

Off-Side Undo

Published by the English Motoring Club



November 1999



The Prez Goes Racing (Sort Of)

During the weekend of October 8th through the 10th your Prez attended the Vintage Sports Car Drivers' Association (VSCDA) race meet at Indianapolis Raceway Park (no, not the famous site of the Indianapolis 500; this is a separate raceway) via the kind invitation of an old buddy, vintage racer Jim Wilson. Here is my account of what transpired.

Setting the Field

For this type of a 3-day event, the VSCDA groups cars for competition as follows:

Group 1 - All pre-war sports and racing cars. Includes T series MG's, HRG's and post-war series 1 Morgan 4 plus 4's

Class A - Pre-war moderate speed cars

Class B - Pre-war higher speed cars

Group 2 - Modified vintage production based cars

Class A - Cars through 1963 over 2 litres

Class B - Cars through 1963 up to 2 litres

Class C - Cars through 1963 up to 1600 cc

Class D - Cars through 1963 up to 1300 cc

Class E - Cars through 1963 under 1000 cc

Group 3 - Sports racing cars

Class A - Sports racing cars over 2 litres, pre-1961

Class B - Sports racing cars over 2 litres, post-1960

Class C - Sports racing cars over 1650 cc to 2000 cc

Class D - Sports racing cars over 1300 cc to 1500 cc

Class E - Sports racing cars under 1300 cc

Group 4 - Monoposto cars through 1972 (No Class A)

Class B - Formula B, Formula II and pre-1966 Formula I

Class J - 1962 and 1963 Formula Junior, Formula II and Formula C

Class JE - Pre-1962 Formula Junior rear-engine

Class JF - Front-engine Formula Junior and 500 cc Formula III

Class F - Pre-1973 Formula Ford

Class V - Formula V through 1969

Group 5 - FIA, World Manufacturers Championship cars, F5000, FA and prototype cars

Class A - FIA, WMEC over 2 litres

Class B - FIA, WMEC under 2 litres

Class C - Prototype cars over 2 litres

Class D - Prototype cars under 2 litres

Class E - F5000 and FA cars

Group 6 - Historic production GTO (Gran Turismo Omologato)

Class A - Production based cars over 5 litres

Class B - Production based cars 3 to 5 litres

Class C - Production based cars 2.4 to 3 litres

Class D - Production based cars 2 to 2.4 litres

Class E - Certain production based cars under 2 litres

**Group 7 – Monoposto racing formula "70":
All types of single-seat race cars equipped
with wings and slicks from the late 1960s
through 1979**

Class A – Formula 5000 and cars with
monocoque chassis from 1971
to 1976

Class B – Flat bottom Formula Atlantic
1970-1979, early 1600 cc
Formula II

Class C – Formula 5000 and Formula "A"
up to and including cars raced
before 12/31/70, Formula Super
Vee and Formula C/Formula III
cars

Group 8 – Historic Production GTU

Class A – Production based cars under
1275 cc

Class B1 – Production based cars 1275
cc to 1500 cc

Class B2 – Production based cars 1500
cc to 2000 cc

Class C – Production based cars over 2
litres

**Vintage Racing Not for the Weak-of-
Pocketbook**

The collection of cars assembled for the race meet was truly awe-inspiring. One of the most interesting was a 1937 Morgan Four-4, which historically was one of only three cars outfitted with the Standard Special engine before the war. This particular car was built by H.F.S. Morgan for his son, Peter. Shown at Pebble Beach three weeks prior to the Indianapolis race meet, the car is signed by Peter Morgan, his son, Charles, and mechanic Maurice Owen, who worked on it before and after each race when owned by the Morgan family. Other interesting vehicles included a 1938 Morgan F-Type trike; a 1953 Allard which was one of two team cars 46 years ago, the other being driven by Sidney Allard, the car's designer; an exquisite 1939 Jaguar XKSS roadster, a 1957 Jaguar XKSS roadster (the car which became the prototype for the E-Type) and one of 15 known survivors from Jaguar's infamous factory fire of that year; an MG-TC piloted by Carroll Shelby en route to his first racing vic-

tory; a 1926 Brescia Bugatti; and my personal favorite, a 1938 Riley 2 -Litre "Special" which resembled an Allard J2X. Striking up casual conversation with the Riley's owner, I inquired, "...is this yours?" "Yes," he responded. "How many of these were produced?" I continued. "One," he smiled.

