

More wet Drags

WITH a good four-car entry in Top Fuel, all having done six second runs at one time or another, the drag racing at Blackbushe should have been terrific at the weekend. But miserable weather was again particularly cruel to the NDRC which has suffered badly this year with rain - even their rain dates, it seems, are wet.

The track was wet all morning and held water nearly all day, while the drizzle that came and went, even in the afternoon, finally settled in again before many finals could be run. In view of this, it was amazing that the big fuellers made any runs at all, and that Dennis Priddle came very close to his fastest ever run with little short of amazing.

After a real dragster style start that we don't see too much of these days, with smoke for a good eighth-mile, Priddle's car rocketed through at 211 mph in 7.4s. For once he was faster than Skilton's earlier 206 mph blast in the Castrol car, but not quite as quick as Skilton's 7.18s.

Roz Prior followed Clive with an equally smoky 8.3s that wound up to 187 mph on the damp track, but on a later attempt a head gasket went at the mid point. With Roland Pratt limping around with a sprained ankle, Malcolm Quick, former stock car driver and currently owner of Skilton's last front-engined car, Revolution II, took over the wheel. However, he had to shut off with misted-over goggles after a promising start that still netted a 9.3s.

In Top Dragster, Gerry Andrews again led the class most of the day, but Tony Frome's big 414 cu. in. Pontiac went well on the wet qualifying run at 10.6s, but was left with a similar time by Ray Hoare's with a 9.6s. Ray went out in the final to Andrews' bigger 440 cu. in. Chev with a 10.2s to 8.8s at 161 mph.

In the Competition classes, neither Stone nor Hall could really unleash their big Top class altereds which snaked and slid their way up the quarter mile, but action in Senior was livened up by the appearance of the Page brothers' new T-bodied alterd built in eight weeks after their nine second Fiat

red-lit against Page, who went away anyway to another win. With Sharpe beating Bob Deichen's Daimler, it should have been a good final, but the rain stopped it taking place.

In the street classes, Dave Rose had hoped to have his Hemi-Cuda ready for Super Street but last minute problems stopped him appearing, so it was down to a match race between Erol's Camaro and Dennis Stone in the Escort/Chev. He took both runs before the weather stopped the third, but times were not indicative in the 12s of what either car could do.

Ivan Fryer had yet another win in Top Street with a close 14.1s to 14.3s over Dennis Wheatley's 440 cu. in. Charger, which was just about the last run of the day. It doesn't seem possible the bad weather can continue and hopefully Silverstone in a couple of weeks time will see an improvement. J.T.D.

BLACKBUSHE

Washout for dragsters

It was unfortunate that the weekend's running of the Hot Car/208 Grand Nationals at Blackbushe Airport on the 10th Anniversary of the festivals should have weather that was all too familiar to those who remembered that historic event.

Rain throughout the day halted any serious racing with qualifying runs waived for most classes and meaningless in most others.

Four top fuel cars were present but could only run one at a time in the drier of the two lanes. Dennis Priddle set the fastest speed of the day with his Mr Revell car at 211 mph in 7.41s while Clive Skilton in his Castrol car set low time with a 7.18 s/206 mph run. Roz Prior in the Eccles and Pollock "Fast Lady" ran a terrific 8.3 s/187 mph with rain still falling while Malcolm



Fast lady - Roz Prior

Quick had one half run in his top fuel debut in Clive Skilton's second car.

The Stone team fared well again with Dennis Stone taking their Escort Chevrolet to a win in Super Street over Mustapha Erol's Camaro and Jerry Andrews' top dragster with the Hemi-Hunter with an 8.8 s run. Dave Stone was unable to let the "Big Altered" go in the conditions and only ran once, to preclude another clean sweep for the team.

John Dickson

Sports extra



Clive Skilton beat Dennis Priddle (above) by 0.3s, but was 5 mph slower across the line.

