

Bristol Motor Cycle & Light Car Club

Formula 2 at the Fair

The Goram Fair Race Meeting

Whitchurch Airfield, Bristol
1st August 1959

Although the Bristol Motor Cycle & Light Car Club had used Whitchurch airfield on the southern outskirts of the city for a speed trial in May 1937, it would be another twenty years before they would return for another such event.

Within two years of the 1937 event the Second World War had begun, and Whitchurch was immediately requisitioned by the Air Ministry. Unlike most airfields it wasn't destined for use by the RAF however, but was designated as England's only operational civil airport, and throughout the war years many VIPs and civilians would transit through amid high levels of secrecy and security. Within weeks the bulk of the Imperial Airways and British Airways (soon to be merged to form BOAC – the British Overseas Airways Corporation) were relocated to Whitchurch. To facilitate these operations the pre-war grass airstrip needed to be transformed, and by the end of 1941 the site boasted a 1000 yard East-West runway, with paved taxiways to new hangars on its northern and southern edges to house the BOAC, and also extra factory manufacturing space for the Bristol Aeroplane Company.

Post-war Whitchurch reverted to normal civil use as Bristol's city airport, although it was now only lightly used. Any possible expansion to cater for new types of civil airliner was constrained by the continual encroachment of the city's suburbs, and a new location for Bristol's Airport was identified five miles further away to the south-west, at the former RAF station of Lulsgate Bottom, where the Bristol club had run race meetings in 1949 and 1950. The new airport opened in the spring of 1957, and with Whitchurch de-requisitioned the Bristol Corporation could now open up the site for other uses.

Meanwhile, in the immediate post-war period the Bristol club had been very active, organising hillclimbs at Naish, speed trials at Weston-super-Mare (1948 and '49), the races at Lulsgate, and then at Castle Combe from 1950 until 1955 when that was curtailed owing to financial constraints.

“Standing Quarter Speed Trials”, Saturday 25th May 1957

In May 1956, in conjunction with the Burnham-on-Sea Motor Club and the South-West Centre of the MG Car Club, the Bristol Club had begun a series of “3 Clubs” quarter-mile speed trials with an event at Castle Combe. For 1957, within weeks of the old airport's closure the three clubs switched their event to make use of 440 yards of Whitchurch's main runway, with the Burnham club taking the organisational lead on this occasion. The event included classes for saloon, sports and sports-racing cars (25 shillings for the first class entered, then 10 shillings for subsequent ones) and entries secretary Marjorie Buncombe received a good number of entries.

The day was bright and dry, and with a large housing area close by an estimated 1000 people turned up to see the action – there was no admission charge, just a small parking fee for any arriving by car. Maberley Parker's C-type Jaguar stopped the clock in 15 seconds dead for best time of the day; John Buncombe (Tojeiro Bristol) led the Burnham members on 15.4 sec, and Shirley Warren, also of Burnham, claimed the Best Lady award with 17.9 sec in her Triumph TR2. Charles Sgonina (Aston Martin DB3) was fastest from the Bristol club in 16.4 sec, and MGA driver Eddie Searle's 19.0 sec was the best MG club member driving a production car.

While overall it was a successful event, the site's easy access and wide-open spaces made control of spectators – especially the numerous inquisitive children – very difficult, and the following year the “3 Clubs” moved their annual speed trial to Lulsgate. The 1957 event was however a useful precursor to a much more ambitious event that would be held at Whitchurch in the summer of 1959.

