

VI SELBY

A LIFE IN MOTORSPORT

At the request of friends and Speedscene magazine, Vi Selby, President of the Nottingham Sports Car Club, goes back in time and shares her memories of motor sport over the years

Our interest in motorsport started in 1969, when my late husband, Keith, and I were caught up in traffic near Thruxton circuit and drove into the circuit for a break. It was a F2 meeting and we watched Jochen Rindt win his race. This was a new interest and our favourite formulae became Formula Ford and F5000. Other interesting events included Richard Noble demonstrating his Thrust 1 Land Speed Record challenger at Brands Hatch, Jackie Stewart with the 6 wheeled Tyrrell at Mallory Park, a Radio 1 Fun day at Mallory with the Bay City Rollers in 1976 (but not the same day!) and Formula Ford Festivals at Brands Hatch. I remember an invite to lunch with David Purley and his family in their LEC caravan at Mallory – there were no motor homes in those days!

I was widowed in 1976 and, in 1977, after realising spectating was not for me a mutual friend who was a racing driver, suggested I volunteered to marshal. I joined the BMRMC, had very good training, chose the startline and with encouragement from my family was on my way.

After watching Donington Park develop during 1975/76, May 28th 1977 was a special event when it held its first car race organised by Nottingham Sports Car Club and sponsored by Else Motor Group. There was an issue with the local Ramblers Association who had asserted their rights to regain access to a 'historic footpath' which crossed the circuit. This was not on our timetable of events so, to allow the event to go ahead, it was listed as 'A Motor Trial' but this excluded single seaters so unfortunately they had to withdraw.

The first Croix two day meeting was interesting as 14 marshals/officials travelled by ferry to the event with only 13 passports but somehow we all went through.

I also witnessed the day at Silverstone in 1977 when David Purley had his horrendous accident at Becketts when travelling at 108 mph with his throttle stuck open he hit the barriers and survived a g force of 180. I visited him regularly in Northampton Hospital which were sometimes unruly affairs with visits from the late Roger Clark, wife Goo and family, Mike Earle etc. to cheer him up and many 'messages' written on his plaster casts! I later stayed in Midhurst when he was transferred there to be nearer to home. Returning to racing was not a success when he found he couldn't control the pedals at speed due to the weight of the metal plates in his legs. It was sad that, after serving in the Parachute Regiment and surviving his racing



Vi Selby by Steve Miles

career, he lost his life while flying his Pitts Special which he enjoyed so much.

David was well known, of course, for his brave attempts to save the life of Roger Williamson during the Dutch Grand Prix in 1973 for which he was awarded the George Medal.

In 1979 and early 80's my daughter and myself worked for a race driver who competed in a Formula Ford PRS and later in F3 in a Ralt RT3, transporting the car to compete at circuits across the UK from Aintree to Lydden. If it was a weekend event I towed my caravan and Lynne brought the car in a borrowed transporter (driver only drives race car!). Brands Hatch and the FF Festival was not a favourite event what with negotiating the North Circular Road and heavy traffic in the pre M25 days. Once, I recall two of his Championships were running on the same day (at 750MC Mallory and Donington) so we worked out a tight schedule and competed in both with the same car, making four journeys between the venues including gear ratio changes too! A hectic day and it was raining to boot. He won the 750MC race and clinched the Championship. I enjoyed the work and soon became familiar with ride heights, tracking, tyre pressures and temperatures, torque settings for wheel nuts, oversteer, understeer etc. occasionally a grumpy driver and, I almost forgot, polishing the car, but didn't 'qualify' for overalls. It was all good fun at the time.

In 1983 I was invited by a friend, a NSCC member, to an EGM, convened to wind up the company apparently due to lack of finance and organisers. Three attendees unknown to each other volunteered to have a go to recover it. There were no assets to speak of and approximately £700.00 in a Building Society account. So, Des Richardson, Martin Brobyn, myself and a fourth volunteer took on the task.

I had no experience of sprints but Des and Martin



Early days in Formula Ford on the Donington startline

organised mail shots, visits to events and recruited members, I took on the jobs of membership, treasurer, finding officials for events etc. and spent much time reading the Blue Book! Our first event was September 1984 at Curborough. I had now acquired a Gestetner copier - complete with ink and a turning handle, and yes 'Spin Off' was created. The (antique) copier was quickly updated to an electric one. In 1985 we had 128 members and in 1987 we had 34 competitors in our Championship and I think we had nine hard working committee members. I was Secretary of the Meetings and for many years events secretary too.