DRAG

Skilton takes it in the rain

Rain once again played the major role in the Hot Car/208 Grand Nationals at Blackbushe over the weekend, and the club and promoters must be getting very sore indeed with bad weather at nearly all their events this year. Rain fell nearly all morning so that what brave attempts there were at qualifying ended in meaningless times and not a few hairy moments. By midday conditions had improved slightly so that the street classes could run and help to dry the track, but the large pools of water that remained made it a risky business for the more powerful cars.

Because of this, the excellent four car Top Fuel field could only run one at a time in the drier lane, and Clive Skilton was the first to shine with the Castrol car that he took through with a fine smoky 7.1 s at 206 mph. Minutes later Roz Prior showed that she too could run well and clocked an 8.3 s that was only slow because of a long trail of tyre smoke, but right up there at 187 mph through the finish.

Malcolm Quick, who was subbing for Roland Pratt (who had a sprained ankle) ran his first quarter in the "Revolution Three" car at a mid nine, but when his goggles misted up he had to shut down. Lastly Dennis Priddle,

with his new Donovan installed in the Mr Revell car laid down another impressive smoke trail that netted a 7.4 s but at a 211 mph speed, one of his fastest ever.

That was it from the big fuellers, although Ed Shaver made a promising run in the Castrol funny car at 9.5 s/150 mph which included dodging the puddles, but the car looked and sounded far better than it had before and could at last be well on the way to some good times. Of the Top Dragsters present, Tony Frome at one time had the fastest run of the day with his injected Pontiac. After having installed a new cam the day before the event, he stormed off the line to a strong 10.6 s that was near his best ever but as with so many other runs, was curtailed by the water to a speed in the 120 mph range. He repeated this time later against Ray Hoare, who made a perfectly judged start with his smaller 292 cubic inch Chevrolet, and led all the way with a 9.6 s to 10.6 s for the bigger car. Gerry Andrews took a bye at 8.7 s/164 mph in the Stones' 440 Chev rail when things had improved a bit tractor-wise, and he went on to beat Hoare in the final with 8.8 s/161 mph, to 10.23 s/133 mph.

In Senior Dragster, Tony Anderson ran some remarkably quick times including a 9.3 s

with his 2.5 Daimler rear engined rail to get to the final, which he took with a slower 11.62 s/138 mph over Jim Rowatt's small Chevy car that was also slower than before with a 12.3 s at 127 mph.

In Senior Comp, the class was brightened by the addition of Lawrence Burn in his 350 Chev Avenger that promises some really good times. His 15 s run in the morning was hardly typical of the car's performance though, and he was unlucky to break a half-shaft when running against Dickson's Duckhams Popular in the first round after a good start. Dickson's big Oldsmobile had a tappet break off half way through the run and he slowed to a 13 s, but no damage was done and he was ready to face Clive Page in the new "Panic." Now considerably longer and lower than their late Fiat, the car still has the carburetted 427 Chev and ClutchFlite trans, but now under a "T" body and with a wheelbase of 108 inches, around a foot longer than before. His first run, a bye, was an 11.4 s, far from the car's (or at least the engine's) 9 s potential, but a threat to the recent leader in the class, Dick Sharpe in the "Dorset Horn" Pontiac. He too went through with a bye, and then a win over Bob Deichen's 4.5 Daimler, but Dickson went out with a red light to Page to leave the two fastest cars to face each other. Unfortunately the race never took place, because of the late fall of rain that stopped several finals from being decided.

One that did, however, was the Middle Comp eliminator, the first round of which had an upset when the famed "Strip-teaser" went out with engine trouble to Alan Sherwin's Jag T. Glen Searle in the Fiat/Chev he shares with Pete Lane for driving lost his ignition on a bye run and restored to a long push to get through to the next round, and some 306 s later he was through, only to get left at the line by Cardy's Jag/Imp. Pete Smith went on to win the class with the Sachs Motors sponsored Jag Rochdale with a 12.8 s to 13.3 s for Keith Harvie's nice Rover/Buick Vauxhall bodied funny-type car.

