effort?

People used to say that Cadwell Park was a scaled down Brands Hatch but now Brands feels more like a scaled up Cadwell. The MSV branding is familiar but the once state of the art Kentagon now looks like a working mens' club, where the calendar is forever locked into 1984, there's darts on every Saturday night and Sam Fox is Miss December. Obviously I couldn't have liked it more. The time warp feel continued as I walked through the paddock and noticed the unmistakable outline of Baby Bertha, still slumbering under cover, but still looking like the car that was most likely to rob a bank. Then I double take as I walk past a Seven and notice a steering wheel featuring nearly as many bells and whistles as Kimi's Ferrari. So much for my theory that the Seven is the last analogue car. But what the hell is this? It looks like a Ford Anglia would if it had taken too many recreational drugs and then decided to go drag racing. It's in bonkers green, runs cartoon size wheels and the whole thing is cloaked in a body with more bulges than Schwarzenegger. Garage owner Steven Moss is the man responsible for this madness, and he's a gently spoken man from the Norfolk /Suffolk border - 'my dad used to autocross an Anglia, from knee height I was brought up with them and I thought why not build a space frame Anglia? It took six months of evenings and weekends working in what we call our toy cupboard in the back workshop. We've used a Westfield chassis and mounted the engine as far back as we can and we're fully independent on the rear. We run a Cosworth YB and a 69 G sequential Quaife 'box now - we started with a Vauxhall redtop but we were just lacking power ...' Not any more it isn't - it's running 480 bhp and we've wound it back a bit as we were struggling to put the power down; at 3300 rpm it's producing 400 Nm of torque.' Like everybody else I talk to over the weekend, Steven has nothing but praise for the Club - '...so well run; I've raced with other clubs and that just makes you realise how well things work in CSCC. People in the paddock are so friendly. 'Brands? 'I love it, even though it's a bit short for my car. But I caught a Stiletto up here as I was lapping him and I hung back to watch him corner on three wheels - fantastic!' It's a real family affair for Steven, he's brought his Saturday boy from the garage too and I notice how quick he is to invite another driver, who's here alone, to his evening barbecue. Like me, Steven's a fisherman but, if his driving is anything to go by, I bet he catches bigger fish than I do. A lovely man, and a great example of the inclusivity of CSCC events.

I was at a BTCC meeting at Croft the other week, 30, 000 crowd, wall to wall TV coverage and big buck budgets but in a fifteen minute wander at Brands I've already seen far more diverse and interesting machinery than I did at Croft, with the added bonus of not tripping over hysterical race fans trying to get a selfie with a Plato or a Neal. I didn't ask Uxbridge's Matt Digby for a selfie, but asked him instead about the gorgeous little Ginetta G4 he is driving in the same race as the Moss Anglia, in the CSCC Wendy Wools Special Saloons and Modsports. 'It's Dad's car, we've had it since 1983, and today is its first time out in 27 years. I drove it for the first time yesterday, found a few little problems but it's quick. I'm used to front wheel drive, I race a Clio. The Ginetta's got a 1500 pre-crossflow, all steel and last time it was on the dyno was when dad was driving it. Around 170bhp.' As I watch the car on track later, I can believe it, and the little G4 not only looks as lithe as they always did but certainly isn't lacking poke either. Great sound too. Matt tells me that - '... it's my first event with CSCC but everybody's really friendly, they love the old cars coming back out.' 'And the most surprising thing about you?' I ask. 'I'm not a drinker' he replies with a laugh.