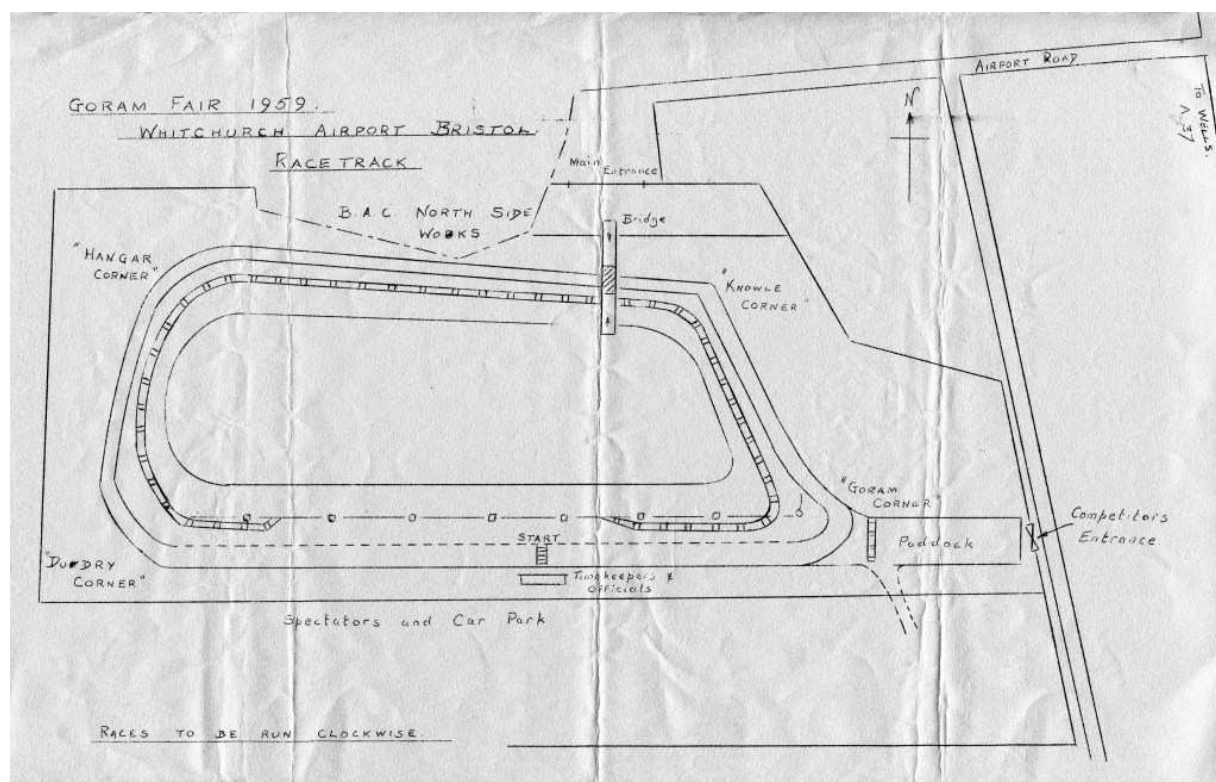
“Goram Race Meeting” Saturday 1st August 1959

For 1959 the Bristol Corporation decided to take advantage of Whitchurch's wide-open spaces to stage their annual “Goram Fair”, previously held at their Blaise Castle Estate on the northern edge of the city. This fortnight-long extravaganza was scheduled for 25th July to 8th August and, in addition to

traditional fairground amusements of Charles Heals & Sons' amusement park, children's sports, and evening fireworks, also billed were special attractions such as the French "*Les Diablos Blanc*" acrobat troupe with a motor-cycle on a 100ft high-wire, and from Sweden "*The Trio Angelos*" riding motor-cycles on a 90 ft. suspended platform.

In a more sporting vein, Whitchurch's paved runway and taxi-ways allowed events likely to appeal to cyclists (with cycle races during the first week), motor-cyclists (with a race meeting on the final Saturday), and for car enthusiasts a selection of motoring events. For the latter, early in 1957 Bristol Corporation's entertainments manager Tom Pyper suggested that the Bristol MC&LCC organised a number of events during the Fair. Agreement was reached for a "3 Clubs" standing-quarter speed trial on the first Saturday (25th July), driving tests for the public on 28th July and 4th August, and, as the main attraction, a race meeting on the Saturday of the Bank Holiday weekend, 1st August. To have a race meeting so close to a major city was a major achievement.

Using the main runway and northern taxiway a 1.0625 mile circuit was laid out, flat, and roughly rectangular in shape, with just four corners, and the competitors paddock at the extreme eastern end of the runway. The compact layout allowed spectators, who unusually were located on the inside, along with the funfair, a good view of the whole circuit. In his programme notes Club President Cliff Salter commented "*A Fun Fair in the centre of such a short circuit is pretty well unique and lends the touch of colour more generally found on the Continent*".



