



BCV8 Championship – a successful club racing series that began almost 36 years ago

The BCV8 Championship has been one of the most successful Club based motor racing series and continues to thrive by providing close racing with full grids at a relatively low cost. For approaching thirty six years, BCV8 enthusiasts have been a group clearly set on enjoying both the fun on and off the circuit - with some notable offs one should add! The annual dinners in the early years were some of the most lively and enjoyable social events you could have attended and that spirit and sense of fun clearly continues today. Here **Victor Smith** (BCV8 Secretary

1974-77) recalls how it all started and remembers some of the characters at the time.

The BCV8 Championship was formed back in 1974 within the MG Car Club by Barry Sidery-Smith and Victor Smith, two longstanding members of the Club, at a time when T Type and MGA racing was on a high and providing close, entertaining motor sport for competitors and spectators alike. So what was behind the creation of the new championship for MGBs, MGCs and V8s at that time? Simply that the better performance of other makes of more modern sports cars was leaving BCV8 models behind but also the rapid growth

Victor Smith brushing a fast apex at Snetterton in a BRSCC Prodsports event in September 1976. (Photo: Fred Scatley)



of sponsorship was raising car preparation budgets dramatically in most national sports car racing formulae. The MGB enthusiast needed a competition series which provided close racing at a more affordable cost - so the BCV8 Championship was formed by members of the MG Car Club.

The MGB competition enthusiast needed a more affordable championship

The MGB was both affordable and popular for motor sports enthusiasts in its early years in the sixties. Its safe and predictable handling had encouraged many enthusiasts to enter club circuit racing events, sprints and hillclimbs. The Abingdon factory provided encouragement both with the Works team cars it prepared and entered in events through its competitions department and from the support it provided club enthusiasts through the availability of competitions parts and advice through Special Tuning. The successes with the MGB and MGC in national and international competitions in the sixties and early seventies are legendary - for example the Monte Carlo Rally in 1964, at Brands Hatch in the Guards 1,000 miles race in 1965, Sebring in 1968 and the hat trick of singleton entries at le Mans in 1963, 1964 and 1965 which Peter Browning reckoned were the last true sports cars to run at the Sarthe circuit. Those successes were achieved in the hands of talented drivers like Paddy Hopkirk, Timo Makinen, John Rhodes, Andrew Hedges and Clive Baker to name but a few.

At a club level, many stalwarts in our Club today were campaigning their MGBs in the early years - people like Anthony Binnington, Warwick Banks, Terry Osborne and the irrepresible Barry Sidery-Smith. But by the mid seventies, the MGB and its variants had become less and less competitive in both modified and standard classes as more modern machinery like the better handling rear engined Lotus Europa, the nimble Davrian and the more powerful TVRs began to dominate national sports car events. In the **modified classes**, MGB

8 DBL, the former works MGB, in action with Ian Polley at Silverstone in May 1974 illustrates how wheel arch flares and extra rubber were used in an attempt to remain competitive with more modern fully modified prodsports cars at that time. (Photo: Fred Scatley)

campaigners tried using more rubber in an attempt to increase cornering speeds and grip and ungainly flared arches started to sprout on classic works cars like 8 DBL. This car had been acquired from Charles Dawkins as the ex Anthony Bamford works car by Ian Polley, a Club enthusiast who had graduated through both Club and BRSCC Prodsports events. We restored 8 DBL together in 1973 still in its JCB livery – but at least the bright yellow car could be seen in competitors' mirrors! It was remarkable how the MGB could be developed in those ways but it became only too evident that the MGB was becoming less and less competitive in fully modified competition.

In **standard sports car events**, the MGB gradually slipped to being a middle order car, even in well regulated and friendly championships like the BRSCC Prodsports series run by Peter Browning.

The rapid increase in sponsorship was the final motivator for forming a BCV8 championship

In the mid seventies, the factor which was the **final motivator for forming a championship for MGBs and its variants** was the rapid increase in sponsorship support for competitors in club based series like the BRSCC Prodsports championship. The annual budget you needed to remain competitive in that series grew at an alarming rate. In less than two seasons we went from one or two standard cars being towed to the circuit, to a situation where only two cars were being driven to events - they were a TR6 and my MGB. I recall sitting with John Britten at a meeting at Oulton Park in the summer of 1973, where he was campaigning an Arkley prepared Morgan V8, and he complimented me on my efforts to keep up with the pack but acknowledged I had to drive with a view to getting home again that evening! The railway sleepers hiding behind their ivy cladding at Oulton were certainly an unforgiving boundary to a modest run off area!

But increasing sponsorship money also had other effects - engine blueprinting and team mechanics. **By mid 1973 blueprinting had become almost a basic necessity** in prodsports racing and some competitors also had **large teams of mechanics** and support equipment in the paddock. The sight of Chris Meek sweeping in just before practice whilst a large team of mechanics swarmed over

his Lotus Europa from just after dawn was a source of wonderment and dismay for the truly amateur, unsponsored competitor at that time I can tell you! The reality was national club sports car racing had made a quantum leap, raising the annual costs for existing competitors and creating a much higher threshold for new entrants to climb over to be on the bottom rung of competitiveness. Many of the active characters at the time felt something had to be done - people like Terry Osborne, John Targett, Ricky Podmore, David Strange, Peter Chowne and John Carter come to mind, and of course Barry Sidery-Smith.

