

Guards Trophy Race Report – Snetterton (21 April 2024)



Hi everyone,

Well, that was a cold start to the season! My thanks to the 24 drivers (and co-drivers), family, friends and support crew who endured a bitterly cold northerly wind that simply never let-up!

However, it did mean we had an almost totally dry qualifying and race, with the wind adding an extra driving challenge, especially down the Bentley Straight.

We fielded 20 cars for qualifying but sadly lost the Chevron B8 of Hugh and Mark Colman after a nasty rear suspension failure on Mark's out lap just after the driver change (so definitely caused by the first driver I reckon!), and Lee Penson's immaculate Lotus 26R with a suspected rear oil seal failure. Both will be sorted before our next race at Donington hopefully.

Qualifying saw the unique left-hand drive Chevron B8 of Westie and Sam Mitchell on pole just ahead of the ever-rapid Lenham of Robert and Benjamin Tusting, with the fabulous Chevron B16 of Ross and Charlie Hyett lining up in third. I think this may be the first time we've seen the top three qualifiers all being dual-driven cars?

It was also fantastic to see the newly acquired B16 of Dan Pickett joining us for the first race, qualifying P5 in his first race with the car.

The GT class was headed up by Nick Powell slightly ahead (by 0.3s) of Bruce White, both in Lotus Elan 26Rs, and Malcolm Johnson (also in a 26R) making up the top three GTs in qualifying. Special thanks to Joe Gomm for entering in his MGB (with co-driver and preparer Dean Trower); Joe's Chevron B8 was sadly not ready, and he didn't want to miss the race!



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Despite the delays throughout the day, the race finally started at ~16:30hrs just as the day's first rain drops started to fall. Westie Mitchell gets a special mention for managing to spin his Chevron on the green flag lap, not once but twice meaning he started from a lot further down the order – apparently it was slippery!! The opening three laps were very unpredictable with several positions lost and won as drivers tried to figure out where the grip was as the rain spread around the circuit. David Forsbrey made the most of the early laps and led the pack (until pitting on lap 13) closely followed by Benn Tilley in the super-agile Lotus 23B (making a fantastic start from P6) and Dan Balfour who moved up from P7 on the grid.

The GT race saw the two Elans of Bruce White and Nick Powell lapping very quickly with Bruce maintaining the advantage for the entire race.

Ashley Hudson (Lotus 23B) had to make an early unplanned stop (on lap 3) but was able to resume the race, sadly to drop out on lap 17 with a terminal oil leak at Bomb Hole – leaving some challenging track conditions for the following cars! Your writer showed his normal form of unperforming in qualifying but being [dragged] along in the race, rising to P5 at mid-distance, then handing the Chevron B6 over to Sean McClurg (always the quicker driver!) who sadly found his race ending prematurely with a spectacular engine blow-up halfway down the Bentley Straight whilst at full chat. Thankfully the escape route at Brundle meant Sean got the car off the circuit and into safety.

There was some confusion as to what brought out the safety car as Ashley was stranded at the side of the circuit but at a similar time to Sean's trip down the escape road to safety. However, once deployed the safety car remained on track for five or six laps as the Lotus 23B was recovered to safety and the marshals did their best to soak up the oil spill. This extended safety car period did however change the course of the race, with Dan Balfour using the safety car period to do his mandatory pit stop (on lap 22), the final driver to do so.



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The ensuing four-lap race to the flag by Ben Tusting, Sam Mitchell and David Forsbrey provided some extremely thrilling racing with Ben ahead of Sam by 1.3s at the flag, and David just 0.6s behind Sam. Despite Ben's obvious joy of 'winning' the race, Dan Balfour (who was several cars behind the 'lead' pack was in fact a lap ahead and had taken the chequered flag almost a full lap ahead of the others). This left Robert and Ben Tusting in second, and Westie and Sam Mitchell in third. Following very closely on track behind the sports racers were the two leading Elans of Bruce White and Nick Powell – crossing the line 0.056s apart – with Andrew Garside just 13.5s behind to take the final GT podium slot.

Our special guest, Clive Chapman (son of Colin) was on the pit wall to watch the thrilling end to the race, and certainly left very impressed with how close the finish had been.

After the race a slightly al fresco awards ceremony was kindly hosted by the Pegasus Classic Engineering team (thanks guys, it certainly helped to get everyone under cover!) and outright winners in both Sports Racing and GT cars were given a bottle of bubbly, the obligatory caps and a warm applause from the large group of drivers and supporters that had stayed on to celebrate the race winners, as well as class winners. Thanks everyone who stayed on – it was a test of endurance!

Clive Chapman also awarded some special Classic Team Lotus awards to the top three Lotus 26Rs, including a factory tour (for two) to the winner. My thanks to Clive and Andy from CTL for their time and generosity.

To summarise the results:

Overall SR winner was **Dan Balfour**, second went to **Robert and Ben Tusting** and third to **Westie and Sam Mitchell** (despite Westie's best efforts on the green flag lap!).

Overall GT winner was **Bruce White**, second went to **Nick Powell** and third to **Andrew Garside**.

Class winners were **Bruce White (GTA)**, **Joe Gomm and Dean Trower (GTB)**, **Benn Tilley (SRA)**, **Dan Balfour (SRB)** and **Dan Pickett (SRC)**.

A full list of positions and points will be published shortly and available on the Guards Trophy web site (accessible via www.guardstrophy.org).

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Podium Smiles!

Clive Chapman with the top three Lotus 26R drivers, Bruce White, Nick Powell and Andrew Garside.



Overall race winner Dan Balfour (right) with Nick Thompson (on the left) and Clive Chapman in the background.



Nick sharing a joke with Ben and Robert Tusting (they thought they'd won!) with Sam and Westie 'Green Flag Spinner' Mitchell modelling the new Guards Trophy jackets!

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