**The Weatherman Creates An English Bog For
The Entire Weekend**

The First Day--Friday was the designated day for practice runs and, regrettably, it was raining. And it kept raining, and raining, and raining. Although the competition cars are covered by basic to quite elaborate tents, to say that the rain put a damper on the weekend's peripheral festivities was an understatement. As a usual thing, on Saturday the local British marque-specific car clubs come out to the course, set up their exhibition areas and pack picnic lunches. But not on this day, nor the next, nor the next. Four ducks did fly over on Friday morning (there is a pond in the race course infield) and truly, it was an omen: The weekend belonged to the ducks. Indianapolis had seen 100 previous days with no rain, so the area's farmers were most appreciative for this Gift from God. But it did not bode well for the cars.

The Indianapolis Raceway Park's vintage sports car racing circuit is two and a half miles in length with various twists, turns and a lengthy straight-away. During an early practice run a Morgan spun out and smacked a wall with its right rear fender which knocked the entire rear end of the vehicle out of kilter. It was done for the weekend.

Wilson races a 1962 tri-carb Healey 3000. His car contains many special features, such as Jag disc brakes all the way around, straight exhaust with twin pipes protruding out from under the driver's door, and various engine modifications to boost performance. When he went out solo to practice in the rain with his designated group, things were going well until turn 15. He came in a tad too fast and the Healey did a triple pirouette and then gently kissed the wall, smashing its front end. The damage was not

fatal, but bad enough that a jack had to be used to pry the right front fender away from the right front wheel. All broken glass (headlamps and driving lights) had to be removed and the area where the light fixtures were located had to be covered with duct tape before the car was allowed back onto the course. Chief Tech Steward Bill Langston (more about him later) inspected the car and deemed it suitable for racing, but this adventure with the wall would end up costing Wilson a chunk of dough down the road.

The Zanies of "Team Thicko"

Friday afternoon Wilson advised, "Let's go visit Thicko Village." This, I was to learn, was the hangout of the Team Thicko racing team, a bunch of great folks and zanies who take vintage racing with tongue firmly planted in cheek.

It seems as though Team Thicko was more or less founded in the spirit of the original "Healey Works" team. Geoffrey Healey, Donald Healey's eldest son, was the company's Chief Engineer, and ran their racing program (not to be confused with the rallye cars, which were generally campaigned and prepared by British Motor Corporation). Roger Menadue ran the Experimental Department that fabricated all the prototypes and Healey race cars. These efforts were on a limited budget and yet were quite successful considering the humble origins of the machinery.

Roger and Geoff were good friends, and Roger's relationship with Donald Healey went way back. Roger's deal with Donald Healey was that only Donald could fire him, and Roger's hours were his to set. Geoff referred to those that complained a lot, or those that didn't understand Roger's contributions, as "thickos". Hench, the name of this August group of racers, who campaign bug-eyed and square-rigged Sprites.

Having fun with their more affluent racing colleagues, the drivers of the Team Thicko Sprites adorn the rear ends of their cars with slogans such as "Driver carries no cash" and "Drive it like you stole it!". Jim Donato, Bill Thompson and

Gary Speckman are the guys who lead Team Thicko, and getting to know them a bit was a real treat.

Donato is great guy and cook extraordinaire, and carries the nickname "Elmo Mancini, the Meatball Magnate from Logantucky" (he is from Logansport, Indiana, but somehow, his fellow team members must think the town is in Kentucky; no matter). His nickname is based on that of Elvis's suave arch-rival in the movie "Viva Las Vegas," a Team Thicko favorite. At lunch Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Donato cooked up meatball sandwiches for everyone, and I mean everyone, who cared to stop by to visit, and always served them with a smile and a word of good cheer.

When not practicing or racing Bill Thompson rode around during the weekend on a moped offering help to fellow racers and advice if needed. He is considered by his fellow team members to be one of the original founders of the organization but, again, in Team Thicko fun, he is referred to as "Flounder," which also is plastered on the back of his Sprite. He was also a professional musician for several years (we'll get to that later).

Gary Speckman, who pilots a black bug-eye Sprite with a wide white racing stripe, writes up the Team Thicko race reports for the group's website. He also was the designated Barbeque King for the Saturday night Team Thicko extravaganza which featured free music and free food (more on that later).

Saturday—More rain. Wilson goes out to practice early that morning; his first time out since the experience with the wall on turn 15. He goes nice and slow. I spend the day meeting people and gawking at what has to be an assembled million dollars or more worth of European engineering. There are lots of Lotuses, including one which graced the cover of Road & Track in the early 1960s. As I find out later when real racing begins, these Lotuses are very well suited for this particular course: They can rip through the turns and hold their own on the straightaways.