Mitigating the spectator problem of two years earlier, the whole site was completely fenced in, with 1.5 miles of corrugated iron sheeting on tubular scaffolding. Access to the central area and fairground was over a 50 foot span Bailey Bridge, with 120 ft. ramps either side, specially constructed by No.22 Field Engineer Regiment above the north straight. Track approval for a National status event was granted by the RAC, permitting 18 starters for the 500cc Formula 3 race, and just 14 for the others.

The original plan had been for seven races, but that for 500cc production cars (such as Goggomobiles and Berkeleys) was scrapped through lack of interest.

The main attraction was a 25 lap race for Formula 2 racing cars (1500cc), offering £75 to the winner, reducing to £5 for 5th place. Prize money was also on offer in the other races, up to £40 for the Formula 3s and sports cars, and £20 for the Saloons, while all starters would also have their entry fees (3 guineas) returned (less 10 shillings personal accident premium).

Interest in the remaining races was high, with the two sports-car races being oversubscribed, and some leading British club racers were expected to appear, such as Tim Parnell, Ian Raby, and former British Formula 3 champion Don Parker, plus Henry Taylor and David Piper who had made their Grand Prix debuts just two weeks earlier in the British Grand Prix at Aintree.

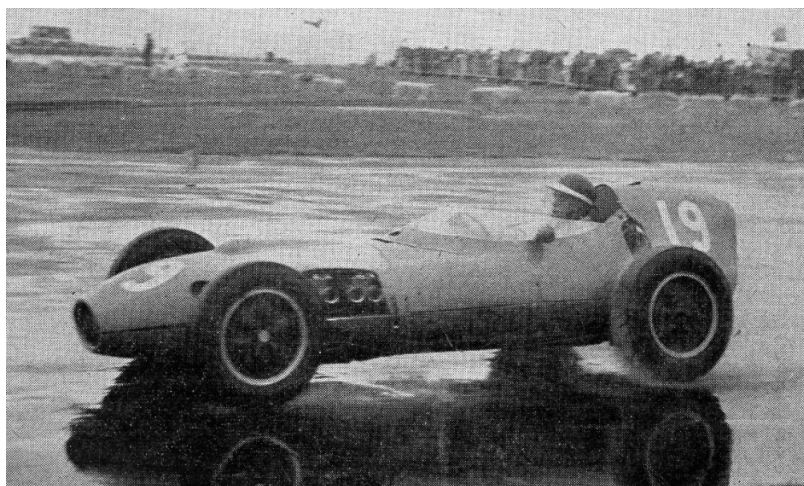
With the meeting being jointly promoted with Bristol City Corporation, Tom Pyper acted as Secretary of the meeting, Clerk of Course was the experienced Tom Simmonds, Eric Storey was Chief Observer, Scrutineer was Jack Harding, and race starter Chris Bigwood. Practice was from 11am to 4pm on Friday, with a further unofficial 90 minute session at 10am on Saturday, with racing scheduled to start at 1.30pm.

First out to race, and benefiting from a dry track, were the Formula 3 contingent. Don Parker spun his maroon Cooper off on the first lap and thereafter spent the race climbing back through the field. Out in front Phillip Robinson led from start to finish, while 30 seconds back Jack Pitcher set what would be the fastest lap of the afternoon (53.0 sec, 72.17 mph) as he held off the recovering Parker, who just overcame Gordon Gartside for third.

Rain greeted the GT cars for their 20 lapper, the race being an AC benefit with local man Eddie Searle heading a 1-2-3 for the Thames Ditton marque, while in the 1600cc class Geoff Dear edged Mike Reid in the battle of the MGAs, almost a lap ahead of Rowcliffe's third-placed Porsche.

The Hon. Eddie Greenall easily won the third race, for 1500cc sports cars, in a Lotus, from Ian Raby's Cooper. Raby, the only non-Lotus interloper in the top eight, led home Keith Greene, Louis Bramley and Lionel Mayman.