Unlike Gerry Marshall, whose spirit I can almost sense as I wander over and talk to Andy Newall, who has the weight of history on him as today's pilot of the legendary Vauxhall Firenza, the Super Saloon which conjured up so much of what was great in the laid back motor racing of the Seventies - 'Same again mate? Cheers, mine's a pint.' I last saw Andy Newall taming a McLaren M8F Can Am car at Silverstone and if anybody can tame Baby Bertha it should be him, but later, as I watch qualifying, it's clear she's clearly still the wildest of rides. There's speed to give away, but a heart (mine) in mouth moment at Druids and a small off at Paddock Hill Bend show that this Baby's not always for turning. When I spoke to Andy, there's no doubt that the sense of occasion is even bigger for him than it is for an old fart like me who not only saw Bertha in period but also her mum, Big Bertha, before her premature demise. 'I was 7 or 8 when all this was happening but Gerry's always been a hero so... yeah, definitely, the first time I sat in her was special. I've driven some unbelievably famous cars, like GTOs and GT 40s, it's over 400 historic racing cars now, but when you sit in this .....(long pause)...it's different, and the effect won't wear off. I had expected an absolute brute, I've seen the videos of Gerry driving, but it's got a lot more finesse than I thought. Brakes are good, handling's not so bad and the engine is unbelievable. But it's so hot - it must be 50 degrees in there, sitting right between the exhausts.' Oh, and Andy turns Bertha's power steering off on track - 'there's more feel ...'



As I relax with the first of many cold drinks in the 30C heat I talk to Peter Sandford, from Papworth, Cambridge, who is marshalling today. Everybody in the sport makes a point of thanking the teams of volunteers who help make events possible but we still often take them for granted, so now is the time to talk. He's been around, has Peter, having marshalled in the UK and the States but - 'I've had this meeting blocked out since January as the CSCC always have good grids and excellent racing. I started marshalling in the mid-Eighties at Castle Combe, drifted into incident marshalling and today I'm on flagging duty on the entry to Clearways. Highlights of my career? I did the first three F1 races at Indianapolis which was...umm ... quite an experience. Lowlights ...(pause) there's been one or two fatalities.' As Mario Andretti said, after Ronnie Peterson's fatal crash at Monza - 'unfortunately, motor racing is also this', but thank God the sport is now infinitely safer than it was in those dark days. Back to Peter, and it's clear he's another enthusiast, just like everybody else in this community - 'I can't afford to compete, and marshalling is the second best thing. And I find that people in club racing, like CSCC and HSCC, all say 'good morning', they thank you and they mean it. Don't know if that applies to F1 drivers these days ...they'd need a printed script to read from.' I discover Peter works in IT, as do so many in the sport, and one of his clients is Red Bull Racing; however, telling me much more might risk the wrath of Dr Helmut Marko. And you really don't need that, right?



The runner up for snappiest race title this weekend goes to the Toyo Tires /Watchdogapp.com Jaguar Saloon and GT Championship, in which Chris Pizzala is driving his 4 litre XJS, a big car for a big man. Chris tells me he's got the Jag down to a very svelte 1350kg and that the rules for his class are very soft touch. Which explains the 18 inch wheels, the 300 bhp, the six pot caliper brakes and the amount of grp panelling - 'You can go the whole nine yards. I've been racing these seven years, it's a British sports car and I'm a big fan. CSCC are one of the



nicest clubs I've ever raced with, they're friendly and supportive.' Chris is a pro driver, working at Silverstone and the rally school at Castle Combe and at 58 - 'I'm just enjoying life.' His secret pastimes? 'Restoring antique juke boxes and I target shoot at a mile.' Good man.

I'm trying to get to the pits but I keep getting distracted. And who wouldn't be when there's a posse of Smart 4 Twos on track? I'd done that Roger Moore thing with an eyebrow when I saw the entry list for the (deep breath) CSCC Motorsports School Turbo Tintops, Smart 4Two Cup and Cartek Motorsport Puma Cup but I've enjoyed 2CVs and Morgan 3 wheelers before, so why not? I will own up to thinking that the Smarts looked like trackday Daleks but, instead of a metallic squawk, this lot all sounded like they wanted to be Porsche Turbos when they grew up. And slow they really weren't; I wanted to find out more but, when I tried to find them in the paddock I had no success. My theory is that they all hole up in some secret bunker between races. Nor were the Pumas hanging about, and I noticed one driver of the little Fords who was determined to use more Paddock Hill Bend kerb, for longer, than anybody else, each lap, every lap. I think this was car 132 driven by Alex Eacock but don't sue me if it wasn't.