The BCV8 regulations were drafted in the Old Ship at Mortlake

The **regulations for the BCV8 Championship** were drafted as I sat in the Old Ship at Mortlake, opposite the finishing line of the annual boat race. I had the help of Vic Ellis, Roy McCarthy and Rob Innes-Ker who were active MGA racers at that time. **For the first season I had just two classes - standard and modified.** Of course "standard" was an open debating point from the start but the spirit of the regulations for standard cars was they should be "as they left the factory production line". During the first two years it became clear that a third class was needed to cover the increasingly quick "standard" cars resulting in the inevitable creep from subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, interpretations of the regulations. So we decided to create a **road-going modified class** with the only constraint that those cars had to be taxed and insured for the road, on road tyres and most important driven to the circuit.

The good spirit amongst competitors resulted in very few disputes or crises in those early years with the exception of



David Franklin, a former National Hillclimb champion and regular driver at the Goodwood Revival. (Photo: Victor Smith)

an indecently quick space framed MGBGTV8 which burst on the scene for a short while in 1976 to the disgust of many competitors. My job as the first BCV8 Secretary had been to get the championship going whilst enjoying competing in some standard class events too!

On selling my standard MGB to the late Peter Malimson in 1977, I handed over the role of secretary to Rob Gill from the Lincolnshire Centre. He was an example of a Club member who had come into motor sport through the BCV8 Championship and had successfully campaigned an MGC Roadster. Along with Vic Young, he did a great deal to moderate some of the less than flattering bar room jokes of the MGC as a nose heavy rocket!

BCV8 Championship winners in the early years included **David Franklin** in a standard MGBGTV8 at a time when he was a very successful leading light in the RAC national hill climb and sprint championships in his ex Formula 2 racing car. His V8 was usually entered



Your first race is always something you remember – the unfamiliar sensation of pushing a car to its limits and the inevitable process of learning track skills. Mine was at the Club's annual meeting at Silverstone in May 1973, seen here rounding the old Woodcote Corner on the Club Circuit. (Photo: Fred Scatley)

as his "wife's shopping car" and was always driven to the circuit and on arrival could easily have entered a concours event. But once in the paddock, the rubber bumpers were stripped and then in the hands of David's deceptively quick and smooth driving style, it became a most competitive machine. Probably one of the most memorable spectacles in the late seventies at wet Silverstone meetings (and what a series a wet ones we had at that time!) was the sight of David's brilliance in the wet, trouncing the fully modified cars. His car seemed to go round the old Woodcote Corner in front of the stands at speeds which were breathtaking and demonstrated his uncanny knack of driving on the edge in the wet.

A championship that encouraged a standard class and "all-rounders"

Peter Chowne, a former standard class champion in the early years, reflected some time ago that one aspect of the Championship which encouraged standard class competitors and "all-rounders" was that speed events also counted for championship points. So it was possible to do very well by combining the cheaper hillclimbs and sprints with circuit racing. He feels that the BCV8 Championship may have been one of the fairest championships ever devised. Even with

a standard car, providing one was prepared to travel around the country and enter all events, it was possible to win the Championship without ever winning a race! Peter won the standard class one year this way.

The 1970s were glorious years of fair competition but in the early 1980s "standard cars" were going very quickly which he did not feel was entirely the result of driver skill.

Your first race is always something you remember – the unfamiliar sensation of pushing the car to its limits

One year Peter went into the roadgoing modified class with a balanced engine, stage 2 head, 1.75 SUs and a 740 cam and could only just about keep up with leading contenders! He has little doubt blueprinting had become widespread and increasing sponsorship finally drove many competitors out. Nonetheless Peter had five glorious years of competition with memories of fellow competitors from varied professions and backgrounds. He also recalls the Donington Six Hour race where the BCV8 team ran and many invitation races competing against Morgans and TRs with success, particularly at Brands and Cadwell which suited his MGB without an overdrive.

The MGBV8 has played a major part in the spectator value of the BCV8 series

Whilst standard and modified MGBs have provided good spectator value for many years, over the last ten years the powerful full-house V8 powered

machines of Malcolm Beer and Warwick Banks, to name but two, have raised the performance envelope substantially. But the V8 has not eclipsed the 1800 based machines, and modified MGB racing is as close and exciting as ever with young drivers like the two McCarthy brothers showing exceptional skills. The standard class racing today is to my eye extraordinarily good in that the cars frequently run within inches of each other whereas in the mid seventies we felt being within two car lengths seemed very close indeed!

Successful championships do not need to rely on their past glories

Today the MG Car Club's BCV8 Championship has some of the closest racing you could wish to see and is as popular as ever. I

attended an annual BCV8 Dinner organised by Pam McCarthy and found the room packed with BCV8 enthusiasts – not only the older drivers but most important younger competitors and their friends too. The MGB is still an affordable sports car for club racing and the spares suppliers have created an availability of parts which is as good as ever. The atmosphere at that dinner was as convivial as any of the annual BCV8 dinners at the Bookham Grange in the early years, although with less bun throwing, soda siphon attacks and whip-rounds to keep the waitresses going under adverse conditions!

Maybe the most telling comment that evening was from the guest speaker **Rob Gravett**, the successful production saloon car racer, who gave heart felt thanks to the BCV8 Championship for having provided him with a way of entering motor racing and learning the basic skills in a friendly and affordable club based series.

The BCV8 Championship has been well run too for many years by Mike Breedon (chairman for 26 years) and Pam McCarthy as BCV8 Coordinator. They have put out a very professional newsletter. Sadly Mike is standing down at the end of the 2010 season and he has had to retire from racing too, so his ex-John Tadman Class D V8 is passing to fellow competitor Joe Parrington.

Yes the BCV8 Championship is very much alive today and thriving, and above all it is respected and valued as an exceptionally well run, club based series in an increasingly professional motorsport world.