

Rain Fails to Dampen Spirits at Ninth Goodwood Revival Meeting

By Gordon Morris

120,000 international historic racing fans poured into Lord March's West Sussex theatre – aka the Goodwood racing circuit – for the Ninth Revival Meeting in early September. Everything was perfect – the setting, cars, drivers, people, the racing and so on – with one exception that even the good Lord hasn't yet worked out how to control – the weather. Saturday and Sunday morning were wet and drizzly, with low cloud and rain throughout. But the racing, and the theatre, continued as per normal – with the exception of some flying displays which were modified to cope with limited visibility.

I must explain the setting, and the culture of the Revival Meeting, to set the scene for readers who have not sampled the special experience that is Goodwood in late summer. The March estates stretch round Chichester, on the south coast of England, some 65 miles south west of London. The estates have been in the family since time immemorial and include a famous horse race track (Glorious Goodwood), numerous farms and a grass airfield that doubles as a motor racing track and provides the stage for the Revival Meeting.

During the last war, that airfield – named Westhampnett after a local hamlet – housed a number of fighter squadrons who fought in the Battle of Britain. Post war, the grass airfield carried on as a base for light aviation, and the tarmac perimeter track was turned into a racing circuit. The track was a popular venue and hosted many famous events – the Goodwood Nine Hours and Tourist Trophy world championship sports car races, but never a Grand Prix. Come the mid sixties, though, the rising speeds of the cars, coupled with the need to provide safety facilities, caused the closure of the track in 1966.

Lord March had always wanted to

reopen the Goodwood circuit and, using his extraordinary persuasive powers and the revenue provided by the successful Festivals of Speed that he held on the front drive of Goodwood House, he was able to persuade Chichester local authorities to allow him to start racing again on the historic track in 1998. That was his first miracle; the second was to recreate the old circuit

pretty much as it was, whilst incorporating modern safety requirements. The third was to create the unique atmosphere that is the Revival Meeting. No car younger than 1966 is allowed inside the circuit or to compete, the surroundings are as they were forty years ago, and the majority of the racegoers, drivers, mechanics and officials dress as they would have done in those days. The result is a wonderful setting – a magical step back in time – that is at the very centre of this quite unique event.

All of this provides a very special backdrop to some of the best historic (you call it vintage) racing anywhere in the world. The entry – by invitation only – is breathtaking and the organisers, faced with unprecedented demand (everyone wants to race at the Revival) have to ring the changes in terms of the races that are staged over two days. Last year, Lotus were dominant, with a number of overall wins and podium places. This year, the changes worked against the marque; there were no wins and only a solitary podium. None of that took anything away from the spectacle or the sheer joy of being part of such a wonderful event.

A feature of Goodwood has always been the sensory overload of so many rare and priceless cars and aeroplanes in the same place. The air display kicked off with a fly past of eight – yes eight – Spitfires; I doubt that so many Spitfires have been seen in Sussex skies since the war. Then, in the paddock, you could wander amongst a row of GTO Ferraris, GT40s, eight real Cobras, lightweight Jaguar E Types, single seat Lotuses from Mark 12 to 33, 23 and 30 sports cars, six Maserati 250Fs and so on. Part of the show was a tribute to 1961 American World Champion Phil Hill and 27 cars he had driven took part in parades and a static display. Phil's son Derek, very appropriately I thought, won the Freddie March Memorial Trophy for fifties sports racers in an Alfa Romeo 3000M.

Sixteen races, from prewar cars and post war saloon cars and motorbikes to state of the art 1966 single seaters and sports cars, took place over the two days of racing. The track – recently resurfaced – was wet and

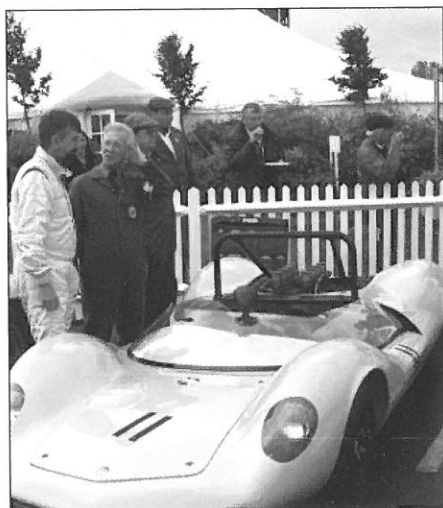


slippery for Saturday and Sunday morning, but dried out on the Sunday afternoon. Speeds were, inevitably, slower because of the conditions, and there was plenty of close racing and the occasional visit to the barriers and gravel traps.

Lotus interest centered on single seaters and sports cars. Bob Dance – speaker at LOG 24 – was mechanicing the Classic Team Lotus 32B and 30, while boss Clive Chapman looked on. The CTL cars went well, in the hands of Lotus doyen Malcolm Ricketts and Scots touring car ace David Leslie, while the Madgwick Cup race for sixties sports racers under 3 litres was awash with Lotus 23s, mostly with Lotus twincams. Three Lotus 19 – Climax cars were entered; I've never seen so many in one place before. Anthony Hancock, in a 23B, pushed noted restorer Simon Hadfield in a 2 litre Elva BMW throughout and finished a worthy close second – the highest placed Lotus of this stunning meeting.

For me, every Goodwood Revival produces memorable sights and sounds to savour. This year it was those eight Spitfires and the Chapparral. I'd read about this car in period, and remembered seeing it winning the 1967 BOAC six hours at Brands Hatch in the hands of Phil Hill and Mike Spence – but I'd never had the chance to see it up close, examine the engine and suspension and to talk to the crew who brought it over from Texas. That, together with the sheer spectacle, wonderful sights and sounds and sense of history, is what has drawn me to Goodwood for the past nine years.

