

SOUTHERN STUFF 5 2012

PRECOTT HILLCLIMB

This year we were back to our usual October date, which is the very popular Autumn Classic event which has an American theme. This may not suit the Hill Climb purist but certainly seemed to draw in the public and gives everyone an added attraction. One the sideshows was the Wall of Death motorcycle show (as far as I know nobody died which could contravene trading standards, I wonder if anyone has asked for their money back after a non-fatal display?) There were also rock and roll singers, dancing girls and American car and motorcycle displays, my favourites being the Choppers, which, for the uninitiated are modified motorcycles, usually Harley Davidsons with extended forks. The engineering and attention to detail is a work of art, the owners are leather clad folk and by their looks you wouldn't want to cross swords with, but once chatting to some of them they are very friendly and knowledgeable about their beloved motorcycles.

Prolonged overnight rain made competitor and spectator parking difficult with grassed areas being closed off and vehicles re-routed. The grass paddock parking was also very slippery, thankfully we were in the upper paddock which is tarmac. This Luffield Championship round was well supported with 27 MG entries although we were split into two classes, pre 1966 and 1966 onwards; collectively we outnumber any other class or marque. The track was very wet for first practice with water flowing across the 'Esses', thankfully it didn't rain during the day and the sun shone which dried most parts of the track during the morning practice runs.

The event runs began after the lunch break which featured demonstration runs from steam powered cars (jokes about boiling and blown head gaskets were ignored by the drivers as they have heard it all before!), American cars and motorcycles, vintage hot rods and a Penske Indy racing car (actually made in England!) The main paddock is always busy at Prescott and getting down to the start line involves winding your way through the spectators, this all adds to the atmosphere. The track was almost dry apart from a few damp patches, the esses still had water flowing across the kerbs which made this section quite tricky, thankfully semi-circle was dry. Times got faster and after the first run I was leading the pre 66 class with 53.30, this quicker run of mine was a result of red mist caused by an exchange of words with an MSA official at the starting area regarding spilt fluid on the start line, which to me looked like oil. Andy Kitson was leading the other MG class with time of 49.49 in his supercharged MGF. It was nice to see Lawrie competing in a ZR135, he has obviously got the bug after driving Andy's MGF at Anglesey, I'm sure he won't mind me saying that he is 80+, I suspect that all of us would like to think we were still able to compete in speed events at this age, hats off to him!

Our second run soon came around and most of us went quicker, Stuart Gilbert and Andy Kitson were set to battle for the fastest MG time but Stuart went a bit too fast and visited the gravel trap at Pardon, Howard Harman had supercharger trouble and missed his second run, he also had to pull out of the Sunday event due to this, commiserations to him. This is the time of year that Championship positions and winners are decided and Prescott was the final event for the Northern Championship competitors, Chris England was hoping for a score of 101 to clinch the Northern Championship but due to the conditions scored a creditable 99.64 with a time of 57.55. The absent Ashley Woodward took the title by less than a point, well done to Ashley. The main Championship title was still up for grabs, but track condition meant my '102' was out of reach and I had to settle for 101.25 points with a 53.14, Martin Woolacott in his Group 2 MGA Coupe scored a very useful 99.40 with a 61.46 and took the Championship lead after this event. He made the long journey to Rushmoor the following day and scored a 102 and by my reckoning he is this year's Luffield Champion, congratulations to him. There will be a small celebration at Castle Coombe please note.

The fastest Luffield time of the day was Andy Kitson with his 49.49. Class winners were; Pre 66 MGs, 1st myself MGA – 53.14; 2nd John Hawley Midget – 54.43; 3rd Keith Beningfield TC – 57.37. Post 66 MGs 1st Andy Kitson MGF – 49.49; 2nd Stuart Gilbert MGB GT V8 – 51.00; 3rd Keith Egar K Series Midget – 53.09; 4th Rob Orford MGB GT – 54.24. A few of us stayed on for the Sunday event and managed to achieve class awards, these being myself 2nd – 52.12 and Mike Cole MGB GT 4th 55.78 in the Pre 72 Handicap Class, Keith Beningfield won the Pre War class with a 55.88.

Thanks to the Bugatti Owners Club for organising a great event and of course the Marshals who provide their time purely for the love of the sport.

Terry Drinkwater

STOP PRESS: I see that Andy Kitson was second fastest overall driver in his MGF at Rushmoor sprint with a time of 50.26, well done to him!