



North Kent Lotus Group

Dear Enthusiast
Happy New Year!

You may remember that there wasn't a letter last January - news was a little thin on the ground and this year was looking that way as well, that is until Chris saved my bacon with a splendid write up on his recent trip to the States.

It makes a very interesting read and the circuit photos look like track-day heaven to me. Terry must be booking his flight and container as we speak!

There is lots for discussion, especially when you look at the shenanigans regarding two Lotus F1 teams this year - but as far as NKLG goes it's more a case of the calm before the storm of events for the coming year. Much

to look forward to and Ian & Heather should have the full list for next month but don't forget to keep an eye on the website.

Incidentally, talking of events, Magnus thinks we should have another Buckmore karting session - not a race but just some simple timed practice, anybody up for it? Also another clay-pigeon shooting morning. Perhaps shooting for the morning and karting in the afternoon???

And as for the monthly meeting, a good strong turn out for January (no snow this year!) and good to see some faces we haven't seen for a while. After some suggestions from Howard, we decided to do a simple questionnaire to kick off 2011

and everybody was busy filling them out on the night. For those of you not there, I've included one with this letter and we'd be grateful if you could forward it on to Pauline in the next couple of weeks.

No takers on last month's mystery car photo apart from John U pointing out that it's powered by a 1172 side-valve. But as to what the car is - does anybody know?

I'll leave you with Chris's article and some very interesting advice which Howard forwarded to me. Next month's meeting is on February 9th. So I'll see you then.

John

Motorsport related visits in the USA Two venues in the deep south

When considering this article I was conscious that I should avoid it becoming too much of a travel log and that, as those of you who know me well will appreciate, I am not wholly committed to the "Special Relationship", I therefore needed to avoid offending American eyes. I hope I have done my best to avoid both traps.

We went to Georgia for ten weeks at the beginning of November to help care for our daughter Jayne, and our granddaughters, whilst she was having and recovering from an operation. "Winter weather in Georgia, up to about Christmas, is quite pleasant so just bring short-sleeved shirts and pullovers for the evenings" said Jayne. Somehow we managed to close the suit cases without the need for a hydraulic press, a first for us for a number of years, and set off for Gatwick. It is easier to pack for a long stay than a short one.

Road Atlanta

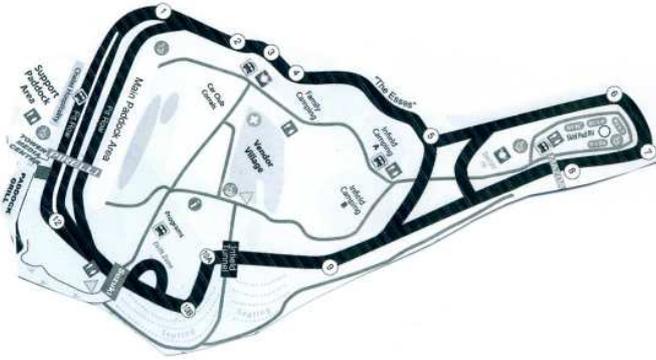
Our first two days were indeed warm and sunny, but on the Saturday, the day Daniel, Jayne's husband and I had planned to go to a motor race meeting at Road Atlanta, we awoke to a frost that turned every thing white and would have made Father Christmas very proud. Was this our former colony getting its own back on visitors from the olde world?

Undaunted we set off for Road Atlanta which was about 35 miles away. Now if you have not experienced this circuit a brief description will explain why I was so surprised and impressed.

Firstly, dear Bernie, if he were dead, would turn in his grave to see the facilities. No pit buildings, just open hard standing as pits, one 'chuck' wagon on the whole course and a large tin shed which served American fast food to drivers, marshals and spectators in a very friendly but steamy atmosphere. It reminded me of Silverstone in the early 1960's

Secondly, Herman Tilke would not approve the circuit design. Plenty of opportunities to overtake, limited run off areas, fabulous corners, a circuit that demands great driver skill and great respect for self preservation. Not sterile or Tilke like at all. To put this in perspective the circuit is 2.54 miles long and along with many other international races hosts the annual Petit Le Mans race, although the meeting we attended was a regional club meeting run by the SCCA (Sports Car Club of America). More later.

A description of the circuit will help to explain a bit more. Start by thinking Brands Hatch, but with undulations many times greater than Paddock Hill, add Craner Curves at Donington and merge in a bit of Le Mans, and you have some idea of this exciting track.



The start and finish are on a short straight which immediately turns right (1) and up a steep hill and over a crest and then dive down hill into a series of three sweeping curves (2,3,4). A bit like Craner Curves on a steep hill. The track has several options here for the curve layout! At the bottom of the hill the circuit rises up a very steep section through some esses before a 60 degree left at the crest of the hill (5). It's then a straight blast for a few hundred yard to two bends (6,7) forming an open hairpin. It then goes onto the mini 'Mulsanne Straight' for a flat out blast through two minor curves which are straight lined, before heavy downhill braking, from over 200mph in a Le Mans car, to a 90 degree left (10A) immediately into an uphill 90 degree right (10B). As the lap nears its end the circuit rises to a crest under the Suzuki bridge before sweeping down through a Paddock Hill type bend (12) onto the start/finish straight.