One of the closest runs of the day came in Top Street when regular Ivan Fryer just edged out newcomer Dennis Wheatley with a 14.1 s/199 mph for his 351 Mustang to 14.3 s/97 mph for Wheatley's 440 Charger. In Super Street Dennis Stone showed his boot to Mustapha Erol's big Camaro with two wins out of two, the last being a 12.8 s to 13.3 s as the rain was starting to fall again.

JOHN DICKSON'S



DRAG RACING

June was the busiest month yet in drag racing, with meetings at Long Marston, Silverstone, Santa Pod, and Wroughton, then back to the Pod for the first weekend of July. Within these five events, two of which were Internationals, some sensational times and races took place.

The long Marston event proved to be hampered by the bumpy surface, which stopped any really fast runs, although Gerry Andrews achieved times only a little off his usual with the Stones' Top Dragster. His 8.66s was enough to beat Roz Prior, who was competing in her last event in the Age Machine rail before switching to Top Fuel. Dennis Priddle was also using his favourite engine for the last time in the STP Funny, as the Prior team had bought it to go in the renamed 'Mr Six'—now the Accles and Pollock backed 'Fast Lady'. His runs in the car were against the 'London Heavy' Pro-Stock with a two second handicap, but with the bumps shorting out the mag as the body flexed and shook, only his last run, a smokey 9 second half pass, was anything like normal.

By the time the big Silverstone International came up a couple of weeks later, the car had a new engine put together to do battle with the two visiting Swedish Funnies, the 427 Chev Volvo of Leif

Darbach and the Hemi Opel of Bjorn Anderson. Both of them qualified with times in the eights behind Priddle's 7.7s, but the terminal speeds of 180 plus were much the same for all three cars. In a day when the Swedes received their soundest beating in the years that they have been coming over, Priddle took both his runs in the three car round-robin to notch up the FC title for the UK. Top Fuel also proved to be a British benefit, with John Anderson from Sweden out-horsepowered by the British cars; Clive Skilton ran a best of 6.6s to take low e.t. and the win.

Skilton's terminal speed of 220mph was one of the two that beat the incredible 'Tee Rat' altered for top speed honours. Running against Mike Hall's 'Bantam' altered, Stone had qualified the car in the low eights at 192mph and followed this up with two progressively faster runs of 194 and 198mph, devastating the Chrysler-powered opposition. Both runs dipped into the sevens for the first time outside America in this class.

The meeting as a whole was the finest yet run by the NDRC and was arguably the best event this year—certainly better than the Santa Pod International not long after, which, compared to the admittedly hard to follow event last year with Nancy, Schumacher, Murphy and Johnson from the USA, was a disappointment.

DLT took his first win at Silverstone in the Stones' Super Street Escort when he beat Dave Rose's Barracuda with an 11.99s run. Shortly before the event the car received sponsorship from Precision Tapes and in the following weeks got down to a low of 11.3s before destroying the gearbox for the third time. For the Santa Pod Internat. The

team had fitted the 'Easy Ridin' TurboClutch gearbox to solve the transmission problem once and for all.

Between the two big meets were two others: a minor event at Santa Pod and a re-run at Wroughton, which once again was hit by rain for most of the day so that the NDRC had to lay everything on in a four hour period—a task that they managed very well. Roz Prior was to have debuted her rail at this track, but was unable to run when her son had to be taken to hospital following a fall. When Dennis Priddle tried the car out nearly every pushrod bent, for some mysterious reason, so Clive again took the win with the quickest run this year—6.62s.