Over to the pits and, as I can't walk past a TVR Tuscan, I talk to Stuart Daburn who is racing his in the CSCC Racetruck Open Series. Stuart is in industrial packaging - Tripack Supplies Ltd of Portsmouth - and he lives in leafy Petworth, the Sussex town which nobody will ever confuse with Rawtenstall or Redcar. It turns out that the TVR is a survivor of the legendary mayhem of the Tuscan Challenge, having originally been driven by Steve Guglielmi. 'It's an '89 car with the Rover engine, it's not as powerful as the AJP engine but it is more robust, allegedly. The appeal? Oh, it's scaring the life out of yourself while seeing if you can hang on. The first time I drove it here we got a fantastic picture of me coming out of Clearways with three wheels on the floor and one not. In the wet it's awful as we don't have the right rubber. I don't understand why we can't use race wets and I think we should run them for safety reasons.' I'm curious about

the TVR's livery, a uniform grey that makes the normally extrovert car look as if it's in stealth mode. 'It was red and white and we thought we'd paint it an inconspicuous colour but be conspicuous by our results. 'Sadly, the TVR ended its race prematurely in the gravel, leaving it coated in dust which made it look even stealthier. But it was a treat watching Stuart taming the beast. As he did, for most of the time.

I talk later to Steve Tilburn 'I'm from a little village near Kings Lynn ... racing an MGB in the Mintex Classic K race for Richard Carter... (big grin) ...he's got me in as the hired driver, but it's only my second ever event so he's not paying me a great deal yet (laughs). Hopes for your race? 'Fastest MG and a finish would be good.' It transpires that Steve's rally car is 'an all singing all dancing Group 4 Escort and when we rally it here it's sideways everywhere'. I keep an eye open for Steve in his race on Sunday and, judging by his entertaining performance through Paddock Hill Bend, you can take the man out of the rally car but you can't ... (you can guess the rest) .



I notice a familiar figure striding purposefully over to an unsuspecting MGB as the qualifying session begins for the CSCC Adams & Page Swinging Sixties race. It's Patrick Watts, well known for his maximum attack style of driving which has brought him so much success in the last thirty years. He doesn't disappoint, slicing through Surtees and McLaren with such commitment



that he's overtaking cars an MGB should only out-run in its wildest dreams. It develops such a special affinity for the Dean Halsey/Will Arif Datsun 240Z that for many laps the two cars become near inseparable. It's huge fun to watch, and this isn't even supposed to be the race.

But there's much more to enjoy, especially the Raymond Barrow Camaro which is disproving the conventional wisdom that American cars save their heroics for the ... err... straightaways. This badass Chevy is pitched into Surtees with both style and speed, looking like a shark devouring a school of baitfish as it chomps through TR6s in one lap and a shoal of Spridgets in the next. But those scarily short wheelbase V8 TVRs aren't having any sand kicked in their faces and who doesn't love the brutal hybrid from Blackpool? Hybrid? Yes, but not like the Toyota variety, because no Anglo/American TVR ever saved a polar bear.

I catch enough of the qualifying for the CSCC RSV Graphics New Millennium race to report that not only is the metallic induction howl of an M3 a beautiful thing, but that nearly every M3 driver needs to deploy the view from the side window more often than you might need to do in your Citroen Picasso. Nearly? Yes because, for reasons which escape me, Kaz Singh's orange E46 M3 is suffering heroic levels of understeer. Kaz, mate – look, I'd make a complaint to Munich, as who wants to drive a BMW that, instead of being both fast and loose, just wants to push straight on? And I loved the homage to Bastos, the Belgian fags that time forgot, on one of the BMWs. Cleverly done too because, in order to avoid ASA problems, the logo and colour was right but the name was 'Bastus'. I look forward to seeing a Marlburu sponsored 635CSI ...



