



Annual Review

2013

Oliver Fords Great British Race Off

James Nairn reviews the 70s Road Sports season and the characters who define the championship.

After 13 races stretching over 7 months – from the coldest spring for 50 years through a scorching July and finishing in the middle of an October torrent – the difference between 70's Road Sports Champion Oliver Ford and Julian Barter was just 2 points, 10" (although Julian might challenge that dimension depending upon where the measurement was taken) and a pair aviator sunglasses.

From the start Ollie did not adopt the typical approach of a championship campaigner, immediately dropping 11 points to his closest rival Julian by missing the first race. Resilience and the ability to laugh in the face of adversity are claimed to be useful character traits and there was probably a lot of laughter between Ollie and his father Ian during the year. Although viewed alongside 7 overall victories there was also plenty to smile about.

James Dean was Ollie's main challenger in Class C, driving the 2007 Championship winning Lotus Europa. Following a troubled start at Donington, James then turned his hand to a little light catering, serving hot drinks and fabulous sausages from his large gazebo which provided welcome shelter from the inclement weather at Thruxton and Silverstone.

After receiving a gold star for burger flippin' James turned his attentions back to racing and as his experience grew, so the Lotus became quicker culminating with a pole position lap time at Brands Hatch in September.

With a nice display of symmetry Ross Braithwaite competed in every other event of the Championship to take 3rd in class also in a Lotus Europa. Howard Bentham casually slipped into his race suit in April and drove his Lotus Elan to two 3rd place finishes at Cadwell Park before putting his feet up again until August.

Then in September Nigel Ashley belatedly remembered where he had left the keys to his Lotus Europa after Thruxton and completed his season with the final two events of the year.

Bridesmaid again in the Championship and winner of Class B was Julian Barter, a restless dynamo of a racer in his venerable TVR 3000M who has two approaches to competition, total commitment and err... total commitment. As if launched by a length of elastic attached to the apex of the first corner Julian would invariably catapult into the lead at the start of each race before being hunted down by Ollie.

What followed would then be a 'bit of cat and mouse' (an English-language idiom dating back to 1675 that means "a contrived action involving constant pursuit, near captures, and repeated escapes.") then a couple of laps of side by side entertainment and a masterclass in close entertaining racing without resorting to pushing and rubbing. Although Julian did experience a little 'clenching' at Snetterton when the TVR's front wheel made its annual break for freedom following a stub axle failure.

Charles Barter took his customary 2 class wins and a fastest lap once the summer sun came out and the lovely straight six in his Datsun 240Z was able to sing like Tom cat on a polished wooden floor, to take 2nd in class ahead of Paul Stafford.

The timetable this year did not really suit Paul but after more than 20 years competing in 70s Road Sports he is permitted a lay in now and again followed by overtaking action in the races as he hustled through from the back of the grid.

Character and patina are good words to describe the Reliant Scimitar of Alan Hersey and 4th in class was a good achievement, despite the odd moment of disorderly behaviour they have become an colourful partnership within the Championship.

The Porsche 911 is a car with racing built into its DNA and Mark Leverett has progressively developed his into a tidy racer as indicated by an increasingly wider smile on Mark's face as the championship wound it's way through the year.

Steve Cooke was another competitor to display admirable fortitude after his lovely TVR 3000M became a victim of someone else's misadventure and was a shame Ian Forward appeared reluctant to venture to circuits away from the Yorkshire borders as his TVR in Clockwork Orange left a vivid impression.

Third overall in the Championship and winner of Class D was Uncle Robert, now in his third year with the Jensen Healey it has not always been a harmonious partnership. Whilst still displaying petulant tendencies, the involvement of former owner Ian Jacobs managed to keep it's mood swings in check – most of the time.

And then we had the Alfa Romeo's, finishing 2nd, 3rd & 4th in Class D, here is a marque that despite having more style than performance is by far the most popular in the 70s Championship with 9 being entered at various times during the season.

Tenacious Trotter as usual made the best of what he was given to work with, struggling with gearbox issues throughout the year in his Alfetta despite a mid season change of box, the Oulton Park legend took a class win at his home event the Gold Cup – which is as good as it gets.

Ken Rorrison and Justin Wilson collected a class win apiece at the Brands Hatch Super Prix and Silverstone Finals in their Alfas and were joined by Dave Erwin, John Dobson, Simon Holmesmith and James Rutt, creating the impression of a time vortex for the quicker class runners when lapping a succession of identical red Alfas towards the end of each race.

Brian Jarvis started the season looking like a serious contender for class honours in his well developed Porsche 924, quick and committed with two early season class wins at Thruxton and Silverstone but he was not able to complete in a sufficient number of events for its potential to be fully realised.

In 2011 and 2012 the Triumph GT6 of John Thomason was the car to beat but this year, along with the similar car of Luke Clarke-Bagnall they both experienced a torrid series of races. It started well for Luke at the Donington Park season opener where he appeared to walk on water, snow and sleet defying the elements and putting on a sensational display to finish third overall.

Unfortunately it all began to fall apart at Thruxton with Luke suffering broken steering and John Thomason suspension failure. At Cadwell Park the engine of Lukes GT6 self destructed with the shrapnel breaking his piggy bank. John fared little better at Silverstone and despite providing a masterclass in the removal and refitting of a gearbox with minimal equipment, his season lost its drive.

Mark Oldfield continued with his Lancia Monte Carlo until his engine also reverted to component parts but not components that would be recognized from any parts catalogue. Joined briefly by Sarah Hutchinson, Lancia Beta, Louise Kennedy, Lancia Sport Zagato and Graham Hall in another Monte Carlo, brought as 'race prepared' Graham realized quite quickly that the dictionary definition of that statement was neither concise or definitive.

Once Will Morton had exhausted attempts to race both his Alfetta and the £5000.00 Porsche 924 project, he also turned to his hand to catering, feeding hardy competitors and supporters at the Silverstone Finals with lamb burgers and Tamworth pork sausages, direct to the fork from his farm.

Chris Alford must have felt like 'billy no mates' in Class F, not that it bothered him, if something moved he would race it, stroking the little Midget along to results it should not be expected to achieve in overall race classifications.

Richard Plant was the leading contender in class A, usually finding himself locked in battle with either Julian or Ollie in classic David and Goliath battles. Despite all being products of the 1970's the tiny Europa could have come from outer space alongside Richard's Morgan Plus 8. Richard was supported in Class A by Robert Gate's Jaguar E-Type.

An Arkley SS is an rare and unusual car, developed into a racer by Ralph Harwood-Penn to his usual high standard of preparation and attention to detail, although despite the cars red wings Ralph resisted the temptation to paint the body yellow and attach a bell to his helmet.

70s also enjoyed the company of a few guests during the season, notably Sarah Bennett-Baggs Porsche 911, David Tomlin's Ferrari 308GTB, Nick Strong with his very tidy Ford Capri the 70's icon for the working man and William Jenkins lovely BMW CSL painted in the style of Alexander Calder's 1975 Art Car.

Resilience and food in a bun are clearly defining characteristic of a 70s Road Sports competitor, although with fathers, sons, uncles, laughter and light bickering, wives, girlfriends, mothers, silly hats and onesies, daughters, grandchildren, and Alex Bage, a sense of being part of a slightly dysfunctional family gathering is very much in evidence.

Now that the festive season is just around the corner – the Gooseneck perhaps – we look forward to a very enjoyable break. With thanks to Santa, and his helpers Alan, Donna and all in the HSCC grotto for providing us with more than we could wish for... although a Sarah Lund Nomex jumper would be nice.