The next event, the following weekend, was the fifth International at Santa Pod, as previously mentioned, and whereas last year's similar meeting mustered eight Top Fuel cars, this year there were but two, both Santa Pod team cars. Mike Hutcherson did well to record a 7.8s in the 'Houndog' car, but 'Firefly' was being driven by Pete Crane, who will shortly be running a rear-engined fueller himself with help from Santa Pod. For some inexplicable reason they decided to use the meet as a practice session for Pete, who would have been far happier trying the car out on his own during the week, so that of half a dozen runs, only the one with Herridge behind the wheel could be called worthwhile. Learning to drive any fueller, let alone 'Firefly', is no mean task and should not be attempted while people have paid good money to watch racing—in any case, it wasn't just the spectators who were getting a little annoyed.

The two Santa Pod Funnies put on a good show, though.

After several troubled attempts both Haywood and Herridge ran two terrific races, of which the second was the best. Herridge stormed past Haywood's slowing 7.11/160 with a 7.00 at 202mph, the quickest Funny Car race yet in this country.

Priddle was unable to attend after a workshop accident had put him out of action for a couple of weeks, but Revell's new 1/16 scale model of the 'Mr Revell' fueller was just coming on sale, the first yet of an English car, so at least the spectators could take home the model for their mantelpieces!

The Swedes did rather better than they had at Silverstone, taking both the win and runner up in Middle Comp. with Anders Lantz' 427 Chev/Plymouth and Svente Erickson in his infamous 440 Jeep. In Senior it looked as if Bo Stafberg would do the trick with his 'Gas Rat' altered, but in a tremendous final Dick Sharpe strapped a hole shot on him, 10.7 to 10.4, with his A35 'Poncho'. Johnny Johnson took Super Street with his 'Vette' when both Dennis Stone and Dave Rose failed due to a variety of problems, the big 427 pushing the car to 11.2s times all weekend.

On the Pro-Stock front, the two 'Heavy' cars continued to trot out mid-nine second runs with almost boring consistency, Adrian Yorke's Duster hitting a best of 9.4 at 146mph. Poor Gary Goggin was troubled by first an engine that refused to rev and then gearbox problems, but even when his Camaro was 'pulling like a 9.8 run', the 'Heavy' just walked away from him. With two Sox and Martin men flown in for the weekend to help sort the cars, the result was inevitable; Gunne Backe was left with a 10.7 that was his best run yet in England in his Camaro.

flimsy-looking pair of light-weight spoked motorcycle wheels, in marked contrast to those at the rear, where a pair of 15" diameter wheels are shod with giant 16" wide Goodyear slicks which give ultimate grip on the tarmac strip. Tyre pressures are an incredibly low 4 psi, again to provide traction.

There is no gearbox between the engine and the rear axle, just direct drive to the limited-slip differential. The clutch is a very special unit, having three drive plates which are designed to slip as the car comes off the line, but to lock up solid a short distance along the track, thus avoiding wheelstands while getting maximum traction. Tremendous heat is generated in the clutch, so a thick steel shield is used to protect the driver should the plates disintegrate. Driving a 'fueler' is not the most comfortable of occupations. With only a small amount of suspension at the front end of the car, provided by a torsion bar, and a solidly mounted rear axle, the ride is anything but smooth as the



All things bright and beautiful... Part of the dragster's fancy paint job. Below, right: Aerofolia are fitted by the exhaust pipes to add downthrust at high speed. Below, left: 16 inch wide slicks provide the sticky grip.



Above: The "bug-catcher" and "blower" which feed and force the air-fuel mixture into the engine. Below: Flimsy lightweight-spoked front wheels provide the steering.



intrepid pilot is pounded by vibration and the terrific 'g' force of acceleration, despite being firmly strapped in.

The safety harness is just one of a number of items of safety equipment. Before each run Dennis dresses in his multi-layer Nomax fire suit and crash helmet. The face-mask incorporates air filters because the nitro fuel gives off a toxic vapour. Suited up and looking like something from outer space, Dennis is protected in the car by a wrap-around roll cage in case of an accident. There is also a Freon fire extinguisher which automatically puts out any engine fires. To complete the safety equipment, twin rear hydraulic disc brakes and a crossform braking parachute slow the car safely to a halt after every 1-mile dash.