Then it was on to the main race of the day, 25 laps for Formula 2 cars. While Henry Taylor in a Parnell Racing Cooper romped to a comfortable win, after a race long battle, Keith Greene (Gilby Engineering Cooper) just headed Tim Parnell's Cooper by 0.4 sec. The Lotus 16 of David Piper (*pictured, right*) finished a further six seconds back, just ahead of Chris Summers' Cooper.



The next race, for unlimited sports cars, proved to be the most dramatic. At Knowle corner on the first lap, a sliding Smith (Connaught) triggered a four-car mix-up, instantly putting out John Ewer (Lister Corvette) and Peter Cottrell (Lotus Bristol), then himself being flagged off on the next lap with a wildly flapping offside rear wing. Thence David Piper had an easy run to finish ahead of a multi-car scrap eventually resolved in favour of the Aston Martin DB3S of John Dalton followed by Maurice Charles' D-type, after second man on the road Louis Bramley (Lotus) was disqualified for an infringement. Wrapping up the meeting, with the track now dry again, was a sparse field of Production Saloons, won easily by Don Parker in his Jensen, with the little Austins of Noble and Clarke next up after David Baker (Aston Martin) was penalised one minute for a jump start.

Although weather conditions had been far from perfect, varying from dry to a steady downpour and everything in between, and the Club later acknowledged a few organisational flaws, generally the

meeting had been a success, with Autosport's reporter commenting "*For a first attempt it was extremely well handled and well supported*".



Start of the over 1500cc Sports Car race

The following Saturday the Fair concluded with the motor-cycle race meeting run by the Bristol Motor Cycle Club. Future world champion Phil Read scored two wins on his Nortons, in the 350 and unlimited races. Read also recorded the bikes' fastest lap of the day in 53.2 sec (72.07 mph), marginally slower than Jack Pitcher's lap record of 53.0 sec set in his Cooper 500 at the car meeting. The other motor-cycle winners were: 125 – DF Shorey (MV); 250 – DF Shorey (Norvel); Sidecars – RA Robinson/LP Young (Vincent 998); Sidecar handicaps - TP Folwell/RM Knocker (Norton 500) and J Difazio/AH Mustard (BSA 650).

After the car meeting an appreciative spectator had written to the Bristol MC&LCC, commenting: *"It was a really first rate meeting it was possible for everybody to have a good view of the course"*, also remarking *"No doubt both your club and Bristol Corporation have been to considerable expense to start this interesting little circuit and I sincerely hope that your first effort has been a success financially."*

Unfortunately that does not appear to have been the case, as there would be no further race meetings at Whitchurch, nor another Goram Fair.

Whitchurch in the 'sixties, and beyond

That wasn't quite the end of all motorsport activity at Whitchurch airfield though. In 1959 the new sport of 'Karting' was just being introduced to the UK from America, and a group of Bristol club members built one of the very first British karts, the 'Minima'. This made its first public appearance at the Goram Sprint Meeting on 25th July, when the RAC's Dean Delamont had his first Kart drive. The Bristol MC&LCC soon formed a new kart section and obtained permission to use Whitchurch for up to six meetings a year, but although some races were held during 1960, noise became a problem, and they weren't continued.

Also in the 1960s the Bristol club used the airfield several times for their 'Mendip Petit Prix', a non-speed event which entailed lapping a course and making several pit stops to carry out various tasks, an event they had originated pre-war on a road course in the Mendip hills.

Although not exactly *motor* sport, from 1966 to 1987 Whitchurch airfield was also the location of an annual National 24-hour Pedal Car Race. This had been devised by Bristol University's School of Mechanical Engineering as part of University Rag week and became an energetically contested competition between teams from universities and colleges around the country, raising money for charity.

Local motor clubs continued to make use of the site for driving test and autotest meetings through to the late 1980s, but over the years the site was gradually developed by the City Council as Hengrove Park, with a series of trading estates and a major sports centre. While having for years been a valued open space in the city, the site, including the remaining stretch of runway, is now earmarked for major housing development.