Meeting Of The 'Magnutts'

I had figured at some point I'd be asked if I owned any English cars, so I had pictures of the Singer and Magnette with me to show to all who cared to ask. I'm showing my picture of the Magnette to someone when a second guy blurts out "Is that your ZB?" "Yes," I answer. "What's your name," he continues. "Terry Trovato," I reply. "Terry...It's Jeff Powell!" Powell is the Z Magnette Registrar for North America, and although I have talked with him several times on the telephone and corresponded with him in writing, I had never met him. What a surprise! We are joined by another "Magnutt" Jack Heist, of Largo, Florida. All three of us stand there laughing. What a small world. Jack gets a fellow race driver to take our picture for the Z Magnette newsletter. Powell and Heist race MG-TC's which they have brought to the race meet, and I have a great time chatting with them and seeing their cars. The rain keeps falling, but everyone stays in good spirits, which carries over into Saturday night.

Saturday Night: Fun and Frivolity

Team Thicke's Thompson had brought along speakers, microphones, amps and his guitar for the Saturday Night Extravaganza, which started around 6 p.m. and took place in a large tent which, conservatively, could seat 100 or so. "Need a drummer?" I asked, since I had played drums for most of my junior high, high school and college life. "Sure," Thompson said. "Got any drums with you?" "No," I answered, "but I can make a Conga drum out of an empty 5-gallon plastic spring water bottle," which was laying nearby. "Fine with me," Thompson replied. We were joined by Bill Langston (who had inspected Wilson's dinged up Healey) who also had a guitar. Listening to Langston warm up, I could tell he'd been around. "Sounds great," I offered. "You know he wrote the 1950s hit 'We Like Short Shorts,'" Thompson explained, adding "and he sat in with Buddy Holly on occasion." Some Tech Steward, I thought. Then, Jon (pronounced yahn) Forsberg, Wilson's mechanic and Spridget racer, showed up carrying a small cloth bag. Out of it Forsberg produced several har-

monicas, quipping "I play the blues." "All right!" I thought, "this is going to be fun!"

We break into our first impromptu tune, a blues number with Forsberg on vocals and harp. The crowd can't believe it sounds so good (which it does considering we'd never played together before). We finish to alcohol-enhanced applause. "You people will settle for anything," Thompson offers dryly. We fake our way through a whole 40-minute set and, in attempt to keep everybody happy, even throw in a few Country and Western tunes. I get my show-biz break when I offer "Wanna' do Act Naturally?" "Go for it," Thompson says. "I do the vocal and Thompson and Langston lay down rhythm guitar licks to make it as toe-tapping as possible.

Then it's break time, and we wade into our crowd of appreciative admirers, who are in high spirits by this time. Since they ask for more, we go back in 15 minutes or so for a second set, and are even joined by an audience member who does a great job of singing a song he had written: "The Road Atlanta Blues," which describes all of his bad luck encountered on that course to the cheers and guffaws of the audience. Soon, we're out of ideas and songs, so we quit. Langston shakes my hand and says, "The next time you're with us, bring a drum set!" A nice compliment from a top 40 songwriter.

The Prez Goes 'Touring'

Sunday - More rain, but it's race day. More practice runs and, miraculously, the rain slows down to a drizzle, then a mist. By noon, a tiny patch of blue sky appears. Cheers from all. At noon, the race drivers are allowed to take their guests on a "tour" of the course. "Want to go," Wilson asks. "You bet," I reply. Of course, I have brought my RAF leather helmet and goggle set for just this moment. I don it, and off we go. There are only a few folks out "touring" with us, so Wilson says "hold on." The Big Healey's six emits a roar through its straight exhaust and we go flying out of the chute and onto the track. Wilson has a Brooklands Aeroscreen on the driver's side; there is nothing on my side. Glad I've got my goggles. I think to myself. The Healey is

outfitted with a monstrous tachometer; the speedo doesn't work. No matter, there are no cops to give speeding tickets out here. In fact, the rear end of Wilson's car is adorned with the slogan "The last open road," the title of a book by the same name written by a racing driver. I learn later we are doing approximately 90 mph down the straightaway. We head into the turns and the Healey, fitted with special tires and wheels, happily bounds through each, displaying the marque's famous scuttle shake. I start laughing; as a former Healey owner, I had experienced this characteristic many times in the past. All too soon, we cover the 2 miles and my ride's over. What a thrill.