So, as you can see, although speed and acceleration is the aim it is not achieved at the expense of safety.

After looking at what it takes to make a top dragster we asked Dennis what he experiences while driving the

quickest accelerating car in Europe to which he replied "I'm so busy 'feeling' the engine, clutch, and how the tyres are performing, that I have little time to consider what's happening around me!" A startling revelation if you've travelled in an ordinary road car at over 100mph and experienced the thrill of the kerb flashing past at a fantastic rate, let alone at over 210mph!

There's no doubting though that Dennis enjoys the thrill of drag racing, despite the sheer hard work of preparing the car for every race. With the aid of his competent pit crew, everything is checked and double checked to ensure that when the green light flashes Dennis will accelerate cleanly to another Top Eliminator victory in the red and blue guided missile. Win or lose, there is no second chance—just six incredibly short seconds deciding the result, and Dennis aims to make sure that the win light flashes in his lane every time, whether driving his fueler or funny car.

Dennis drops the clutch as the "Christmas Tree" lights flash "GO" and the rear slicks crinkle up as the Donovan engine unleashes its power to catapult dragster and driver down the strip... The rear-mounted parachute pack and disc brakes slow the dragster at the end of its run.

Photo: Keith Lee



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Smoke pours off the giant 16in diameter, 12in wide Goodyears.

JOHN DICKSON'S



DRAG RACING

With nearly a month between meetings in late July and the Blackbushe Grandnationals in August, which as I write have yet to take place, drag racing has had a good long layoff. This may have been a good thing for both the competitors, not forgetting their overstrained machines, and possibly the public, who can always have too much of a good thing, becoming over-exposed to racing.

The last meeting at Santa Pod was most remarkable for the debut of Nobby Hill's new rear-engined fueller 'Houndog', the team's most immaculate creation to date. Based on Tony Nancy's car seen last year, the power comes from an Ed Pink-built 'elephant' motor of some 480 cubes—that's eight litres, European-style. It also has a Lenco reverser and two-speed. Whilst racing Allan Herridge in 'Firefly', it came off the line like a rocket, leaving the other car by yards as it (Firefly) 'wound itself up for the launch'. As he described it later, driver Mike Hutcherson was so stunned by the difference between this and the older 392-powered car that he shut down well before the finish but still notched an impressive 7.3s. Meanwhile the 426 motor in the other car shut itself down by throwing rods out in every direction, the last run for an engine that has given good

service for some two years.

Not long afterwards Harold Bull, who was the terror of the Middle Dragster ranks a couple of years ago with his 9.7s. BMC rail, but now driving the old 'Houndog' rail, lost his car through the traps and crashed heavily into the guard rail in the braking area. After a long bumpy ride the car came to a halt with Bull shaken but unhurt, and the car a total write-off apart from the motor, which was frayed around the edges but generally o.k. Before the day was out, the latter was to find a new home in Phil Elson's altered; he lost his own 392 whilst running Dave Stone in the final when two rods let go. Stone went on to win with his quickest ever run at 7.1s, but a mere 163mph; the bump in the braking area was giving him trouble to the extent of a bent chassis, so each run ended with an early shut-down to save further damage.

Other action included the first eight second run for Liz Burn in the old Roz Prior dragster, when she turned in a good 8.9s against Gerry Andrews in the final of Top Dragster which he took with an 8.2s. Her times have fallen steadily since she took over the car, so it can be only a matter of time before she is down to the low eights the car is capable of.

Following yet another rules meeting a few days prior to the event, the Super Street and Top Street classes were amalgamated, with a handicap, to run the two against each other. The idea of this was to attempt to promote bigger fields of stockers, which have been thin on the ground this year, and, although in itself a commendable aim, once again practice showed that the answer isn't that simple. In theory, the fact that each car ran under its own class record handicap should have been fine, but of course in every class there is one car ahead of the rest, so that the Super Street cars were left with an almost impossible task. Mustapha Errol was the first to fall, with a handicap of some one and a half seconds, to Bob Oram's E-type, which won with an easy 12.6s to 11.2s.