What about the races? The event we attended was the American Road Race of Champions run by the SCCA. This is an event for regional drivers from throughout America held over three days and on the Saturday we watched nine 45 minute races for various classes of cars. I get a little vague here because the class system was totally unfathomable to a mere Englishman. Classifications like SPO, SRK EP and SPU, and often in the same race. The programme was not much help either because it listed the car number, entrant's name, his hometown and sponsors and class eg SPO, but not the type of car!!! Suffice it to say that the races were very varied, no Lotus unfortunately, but very entertaining with cars varying from older NASCA cars to Corvettes, 360 Ferraris, Dodge Vipers through to sports prototype Radicals, Austin Healey Sprites and Mazda MX5 (Miata in the States) and finally open wheeled cars such as Formula Ford, and Vee, including one off open wheeled specials .



I will not bore you further with details descriptions of each race but only mention that in particular the race with Corvettes/360/ Vipers was very competitive and provided some great entertainment. The NASA type cars were spectacular and inspection in the pit area, after the race, showed damaged bodywork which was paper thin fitted over a crude space frame which left little room for the driver in the cockpit. Wigits and large chassis space frame tubes filled the space and the seat for the driver seemed only able to take the bum of a ten year old. All very agricultural !!



I will close this part by mentioning that we were two of about only three hundred spectators around the whole circuit. Those who did attend had some interesting cars but clearly either this type of motorsport does not appeal to Americans in the deep south or they do not like the cold!!

Alabama

We headed into the "boonies" for this part of our motor sport related visit. I should explain that boonies refer in the deep south confederate states to rural areas sparsely occupied by blue collar workers (if you are British!) but red necks if you are from other parts of America!!

This involved a round trip of 360 miles using Interstate highways 85 and 20, though Atlanta, and nearing our destination we passed Talladega a NASCA banked tri-oval track with grandstand seating around much of the circuit. This is in the middle of nowhere but on race days attracts huge crowds to the razzmatazz spectacle of NASCA racing.

Our visit was to the Barbour Motorsport Parkway (actually the museum at the facility) near Birmingham Alabama. For those of you who are old enough think, yellow school buses, Martin Luther King and race riots and you are at the right place. The parkway has a 2.38 mile circuit opened in 2003 and holds an Indy car race each year amongst others. It looks like many modern European tracks (again without pit buildings) and a little uninteresting compared with Road Atlanta.



The Barbour Motorsport Museum is next to the track (a bit like Le Mans) in a very modern

purpose built building. It houses over 1200 motorbikes of all ages, with over 600 on display and, the purpose of my visit, the largest individual collection of Lotus Car in the world. There are 43 on display and others in the spacious and well equipped workshop in the lower ground floor area. The building has five open plan floors designed to display all the exhibits to full advantage.

We spent some time looking at the motorbikes which range in age from 1902 to the present and all were in concours condition. Some very interesting and famous bikes were on view, including the bike John Surtees won the motorcycle world championship, but for John Underhay's benefit I will mention that there were a lot of Indians of all ages (for the rest of you not redskins!).



Obviously I spend the most time looking at the Lotuses and photographing them. The collection is too large to list here but ranges from a very good replica Mk 1 trials cars used by Colin and Hazel Chapman through to the Type 109, the last F1 car from Team Lotus. Some of the cars were not those driven by the number one Team Lotus drivers and therefore less well known to us in England, but a considerable number have visited the Goodwood Revival and other UK historic meetings and some are very well known and famous. The collection covers examples of most of the early cars, a selection of F1 cars, road and sports prototypes as well as CanAm and Indy cars. A few photographs are included over the page to give a flavour. Anyone bored enough to want to see more should contact me.

Anyone visiting the area or living in the southern states and interested in Lotuses would find this museum a very worthwhile visit.

Chris



The Barbour Museum

GOOD VISION IN A DOWNPOUR Supplied by Howard E

How to achieve good vision while driving during a heavy downpour. This method was related by a Police friend who had experienced and confirmed it. It is useful...even driving at night.

Most motorists would turn on HIGH or FASTEST SPEED of the wipers during heavy downpour, yet the visibility in front of the windshield is still bad.....

In the event you face such a situation, just put on your SUN GLASSES (any model will do), and miracle! All of a sudden, your visibility in front of your windshield is perfectly clear, as if there is no rain.

Make sure you always have a pair of SUN GLASSES in your car. You are not only helping yourself to drive safely with good vision, but also might save your friend's life by giving him this idea.. Try it yourself and share it with your friends!???

Amazing, you still see the drops on the windshield, but not the sheet of rain falling.? You can see where the rain bounces off the road. It works to eliminate the "blindness" from passing cars or the "kickup" if you are following a car in the rain.

Another good tip:

A 36 year old female was traveling between Gladewater & Kilgore. It was raining, though not excessively and her car suddenly began to hydro-plane and literally flew through the air. She was not seriously injured but very stunned at the sudden occurrence! When she explained to the highway patrolman what had happened.

He told her - NEVER DRIVE IN THE RAIN WITH YOUR CRUISE CONTROL ON. She thought she was being cautious by setting the cruise control and maintaining a safe consistent speed in the rain - But the highway patrolman said that if the cruise control is on, your car will begin to hydro-plane when the tyres lose contact with the pavement, and your car will accelerate making you take off like an airplane.

She told the patrolman that was exactly what had occurred. He said this warning should be listed on the driver's seat sun-visor - NEVER USE THE CRUISE CONTROL WHEN THE PAVEMENT IS WET OR ICY, along with the airbag warning.

NOTE: Some vehicles will not allow you to set the cruise control when the windshield wipers are on.