The feature race is held in early afternoon. Fifty-five vehicles line up "Le Mans" style on the starting grid. Those excluded from this feature race are the Group 1 cars, which are a bit too slow for this assembled throng. The entourage includes Sprites, MG Midgets, MGA's, Porches, Big Healeys, Jaguars, lots of Lotuses, a couple of Kurtises, a Lister Chevrolet, an AMC Javelin, a Volvo 120 Sedan, a Sunbeam Alpine and a couple of Corvettes, among others; 55 cars in all. When all fire up their engines it is a wonderful sound (many of the drivers are wearing ear plugs). A new Ferrari leads the group on a pace lap and then, it's off to the races.

Right away two Lotus Elans, which were placed one-third back in the pack, sprint to the lead. These two guys can drive, and they make the bigger cars look like clumsy teenagers at their first cotillion dance. Total race distance is 10 times around the course. Yes, I know it's not that long a race, but most of the drivers are 45 to 65 years old, which is a consideration in this type of vintage event. Wilson is playing it safe in the Big Healey. He stays in the middle of the pack. On about lap 8, the lead Lotus starts emitting white smoke. The driver sees it, and heads for the pits, finished for the day. His compatriot is still out on the course and leading the pack, and he hangs on to capture the checkered flag. Only one car gets seriously damaged, another Lotus Elan which bangs its entire right side against a wall. The driver's fine, though.

At race's end it's back to the pit area for reminiscing and good-byes. I profusely thank my buddy for a great time, and head for the airport. Rain or no rain, it was a weekend to remember.

Highland Games and British Car Show

Our next event will be in Jackson, Louisiana on Saturday, November 20. Those who made our Spring driving tour to Jackson will remember the site for the games as it is next to the museum and around the corner from the winery.

This is the first time Earl Smith has attempted a show and games so he really wants us to come in our British cars. The judging will be by popular vote and I don't know about classes. For more information call Jamie Branch at 225-634-7397 or email Earl at earl156@hotmail.com. John Simmers has plans to go so he may be able to provide more details.

Christmas Party on for December 4

The annual Christmas party will be at Jake Weaver's house in Clinton/Jackson on Saturday December 4 from 2:00pm until 6:00pm. As in the past, please bring some goodies to put on the table for the club to devour. Jake usually has something interesting to see out in the garage so plan on being there for the party.

To get there: exit I-20 at the Springridge Road exit and go South. Turn right IMMEDIATELY after the railroad tracks and go one and a half miles. Turn left on Skyline and proceed to the end of the street where you will find happy EMC members. Call Jake at 601-924-4367 for any more details.

Bristol Aircraft Collection

Alex Wade, our aircraft correspondent, sent in a brief about three British aircraft that have been moved to Nashville. They are an ex-RCAF Bristol Bolingbroke, Bristol Beaufort and an AF Ajeet. Plans are to restore them and show aircraft, engines, and cars made by Bristol. Ask Alex to play his aircraft engine compact disc for you.

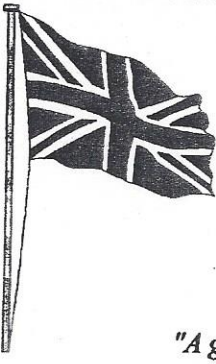
39120/3924

Terry & Meredith Trovato
137 Winchester Road
Natchez MS 39120



Off-Side Undo
237 McAULEY DRIVE
VICKSBURG, MS 39180



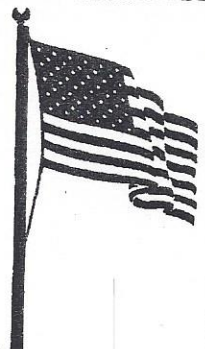


English Motoring Club

P.O. Box 5263
Jackson, MS 39216-5263
(601) 442-8684

President: Terry Trovato
Contributing Editor: Pat Cashman

"A gentleman does not motor about after dark." -- Joseph Lucas, attrib.



"Brits on the Bluff" enjoys record participation

by Terry Trovato

NOVEMBER 1999

NATCHEZ, MISS. — On October 16th, under blue skies and warm (high 80s) temperatures, the English Motoring Club of Mississippi hosted its 3rd Annual Brits on the Bluff British Car Show & Competition in historic Natchez. It was the largest turnout yet for this small, but interesting, gathering, with 48 cars on the field by noon.