Whitchurch Airfield Location:
Coordinates: 51.41510°N 2.581524°W

Pete Stowe
2021

Goram Fair National British Race Meeting, Saturday 1st August 1959.
Organised by the Bristol MC&LCC

Entries and known results

No.	Driver (Entrant)	Car	Colour	Time	Pos.	Notes
Race 1. 500cc Racing Cars. 20 laps (Max. no. of starters 18)						
5	P Robinson	Stuart-Cooper	black/red	18m 29.0s (68.98 mph)	1	
4	J Pitcher (Lea's Garages Ltd)	Beart-Cooper	green	18m 52.4s	2	FL. 53.0s (72.17 mph)
12	Don Parker (Don Parker Motors)	Cooper	maroon	19m 00.2s	3	
8	G Gartside	Cooper	white/red	19m 02.4s	4	
2	GM Jones	Cooper	green	18m 48s (19 laps)	5	
1	P Ellis	Cooper	yellow			
3	DAS Colvin	JBS	green			
6	PA Simpson	Cooper	blue			
7	EG Willmott	Cooper	red			
9	AD Plumstead	Cooper	black/white			
10	M Blakemore (Ecurie Chaos)	Cooper	red			
69	J Hodges	Kieft	blue			

Race 2. Grand Touring Cars. 20 laps. (Max. no. of starters 14)						
1601 to 2000cc						
55	E Searle	AC Bristol	white/red	22m 01.2s (57.9 mph)	1	
47	TG Cunane	AC Bristol	grey	22m 06.0s	2	FL 1m 04.4s (59.40 mph)
72	J McKechnie	AC Bristol	green	22m 37.8s	3	
41	JG Tallis	Frazer Nash	green			
71	HPK Dibley	AC Aceca				
up to 1600cc						
76	GN Dear (Octagon Stable)	MGA	red	22m 43.8s		1st class
77	M Reid (Octagon Stable)	MGA	green	22m 44.6s		2nd class
40	HH Rowcliffe	Porsche	white	22m 42.4 (19 laps)		3rd class
66	HR Vincent	Wolseley	maroon			
70	Max Trimble	MGA	green			

Race 3. Sports cars up to 1500cc. 20 laps. (Max. no. of starters 14; entry list oversubscribed)						
34	EJ Greenall (John L King)	Lotus	green	21m 08.8s	1	FL 56.8s (67.34 mph)
25	IE Raby (Sewell & King (Chelmsford))	Cooper	red	21m 15.0s	2	
37	KA Greene (Gilby Engineering Co. Ltd)	Lotus	green	21m 27.2s	3	
28	L Bramley	Lotus	blue	21m 30.4s	4	
36	LB Mayman (Kay Garage)	Lotus	fawn/red	21m 34.6s	5	
61	TJ Threlfall (Competition Motors)	Lotus	green/yellow			started
26	JH Saunders (GH Saunders)	Victoria	silver			
27	AB Rees	Lotus	green			
29	M Woodley	Lotus	maroon			
30	RGF Swanton	Lotus	green			
31	BP Spicer	Cooper	green			
32	PD Gardiner	Waddup Special	aluminium			
33	GM Jones (Competition Motors)	Hume Cooper	green			
35	JF Westcott (Cranham Service Station Ltd.)	Lotus	red			
38	NR Hicks (Team Thercel)	Lotus	green			
39	RH Williams or F Tuck (Fred Tuck Cars)	Austin Healey Sprite	white			
40	HH Rowcliffe	Porsche	white			

1959 Whitchurch Races

No.	Driver (Entrant)	Car	Colour	Time	Pos.	Notes
Race 4. Formula II. 25 laps. (Max. no. of starters 14, 11 starters)						
16	HC Taylor (RHH Parnell)	Cooper	green	24m 08.2s (66.03 mph)	1	FL 57.4s (66.64 mph)
20	Keith A Greene (Gilby Engineering Co. Ltd.)	Cooper	green	24m 41.2s	2	
15	Tim Parnell (RHH Parnell)	Cooper	green	24m 41.6s	3	
19	David Piper (Dorchester Service Station)	Lotus	green	24m 47.6s	4	
11	Chris Summers (Arden Equipe)	Cooper	blue	24m 48.0s	5	
14	F Tuck or RH Williams (Fred Tuck Cars)	Cooper	green			
17	RJW Utley (Team Thercel)	Lotus	green			
18	Maurice Charles (Maurice Charles Motors)	Cooper	green			
21	Dennis Taylor	Lotus	green			
22	WEJ Allen (Curtis Smith Racing Team)	Lotus	green			
23	G Wicken (Wincheap Racing Associates)	Cooper	green			
24	B Whitehouse (Westmount Garage)	Cooper	green			
25	IE Raby (Sewell & King (Chelmsford))	Cooper	red			sports racing car