Dennis Stone in the Precision Tapes Escort fell with an 11.4s to Oram's 12.4s, whilst Al O'Connor, who with the installation of a strong

Oldsmobile axle and more suitable gearing was running quicker than ever at 11.5s, fell with an 11.7s to 12.7s for Melvin Wooding's nicely turned-out 289 Falcon. Wooding went on to win, with a super close 12.40s to 12.48s for Oram.

The week before this event, the embryo drag strip at Crossland Moor, Huddersfield, put on its first event, and although at this moment only an eighth of a mile long, the meeting drew over 3,000 people from the drag-hungry North, with a good entry of local cars and some big names from 'down South'. Clive Skilton and Roz Prior both ran their rails, with Skilton's car dipping into the four second range for the distance, whilst Ed Shaver ran a strong five in the Castrol funny. All who went said that the event was commendably well run for a first attempt and had the friendly open feel about it that has perhaps been missing lately.

More meetings are planned for the Pennine Raceway and anyone interested in either spectating or racing can find out more about it by contacting Steve Murty at Hebden Bridge 3651.

Over the first weekend in August the Swedish National meeting took place at Mantorp Park and it was ironic that it was at this foreign venue that cars from Santa Pod and Clive Skilton raced at the same track. As it happened they didn't actually race each other, for the two big Funnies went out early, Herridge with a broken reverser and Haywood with a red light, so that Dennis Priddle took his STP Avenger through with a 7.7s victory over Bjorn Anderson's Opel Manta which shut off to a 10.0s run.

Skilton took his old car, as the Castrol rail was at Olympia, and took the win from the 'Valkyrian' of John Anderson when that, too, suffered engine trouble. His 7.0s, 202mph qualifying runs were also the quickest of the weekend, whilst Roz Prior in the Accles and Pollock 'Fast Lady' went well to record a 7.5s run, her best at that time.

The many street classes were dominated by the Pro Stock action, which saw a clean sweep for the team with Colin Mullen taking the 'Heavy' through for another win in the nines, over

the 'Trollit's Toy' Camaro of Bo Hollstrom.

On return to England, Clive put both his dragsters and the Castrol Funny on the market, together with a variety of engines, both stock and stroked 392's as well as the Donovan. All are reasonably priced, so anyone looking for a way into Top Fuel racing could be at the wheel of a six second car for under three grand, with assistance thrown in for running it. Clive wants to race with a new car in the States over the winter months, which would give the sport another new car for next year if the current ones are sold.

At long last I have been at the wheel again, with 'Good Vibrations', my '51 Pop, powered by a 474 cube Olds motor that was to have been the biggest engine on the strips until all these giant Ed Pink motors started cropping up. Running in Senior Comp, the class dominated by the Pages' 'Panick' until it crashed and since then by Dick Sharpe's 'Dorset Horn' Poncho A35, the car had about three meetings of singular failure before it started to perform, the first being at Silverstone. An oil leak of major proportions came when we discovered that the crank seal was in fact somewhat larger than the crank, so that meeting came to nought.

Trying to sort out the injection, which being second-hand was not set up for the car as they usually are, took another couple of meets, after which, with a change of plugs of some four ranges, the car suddenly seemed to wake up off the line. Actually I was so amazed after the previous runs that I went straight into third and then shut off when the car filled with smoke near the finish. Convinced that the motor had come apart already, I returned to the pits to find that it was in fact the tyres growing into the wings that had caused the smoke, so after a quick bit of work with the hacksaw it was ready to run again.

More minor problems followed and at time of writing the best we have managed is an 11.7s at 117mph—hardly enough to set the world on fire, let alone beat Dick, or Dave when he is out again, but we should see a ten eventually.

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