A Concours d'Elegance-style, points judged show, the event coincided with the city's Fall Pilgrimage Tour of antebellum mansions and the annual hot air balloon race. The site for the show was superb. It overlooked the mighty Mississippi River and was just one block from the balloon race site, where there was music — including Johnny Rivers' "Memphis," Jean Knight's "Mr. Big Stuff (Who Do You Think You Are?)," and Frankie Ford's "Sea Cruise" — and food.

British rarities on site for viewing pleasure included a 1949 Triumph 2000, complete with its own dicky seat (that's rumble seat in U.S. lingo) and separate rear windscreen; a 1960 Armstrong Siddeley Star Sapphire Saloon, a 1964 Gordon Keeble signed by the designer (there are only four known examples in the U.S.), a 1950 MG Y-type saloon, two 1958 MG ZB Magnette saloons, and a 1949 Series A Singer "Nine" roadster.

Judging commenced at 12:30 p.m. with an awards ceremony at 3 p.m.

The results were as follows:

Best of Show — Tom Schmitz, 1955 MG TF 1500.

Show Stopper — Tom Schmitz, 1955 MG TF 1500.

Austin-Healey Sprite/MG Midget — 1st, Charles "Red" McMahan, 1960 Bugeye Sprite; 2nd, Wayne Leonard, 1978 MG Midget; 3rd, J. T. Seale, 1976 MG Midget.

Austin-Healey 100/3000 — 1st, Martha and Robert Goodwin, 1956 100-M; 2nd (tie), Don Dietrich, 1963 3000 and Ted Glover, 1960 3000.

Jaguar — 1st, Bob and Margaret Henson, 1967 E-type roadster; 2nd, J. D. Damon, 1985 XJ6; 3rd, David and Chesney Loeb, 1965 3.8 saloon.

Triumph 2/3/4 — 1st, Richard Johnson, 1960 TR3A; 2nd, Daniel Ducote, 1962 TR3B; 3rd, Fred Bertch, 1964 TR4.

Triumph 6/7/8 — 1st, Steve Collins, 1975 TR6; 2nd, Nicky Edrington, 1975 TR6; 3rd, Gus Fell, 1980 TR8.

Morgan — 1st, Don Polak, 1970 Plus 8; 2nd, Ted Glover, 1985 Plus 8.

MG TD/TF/Y-type/Magnette — 1st, David and Chesney Loeb, 1952 TD; 2nd, Cappy Stahlman, 1958 ZB saloon; 3rd, Mike Lewis, 1950 Y-type saloon.

MGB Chrome Bumper — 1st, Wilbert Easom, 1968; 2nd, Mark Toney, 1974; 3rd, Charles "Red" McMahan, 1963.

MGB Rubber Bumper — 1st, Matt Cook, 1977; 2nd, John Turbeville, 1977; 3rd, Renee Cole, 1976.

MGB/C GT — 1st, Richard DeCrevel, 1974 B GT; 2nd, John Simmers, 1967 C GT; 3rd, Paul Verneuille, 1974 B GT.

Empire and Luxury — 1st, Bill Silhan, 1949 Triumph 2000; 2nd, Barbara Cashman, 1960 Armstrong Siddeley Star Sapphire Saloon; 3rd, Pat Cashman, 1964 Gordon Keeble.

Empire and Light — 1st, John Boudreaux, 1969 Triumph GT6; 2nd, Merideth Trovato, 1967 Sunbeam Alpine; 3rd, Terry Trovato, 1949 Singer "Nine" roadster.

Special awards

Children's Choice — Matt Cook, 1977 MGB.

Lamp Screens (donated by MG Bits & Spares) — Ted Glover (for bringing two cars all the way from Texas).

Club Participation — Panhandle British Car Association, Pensacola, Fla. (5 cars).

Longest Ride — Don Dietrich, 1963 Austin-Healey 3000 (drove 1,250 miles one-way from Baltimore).

Roughest Ride — Gus Fell, 1980 TR8 (while turning left, a concrete truck dumped wet concrete on the car! See page 7's article, "Helplessness!", for details).

Rare Breed — Pat Cashman, 1964 Gordon Keeble (rarest car on the field).

Rolling History — Terry Trovato, 1949 Singer (owner's age plus car's age: 108).

Valdez Award — John Boudreaux, 1969 Triumph GT6 (the car that leaked the most oil onto a piece of white paper).

Thanks!

The English Motoring Club wishes to thank all participants for making this year's show a success, with a special tip of the hat to Tom Schmitz of the Panhandle British Car Association and Mike Lewis of the Mardi Gras T's for their enthusiastic support of the event.