Race 5. Sports cars over 1500cc. 20 laps. (Max. no. of starters 14; entry list oversubscribed)						
43	David Piper (Dorchester Service Station)	Lotus	green	18m 46.6s (67.9 mph)	1	FL 54.0s (70.83 mph)
51	JF Dalton	Aston Martin	green	19m 00.0s	2	
42	Maurice Charles (Maurice Charles Motors)	Jaguar D-type	blue	19m 02.0s	3	
53	M Bond (Ecurie Chiltern)	Aston Martin	green	19m 11.8s	4	
56	R Brightman	Lister Corvette	red/green	19m 29.0s	5	
28	L Bramley	Lotus	blue		DSQ	Finished 2nd on road
50	RH Smith (Curtis Smith Racing Team)	Connaught	green		retired	lap 1 accident damage
46	J Ewer	Lister Corvette	red/gold		retired	accident lap 1
52	PHG Cottrell	Lotus Bristol	yellow		retired	accident lap 1
41	JG Tallis	Frazer Nash	green			
44	C Sgonina	Aston Martin	green			
45	J Randles	Lister Bristol	blue			
47	TG Cunane	AC Bristol	grey			
48	WC Cuff (Cuff's Garage)	Jaguar	green			
49	JO Coundley (Westover Garage Ltd.)	Jaguar	blue			
54	HR Jones	Maserati	white/blue			
55	E Searle	AC Bristol	white/red			

1959 Whitchurch Races

No.	Driver (Entrant)	Car	Colour	Time	Pos.	Notes
Race 6. Production Saloon Cars. 15 laps. (Max. no. of starters 14)						
over 1600cc						
68	Don Parker (Don Parker Motors)	Jensen	reno red	16m 06.0s	1	FL 1m 02.0s (61.69 mph)
67	David P Baker	Aston Martin	black	17m 13.4s*		2nd class. *incl. 1 min penalty for jumping start
up to 1600cc						
75	JM Noble	Austin A40	grey	16m 32.8s	2	1st class
58	DW Clarke	Austin	black/silver	16m 33.8s	3	2nd class
66	HR Vincent	Wolseley	maroon	16m 41.2s	4	3rd class
40	HH Rowcliffe	Porsche	white			
57	RH Williams	Sunbeam Rapier	blue			
59	EP Foden	Riley	red			
60	M Thorburn (Grosvenor Garage)	Renault	white			
62	"Tiny" Lewis (IDL Lewis)	Triumph Herald	green/white			
63	GW Brown (IDL Lewis)	Triumph Herald	green/white			
64	AF Lefevre	Sunbeam Rapier	blue			
65	J McKechnie	Alfa Romeo	red/white			

Event officials.

Clerk of the Course: TH Simmonds. Secretary of the Meeting: TJ Pyper. Chief Scrutineer: ACH Harding. Chief Observer: Eric Storey. Chief Marshals: WJ Jones (flags), P Scott (course), M Edkins (paddock), R Jones (start line). Starter: CC Bigwood. Timekeepers: TCE Clapp & A Stone. Race Control: Mrs. GA Howell. Commentator: Wilfred Kay. Stewards: RC Crouch (RAC), RD Caesar, CB Salter. Judges: SE Witchell, AW Britton, KB White.

Information sources:

Race entries from the official meeting programme.

Bristol Motor Club archives, Autosport, Bristol Evening Post, Bristol Motor Cycle & Light Car Club Driving Mirror, The Stage.

'Somewhere in the West Country' – The History of Bristol (Whitchurch) Airport 1930-1957, Ken Wakefield (Crecy Publishing Ltd., 1997)

Pedal car races: <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/pedal-car-race>

Westcountry Motorsport History

Website <https://bpmc.org.uk/petestowe/wmh.htm>

petestowe @ talktalk.net