



## SIMON TAYLOR

Watching Bernie's cars go under the hammer at Battersea, and enjoying the company on the Norwich Union MSA run  
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Norwich mixture: Barker Daimler, MGA, Porsche 356B and AC Greyhound with Throttle's Ace 2.6



Pickering Fiat finished, despite bothers



Rabagliati's rare Arnott-Climax Le Mans

## New Norwich

Through the late 1980s and the early '90s the Norwich Union Run was, in terms of participants, Britain's biggest classic event. It peaked in 1996, when 1780 cars set off from 14 starting points, including Paris and Dublin, and more than 1700 of them made it to the finish at Silverstone. Norwich Union pulled out after 1997 and, although the run continued with other sponsors for three more years, foot and mouth cancelled the 2001 event and it never got reinstated.

But in October 2007 it returned, with the MSA and Norwich Union getting together again and more than 650 cars starting from Norwich, York, Bath, Silverstone and the RAC Country Club at Woodcote Park, Epsom. Pearl and I started our AC Ace 2.6 from Epsom, on a glorious autumn day that helped erase memories of a sodden summer. Our pleasantly meandering 155-mile route not only took us through sleepy villages and golden woodlands, but also delivered us to the Longcross and Millbrook test tracks.

Millbrook is used by the motor industry to develop secret new models, so we had to leave our cameras at the gate, but I noticed nothing more scoop-worthy than a truck with an unfamiliar cab. The tortuous Hill Route at Millbrook is a real mini-Nürburgring,

squeezing steep gradients and endless fast and slow corners into a very short lap. The famous High Speed Circuit, two miles of a constant-radius banked left turn, is disorientating, and I doff my tweed cap to drivers who sit on it for hour after hour during record attempts. But it was fun winding the Ace up to its maximum in overdrive top in the third of the five banked lanes. The finish at Silverstone included two laps of the full circuit, whose expanse of F1-friendly tarmac leaves a period sports car feeling a little lost, but we got our Michelin Xs howling nicely as we squeezed between a Fulvia Zagato and a Jowett Jupiter going into Stowe.

There were MGBs, E-types, Healeys and TRs in profusion, and rarities too, such as Sarah Rabagliati in the family Arnott-Climax Le Mans, David Rawlinson's Trident Venturer and Geoffrey Foster-Taylor's magnificent 8 Litre Bentley. More humble was Richard Gunn's enthusiastically driven 1979 Vauxhall repmobile, whose understeery body roll around Silverstone earned it the title of *The Laughing Cavalier*. Bill Sherratt was out in the world's fastest road-going Morris Minor, the ex-Nic Mann turbo V8-powered hillclimb car, while first breakdown fell to James Smith's Allard, which shed its crank pulley barely a mile from the RAC Club. Appropriately, a patrolling RAC breakdown van came to his rescue and he made it to Silverstone.

So did the lovely Fiat Otto Vu coupé of historic racers Tony and Gavin Pickering, despite an oil leak, a puncture, a loose exhaust and a glowing generator warning light. But for most of us it was an uneventful amble through the sunny countryside. For many miles the Ace was in procession behind Daimler Barker Special Sports, Jaguar XK120, Morris Minor Traveller and Mercedes 190SL. It could almost have been an everyday traffic queue of 50 years ago. On the narrow roads it seemed almost churlish to overtake, and so relaxed was the atmosphere of the event that it didn't seem to matter. A very pleasant way to spend a day with old cars and friendly people: we'll be back next year.