Having sneaked a look into Mark Werrell's commentary position at Oulton Park and being amazed how little he could see, I find the view from his Brands Hatch eyrie is a revelation. Like Murray Walker, Mark paces as he talks, eyes flicking from timing screens to CCTV to the view outside and, helped by a near panoramic view, nothing on track seems to escape his attention. Judging by the number of neatly highlighted information sheets, entry lists and previous result sheets I bet Mark's office used to be a damn sight tidier than mine ever was ... And here's someone else who is organised, it's Bolton's very own Paul Anderton, who is the driver representative for CSCC Modern Classics and Turbo Tintops – 'In a nutshell you make sure that all the drivers are in the right place at the right time. You look after them all, help them with any issues on their vehicles, ensure the regulations are met by drivers and lots more behind the scenes.' Paul had 35 years in the motor trade, is now semi-retired and teaches dysfunctional children about motor vehicles. He has raced Clios and Fiestas (CSCC, Britcar 24 Hour), 'builds a few cars' and still - 'loves the sheer excitement of a racing weekend and being involved with the Club. When I put the CSCC shirt on, you're part of something lots of people would like to be involved with.'

We walk and talk our way through the pit garages and I watch how Paul operates. It's an education. He manages to combine authority with a role that is almost pastoral, reminding one driver of the new start time, offering words of encouragement to a novice and tactful words of advice to another on overtaking protocol.

There's noise from outside and I watch the drama of the CSCC Cartek Motorsports Modern Classics unfold. It's all a bit much to take in actually, as two cars are sliding wide on to the brown grass infield at Graham Hill Bend and another one is creating a dust storm of its own at Paddock Hill Bend. Then the Ferrari 355 Berlinetta I'd admired earlier crawls down the hill on three wheels, its arrival heralded by its inside rear wheel bouncing across the track, twice. After the race I talk to a slightly flushed Susanne Jones, who is driving an Elise S1- 'I'm from South Wales, the day job is in Bristol, working in video and I've been racing for four years. Always in an Elise, yes, I was renting one and I decided last year to get my own. My race? It was ...action packed, and great fun. Some quicker cars got by me on the straights at the beginning and I couldn't quite get back round them.' I mention that I'd seen Susanne do some very committed overtaking into Surtees and that she'd taken a noticeably wider line, with a later turn in than anybody else – 'Oh did I? Really?' Susanne, don't worry, it worked. She ended up fifteenth but, judging by the width of her grin, she might as well have won – 'yes, I'm happy, really enjoyed it, I'm getting better and we're still developing the car'. Like other women in motor sport Susanne wants to race against everybody – 'women only races ...just hideous. And I've never felt treated differently to anyone else.' Susanne is a great advertisement for the rich rewards this sport can offer to everybody, and what a contrast her animation and good humour is to the tedious monotone adopted by far too many Formula 1 drivers.



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I take the long walk over from Clearways to Druids to take in the sight of the GP circuit and to rekindle memories of days spent here watching Messrs Prost and Senna, Hunt and Lauda from back in the day when I had to work for a living. It's enough to make me misty eyed, and the mistiness increases when I hear the unmistakable growl of a V12 Merlin from above. Is there a more moving sight than a Spitfire spearing across a blue Kent sky on a perfect summer's day?



At Druids, there is another encounter with my past, but the view's as good as ever and I relish the attacking style of the CSCC Tin Tops. Forgive me if I say that I normally encounter hot hatches of a certain age in the murkier corners of multiplex car parks. But instead of knocking out ASBO volume banging tunes I suspect that most of these cars are now being driven much faster than at any time in their lives. I notice Martin Addison, a familiar name in North East motor sport, and he is pushing the little 106GTI hard, with some very committed moves into the right hander. I notice how quickly the Fiesta STs are going too, as this was the car you bought if you couldn't afford the insurance on a Civic Type R. But today several Fiestas, especially the Wheeler/Bushell ST, are lapping at a near ballistic pace.



Or they were, until someone's off triggered a Code 60, the race calming measure which has already enjoyed a mixed reception. Several cars opted for speeds closer to an imperial measure 60 mph rather than the metric 60 km/hr and I wonder if this is some premature Brexit thing? Hmm.

