

Norwich Union MSA Classic 14th October 2007.

John Brasted 1930 15.7 Silver 'Hilda'

This, what used to be, annual event was resurrected this year with the usual choice of five starts: Bath, Epsom, Norwich, York and Silverstone with all cars finishing at Silverstone Grand Prix Circuit.

The first MSA Classic took place in 1986, and ran 15 times until 2001. In 1996 the number of entries peaked at 1,770, and the event was the largest moving classic car event in the world. 2007 saw the original organising team and Norwich Union unite once more to revive the original event format.

The run was intended as fun event and was totally non-competitive, (which suited me)! There were no timings or penalties but a specified route with check points through which one must pass to qualify for the Completion Medal.

With this in mind, I decided to enter my 1930 15.7 Silver 'Hilda'. I thought a good run with the temptation of a blow through round Silverstone would be just what she wanted.

The route from Norwich was particularly attractive with three checkpoints between the start in Norwich and the finish at Silverstone.

We were first away of the 126 starting from Norwich (being the oldest entrant) at 8.00am, and proudly led the field out of the City into the sunlit Norfolk and Suffolk countryside. Our lead was to last only 10 miles before the 1931 8 litre Bentley which started second gently burbled past us with a merry wave.

The first checkpoint was Ickworth House just outside Bury St Edmunds, an unusual oval Georgian House built by an eccentric 4th Earl. The idyllic 'Capability' Brown parkland proved a beautiful background for our first rest. Refreshments were on offer, but after the excellent breakfast available at the Norwich start few took advantage.

Without any pressure or rush we set out for checkpoint 2 at The Shuttleworth Collection near Biggleswade. That stage was as uneventful as the first, except I missed one turn which I insist was due to my navigator having his head hanging over the rear seat mixing himself a 'Bloody Mary' which he felt was essential at that time. We took advantage of the unofficial break, to check levels but still arrived at checkpoint 3 well within the time allowed.

This checkpoint, The Millbrook Proving Ground, was a bit of a shock to Hilda's system. All very professional with cameras taken away from us at the entrance, and officials all over the place to see that we behaved. We were allowed two circuits of 'The Bowl', a circular banked track two miles long with marker posts for speed testing. Some were dismayed that for this meeting a special speed limit of 100mph was imposed. Hilda didn't care although she did manage a creditable 60mph.

In addition there was the opportunity of a hill climb and bend testing circuit. I spared Hilda that: she had done so well so far and there was plenty more to come.

So on to the finish. A very pleasant run through wonderful scenery finally entering The Silverstone Grand Prix complex. Through the outlying car parks, storage areas over the all too familiar bridges we see on television, and into the centre and inner sanctum of the pit and garage area. We were officially 'clocked in' at 2.30pm, given our medals and then directed onto the circuit through garage number 23, (which I'm sure was last used by Louis Hamilton). This took us straight onto the pit lane leading to the main track. What an experience. It looks so different when you are down at ground level. Very wide, and with wicked bends which seem to spring up on you unexpectedly. We took the first circuit very gently, then let fly on the second. Hilda did top 65mph at one stage without any apparent trouble, and having made her point on one of most famous circuits of the world, gracefully trickled off down the pit lane through garage number 23 into the Rally car park for a well earned rest.

The whole day was perfectly organised, the weather brilliant, and the route faultless. The only disappointment was the reception at Silverstone. The total of nearly 800 participants had been spread out along the various routes, and there being no time limit, arrived over a period of 4 hours. The result was that there was no grand assembly of all the cars, rather a trickle arriving without ceremony. The standard of refreshment on offer in the club house left a bit to be desired.

We finally set out for home after a cup of coffee at 4.30pm in order that we complete the 120 mile journey in as much daylight as possible. That was another excellent run, with a decent stop at Newmarket to refresh the horses, arriving in Norwich at 8.30pm.

A vehicle check when Hilda was finally garaged after a total of 325 miles, proved no leaks at all, all levels correct and not a drop of oil consumed.

So a wonderful day was complete, and I strongly recommend any member keep an eye open for next years event (September/October). You won't be disappointed, and will be well looked from where ever you start.

John Brasted
November 2007.

