

THE NORWICH UNION MSA CLASSIC RALLY

OCTOBER 12TH 2008

Impressions from an MAC member from behind the dashboard....

Hurray! For once, the Gods shone upon us, and we enjoyed the best weather that October in England could offer, to herald in one of the milestone events of the classic motoring calendar – the Norwich Union MSA Classic Rally.

Re-emerging again in 2007 after a few years' gap, this year saw an increased entry of over 900 Classic cars (defined as being over 20 years old), including a special Veterans section (cars, not entrants!). Starting from 8 different venues – Silverstone, Cheltenham, Chester, Nottingham, Norwich, Dorking, Cardiff and Bath – all entrants were to finish together at Silverstone for a prize presentation, 2 laps of Silverstone and an optional barbecue supper.

We chose to start from Cheltenham, so a misty Sunday morning dawn saw us warm up our trusty MGB Roadster. We had been sent comprehensive maps and route details of this non-competitive event well in advance, but nothing could quite prepare us for the challenge of navigating the one-way system in Cheltenham in our attempts to find the start – but we were fortunate to follow a confident lady in a beautiful 1960 Mercedes Benz 190SL who led us there in style.

Flagged away enthusiastically by the Mayor of Cheltenham, we followed our route instructions over the Cotswold Hills to our first “rest” stop Prescott, only to be lined up for an un-timed drive up the hill. The course is quite different from our familiar Shelsley venue, twisty, varied and challenging, and it was interesting to witness a huge variety of cars including an Austin A35, a Rover 95, and a vintage Bentley as well as a wonderful display of the best of British (and European) sports cars all “having a go”.

From there our route took us around some familiar Bredon Hill villages, no doubt familiar to many MAC classic and vintage rally members, arriving at Coughton Court, bathed in autumn sunshine, welcoming us to a field car park and a much-needed cup of coffee. This section had been a bit more “pacey”, and we enjoyed some faster convoy driving following a well-driven Porsche 911S and being followed by an E-Type convertible. Having witnessed much paddock gossip and story-swapping we continued in rapid company with various more exotic machines to the Gaydon Heritage Centre, where the size of the event became more apparent as we met up with cars from other destinations. The line-up of cars was just about the best you could ever hope to see and we enjoyed the opportunity to sample the exhibits at the Heritage Centre as well as a very good lunch in the café.

The final section was a particularly interesting route through some lesser-known East Warwickshire / West Northamptonshire county border areas, which encouraged the opportunity for some excellent faster driving, spurred on no doubt with the challenge of “holding” a Ferrari 308GTB and Jaguar C-Type on occasions! Outstanding views were enjoyed, and as we approached Silverstone it became apparent that the entrants from all 7 venues were all enroute on different route instructions. so on

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roundabouts and junctions cars were crossing in all directions. But we arrived at Silverstone without any delays or queues, and were quickly directed to the finish point where we were welcomed by a grandstand spectator area, commentator, and photographer and where we also received a finishing medal and bag of goodies.

Then it was our turn for 2 laps of Silverstone. The first impression on entering the circuit was the width of the track, with Hangar Straight appearing as wide as a runway. It is certainly a very fast circuit and we are sure that the MGB could be driven most of the way round in top gear, third gear being necessary probably only at Vale, Abbey and the final loops. It was a wonderful sight to see such a variety of classic cars on the famous track, some taking the opportunity to extend their skills on the more challenging sections (no names!).

This was a truly outstanding event. The oldest car on the run was a 1903 Ford Model A, and the youngest navigator I met was 10-year old James Cleasby in his Dad's 1986 Caterham 7 Supersprint. Entrants came from all over the country, and included some from abroad including the USA and Monaco.

Our perceptions were that the organisation was brilliant, with the route directions extremely clear and, thankfully, 100% accurate. We saw three RAC breakdown vans, the first about 2 miles out of Cheltenham, and the last 1 mile from the finish. We enjoyed our route immensely as the roads were open and quite fast, and thankfully without a single speed camera in sight!

Take a look at the official website www.msaclassic.co.uk, where you can see reports and pictures of the event, and maybe sign up for next year – we strongly recommend it for a really great classic day out.

Sally and Nick Madeley
1965 MGB Roadster