Time to watch the CSCC Wendy Wools Special Saloons and Modsports race and, if you had asked me to bet on the car most likely to be at the sharp end of the race, it would have had a Ford or Vauxhall badge, or possibly a Peugeot lion, as the pace of the beautifully prepared Parker Morris 309GTI hadn't gone unnoticed. But an MG badge, on a Midget, the Poundland sports car whose Seventies advertising strapline was 'Your mother wouldn't like it'? No. But I'm wrong again as Andy Southcott shows no respect for Bertha's heritage and disappears into the distance. The MG brakes yards later than anything else into Druids and, whilst it's a very, very long way from any MG made in Abingdon, it's still mightily impressive and only goes to show that sometimes, there really can be a substitute for cubic inches. I'm sure I heard a beery laugh echoing up from the bar, and it sounded uncannily like Gerry Marshall's ...



I saw many Super Saloon (aka 'Superloon') races in period and, if I put my rosy tinted specs to one side, the reality was that many races were anything but close, with huge differences in lap times from the front running Colin Hawkers and Mick Hills to the tail end Charlies who made up the numbers. But that didn't matter because, although many modern spec formulae are achingly dull to watch without the spice of overtaking, where special saloons are concerned, the drivers are riding so much horse that simply watching them try not to fall off is enough. So beguiling are these mutants that I'd happily watch a Frankenstein car like Craig Percy's 6 litre Morris Minor circulate solo for twenty minutes.





There really is an embarrassment of riches today, and whilst I really should be talking to people in the paddock, teasing out exclusive scoops and gossip, all I want to do is soak in the sheer diversity of the CSCC Adams and Page Swinging Sixties race. As I preach the gospel of Colin Chapman's 'added lightness' mantra (even though my bathroom scales show I don't practice it) I enjoy the sight of the Elans, especially the Wheeler/Curnow car. Whilst the Johnson Europa opts for sunbathing on the Paddock gravel it looked fun whilst it lasted.

I'd already spoke to John Muirhead, a familiar figure in the Seven community, and it's worth remembering that he has owned his clam shelled wing Seven S3 since the days when Harold Wilson occupied Number 10 Downing Street. John is very well preserved, his Seven even more so, and I reckon it may have found the secret of eternal youth. But not even a Seven is as indestructible as a Porsche, and I cite as evidence the number of 944 and 924s entered in the CSCC Advantage Motorsport Future Classics race. Do these things never die? I swear that the sound of the first car you will hear after the zombie apocalypse will be the flat bark of a four pot Porsche.

I catch the opening laps of the CSCC Mintex Classic K race and can't help laughing at the sight of the Edwards/Lyddall Ford Falcon, in a triumph of hope over expectation, trying to outbrake an Elan. It's like watching a Hippo taking on a Meerkat, and in the very best of ways. Maybe he even succeeded later in that lap? I left before the final race. No disrespect to the Tin Tops but I wanted to get home before 10pm to remind



Joanne who I was before I disappeared to the Silverstone Classic. As I walked through the paddock for the final time I reflected on the strong sense of community and welcome I had felt all weekend, and a final brief chat with Anthony Hayes only confirmed my view. Anthony has owned his Mini for 30 years, had driven here solo from Glossop - seven hours - kipped in his van and is probably not going to be battling for overall honours in his next Wendy Wools race. But he's a genuinely happy man, telling me how he loved watching Baby Bertha from close range and being touched by the generosity and friendliness of his fellow racers. 'They call me a tart, I get invited to so many barbecues!' CSCC doesn't do privacy boards, security tape, 'keep out' signs or VIP areas, ignoring the self-important bullshit that infects so much modern motorsport, even at club level. The HSCC has a similar openness, but perhaps with a touch more formality, and that means the CSCC can feel like HSCC's kid brother on a dress down Friday. Which is no bad thing.



I drove home in the MX5, blissfully ignorant but entirely uncaring about the World Cup final, knowing only that (as usual) football wasn't coming home. I savoured the evening sun and thought about the 30 years since my last trip to Brands. I reflected on the old saying that you should never go back, and it didn't take long to decide that, sometimes, you really should. I'm glad I did and it won't be as long next time.

**John Aston**

