



Annual Review

2011

It's not the size but what you do with it that matters

There follows a totally individual view of the cars and characters who contributed to the colourful tapestry that was the 2011 HSCC 70's Road Sports Championship, as seen through the lazy eye of James Nairn.

Diminutive racer John Thomason, the only driver whose talent weighs more than his body mass, returned to 70's Road Sports after a 3 year absence to take another championship title.

Since the end of 2007, John had been locked in his man shed contemplating his next project for world domination. Living on a diet of spiders, licking condensation from the shed windows John toiled for perfection – using bolts spun with the finest thread – no nut was left unturned, never a suggestion of a screw being loose, Ellie placed a candle in the window to await his safe return.

Rumour had been rife in John's absence, many hours of email traffic had been filled with wild speculation but one thing was certain – whatever he built it was going to be a rocketship – and then at the season opener on 20 March the project was revealed to an eagerly waiting public, in the style reminiscent of Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future – a silver rocketship, to carry him again to championship triumph, well more specifically Triumph GT6 triumph!

John might be slight in stature but he won't shy away from a fight, so he threw himself into the bear pit that is class D2, the recent domain of the fearsome Jensen Healey, fast, light, temperamental and a recalcitrant beast when the mood takes it, Robert Barter rose to the challenge to take a class win in round one – John returned to the man shed and immersed himself in a bath of iced water.

After successfully repelling double trouble at Cadwell Park, with David Lane also throwing his Jensen into the hunt, John didn't look back, collecting maximum point scores until the end of the season, apart from a small blip at Snetterton allowing Brian Jarvis in his Porsche 928 to pick up a class trophy.

After a couple of disappointing outings Bob Trotter, finally exasperated with the trials and tribulations of Jensen ownership banished his car north of the border

Where the Wild Things Are and joined the Italians. Bellissimo Alfa Romeo, what they lack in performance they more than make up in numbers, a commonly held belief in 70's Road Sports is that you are never more than 6ft away from an Alfa Romeo.

Jon Wagstaff was generally quickest of the Alfa pilota relentlessly perused by Alex Childs, whose youth and exuberance more than compensates for the smaller capacity of his GT Junior. Dave Erwin, Ken Rorrison, John Dobson and Justin Wilson happily raced each other throughout the season in their variously liveried 2000 GTV's.

Alfetta racer Will Morton, in homage to the great Italian visionary Leonardo da Vinci successfully made wildly inaccurate weather predictions in North Yorkshire based solely on the positions of fluffy white sheep in a field, totally ignoring the giant grey clouds overhead. Adding to the Italian flavour were Mark Oldfield and Graham Hall in their Lancia Monte Carlo's.

Meanwhile in the keenly fought class B the protagonists were not resting on their 2010 laurels, Julian Barter in his now well developed TVR 3000M again drove as if in a race against time, he might only look 14 years old but the clouds of responsibility are looming on the horizon and time could not be wasted as he drove to 2nd overall in the championship.

Never allowed to rest he was taunted throughout the year by his father's blue Datsun 240Z its reflection sparkled in the sunlight as it danced and shimmied in Julian's mirrors. Even on weekends when Charles was concentrating more on mowing the lawn than racing for victory, Peter Shaw would return with his TVR Tuscan to fill the void and torment his old sparing partner.

Paul Stafford drove another measured season in his venerable 240Z, Mark Bennett book-ended the season in his striking and delightful Renault Alpine A310. Ashley St John-Hart continued to make progress with his Triumph Stag, another icon of the 1970's, despite a buttock clenching moment in the summer when it broke a half-shaft and shed a wheel through the very quick Hawthorns bend on the Brands Hatch GP circuit.

The Ferrari 308GTB of Jai Sharma also suffered a wheel failure, a scary moment safely contained due to wide run-off areas at Silverstone. Safely and contained are not words that immediately come to mind when describing the handling of the Reliant Scimitar GTE driven by Alan Hersey, there is no doubt this racer is brave, his car appears to be suspended on Slinky springs which completely redefine the definition of roll angles.

Captain Slow aka Ralph Harwood-Penn had also spent off-season quality time in his man shed, having turned a fire ravaged wreck with a mild infestation of tin worm into an effective racer in 2010 he continued to preen and pimp, tweaking and tuning this very pretty little racer, often slipping it up the inside and squeezing into places it had no right to be, finishing 3rd overall in the championship and winner of class E.

Not content with being chased in the class by Charles Aram, Lancia Fulvia Sport and Nick Strong, Fiat 128 Berlinetta, Ralph then decided to intensify the challenge by developing an ex-competition Austin Healy Sprite he found 'oop norf'. The Sprite had been in the same family for 30 years and had been used by the previous owner in his youth to court his wife (no, not Ralph's Bevi).

When complete the Sprite was passed to Ian Ford whose son Ollie raced in class C of the championship with the ex Howard Bentham Lotus Europa. Dean Forward is another driver new to 70's Road Sports although not to racing, this experienced preparation specialist introduced another radical Lotus design in the shape of a 2+2, whilst previously not considered to be the vehicle of choice Dean quickly rose to the top of the class.

Howard Bentham led the chase in his Lotus Elan, with Ross Braithwaite and Nigel Ashley in Lotus Europa's, Alan Harper's Lotus Elan and Steve Cooke's Lotus 7 making sporadic appearances throughout the year.

It was appropriate that in its 50th Anniversary year Adam Bagnall took class A honours in his E-Type, although it wasn't an easy path to success especially when his Jaguar took a bite out of the pit wall whilst running with the big cats at Oulton Park. Robert Gate in another E-Type provided regular support. Paul Anderson remains the undisputed drifting champion of the series holding his Porsche at angles normally only experienced in video games, travelling both sideways and forwards at great velocity.

Richard Armstrong continued to make progress in his underpowered 928, displacing a miserly 4.5 litres, whilst Ian Jacobs spent another year struggling to unlock the potential of his highly strung Mercedes 450SL, the car spending far too many weekends strapped to its trailer skulking in dark corners of paddocks having suffered another humour failure. The Morgan Plus 8's of Paul Conway and Richard Plant made fleeting appearances in the championship but as always left an audible impression.

Jackie Stewart wrote recently that champions don't make mistakes and this statement is as true in 70's Road Sports as other rarified formula, all our champions

deserve their success and none more so than John Thomason who reaped the rewards for meticulous preparation, attention to detail and exceptional driving skill.

If you are tucking into a plate full of mince pies accompanied by a warming glass of christmas spirit whilst reading this then it is probably already too late for 2012, as John will be back in his man shed preparing for another dominant campaign.

With thanks to Grahame, Alan and the gang for their calm stewardship even in the extreme conditions encountered at Croft where a less experienced team would almost certainly have alerted the RNLI. Have a great break and we shall look forward to seeing you all again in 2012.