For years now, I've been telling US friends that anyone with a drop of petrol (OK gasoline) in their veins must make a pilgrimage to West Sussex of a September at least once in their lifetime. I have to open a new box of superlatives each time I write about this wonderful event, it's really that good. So – don't put it off any longer. Plan your trip for next September now; I can promise you the weekend of a lifetime amongst 120,000 fellow petrol heads and the finest cars you'll see anywhere in the world. ●

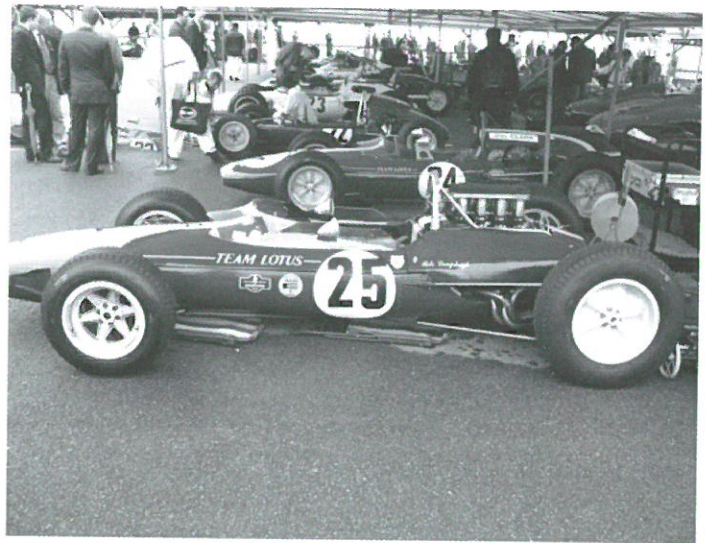


There is an enduring quality to these places. Nothing here is "modern". Rather, there is a respect for the craft and doing it right. They don't remodel to keep up with the Joneses, they adapt and reuse what is there. They understand history and preserve and protect it, never turning their backs on where they have come from in a rush to get where they are going. This 'steadiness' is why there will always be an England.

So how does this translate into letting Lotus compete as a manufacturer of contemporary cars in a world market? We went a few hundred yards down Potash Lane to find out.

At first blush, the home of Lotus doesn't seem to be a manufacturing facility, but rather a research facility. It's quiet outside with none of the delivery bustle and transporters leaving one would expect at an auto plant. I have visited both Ford and GM plants and the contrast is enormous. The throughput in one of those plants is greater per hour than this one in a week and they each reflect that. There is sort of an unspoken pride that Lotus still hand builds each car, while using the most innovative materials and design.

The plant is really more assembly than manufacturing. Components and sub assemblies arrive from various parts of the common market and are installed by a dedicated crew who look to be building a Tamiya model in 1 to 1 scale. Complete front and rear moldings are affixed to the bonded chassis that has already had its sub assemblies like brakes and suspension attached. Every car is hand painted by a human being - no robotics for Lotus! And each car goes on a rolling road and through a high pressure water test displaying a new level of quality control for this company. What is evident through out though, is a pride and dedication to the brand. These people are energized by the fact that it is a Lotus they are producing. The test track just outside the factory door is a distinction that evidences the way things are at Lotus, and a reason for the pride. Further evidence of the distinction is the three type 119 gravity race winners

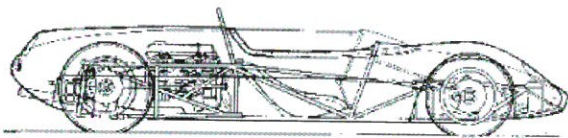


from the Festival of Speed that are displayed in the entry. No other car company has beaten Lotus there.

Having seen the source, and having spent a fair amount at the factory store, Ann and I headed for Goodwood to see the early Lotuses in their period context. If you ever get the chance, go to the Goodwood Revival. Words cannot convey the scope and intensity of this "Happening". While the Monterey Historics are wonderful, and the summer event of various names at Road America has more Can-Am thunder than I've ever seen anywhere, they pale next to the Revival. Not one famous driver but a dozen, not five championship winning cars but fifty, and not millions of dollars worth of nostalgia, but hundreds of millions. Meanwhile, overhead are Spitfires and P51 Mustangs flying in formation so close you can almost touch them. Lord March's estate consists of 12,000 acres and it is magnificent. The fans are knowledgeable and can be counted on regardless of the weather - keeping a smile and a wry comment at the ready while watching attentively even in the face of rain and what were literally gale force winds. The racing is fierce in every run group; cars you've only seen in magazines are thrashed, slid and revved in the sun and rain equally. Almost every run group had Lotus representation other than the Saloon race (where were the Lotus Cortinas?), and they were always competitive. As I wandered through the paddock, I saw the evolution of race technology with the Lotus cars frequently showing some innovation a year earlier than others. There is high regard for the Lotus brand throughout the paddock, along with the famous men who have Lotus connections: Stirling Moss, Jackie Stewart, and others. It was a Lotus and automobile and aircraft overload!

So, now, I understand. And, what is more, I appreciate the Lotus heritage that runs from that first Austin Seven based trials car to the latest Exige and the future Lotus cars. It's in their DNA. And, maybe, in mine, too.

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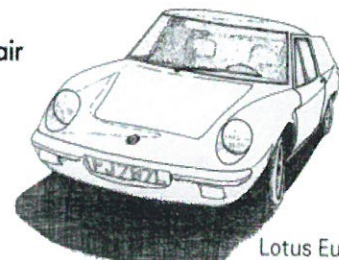
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