Meanwhile I had been upgraded to Chief Marshal and was still volunteering for events with AMOC, BDC, HSCC, 750MC, 8Clubs, JCC, BARC, BRSCC and Jim Russell Racing and at venues including Mallory, Donington, Silverstone, Rockingham, Pembrey, Thruxton and Cadwell as well as training new marshals for the discipline. Through 1994 to 1997 we travelled to Croix en Ternois (in the Pas de Calais region near St Omer) with HSCC and I was startline marshal at British Grands Prix from 1990 to 2001 and was nominated as member of the Dog House Club - quite an enjoyable experience for a marshal. In 1997 I accepted an invite to the BMMC 40th Anniversary Dinner held in Warwick. In 2000 and again in 2006 was awarded the Sylvia Edwards Trophy for Midland Region marshal of the year. Sylvia and husband, Lawrie, were my mentors in the early marshalling years.

The first Croix two day meeting was interesting as 14 marshals/officials travelled by ferry to the event with only 13 passports but somehow we all went through. Three of us covered the paddock and assembly and then 'sprinted' to the startline to grid up, then the pit wall (railings), gantry and flags. Fortunately these were all in close proximity. It was great fun and well organised except for the first race when no one remembered to lap chart and the competitors had an extra lap. The circuit owner, a jovial, enthusiastic gentleman brought us all a complimentary packed lunch and bottle of beer.

In 1992 Bruce Widdowson, a NSCC member, introduced the Club to Dr Raynes, the landowner of Thoresby Park and a motor car enthusiast offered his park available for our sprints. Following an inspection by MSA we were granted a Track Licence to run sprints in the park. Our two day events have proved very popular and in the early days

we were running 100 entries plus some 'hopeful' reserves. There is an enormous amount of work involved transforming the park into a motorsport venue and our club, marshals and helpers work very hard for 2/3 days to make the event possible. I 'book' all the officials and support services and our reliable 'team' of marshals are always willing to volunteer for all our events.

On May 17th 1998 the NSCC, with assistance from the British Motor Sprint Association, organised a sprint at Donington Park. Di Hardy and her ES Team were in Race Control and the late Robert Fearnall, Circuit Manager gave us his support. I was Secretary of the Meeting and my daughter Lynne who did weeks of preparation was Chief Marshal and with Mike Mayfield, Gordon Peters and our professional team of marshals it ran well. We had 240 entries with three competitors on the track at timed intervals so, with a few re runs we had almost 1000 runners off the startline. Before the first runs we had three uninvited guests - drugs officers, who appeared in Race Control,



Judy Parker



To see all the Sprints & Hillclimbs taking place around the country visit our Speed event Calendar Page



Final preparations in F3 at Cadwell



Vi with Nigel Mansell at Rockingham

asked for a programme and picked out a number of competitors at random to carry out their normal procedure of checking. Very inconvenient for those who were all 'kitted' up for practice! A fantastic day's motorsport and worth all the weeks of planning and organising by the club members. I fear that noise restrictions and lack of finance will prevent a repeat of the event.

I was a supporter member of the new Rockingham circuit and enjoyed the whole organisation there. I was startline marshal at the Inaugural meeting 12th/13th May 2001 and the Coy's Historic Festival 27th/28th May which was the most memorable event I have ever attended, with ASCAR, Indy Cars, Transcontinental Saloons, Brooklands cars and bikes etc. all competing. Nigel Mansell opened the event, arriving in a Champ car with hand held high and suspended from a helicopter" and landed behind the pits complex. Then, with precise timing, the real Nigel in a real car drove down the pits to cheers from the spectators! Many not getting the joke!

The first car race meeting at Mallory Park was held on the 21st May 1956 and was organised by the NSCC. In 2006 the NSCC organised a 50th Anniversary event at the venue with a display of Classic and Vintage cars and a parade on the circuit during the lunch break. A similar event followed in 2007 and in 2008 it was a celebration event of 52 years of Mallory Park and 25 years for the owner Chris Meek. These events were all supported by our marshals who all worked so hard with the setting up and running on the day also the clearing up and packing away.

In 2009 we added another venue to our calendar and organised an event at MIRA, a very popular meeting which we ran in 2010 and 2011 but, due to high costs and low entries, we couldn't continue. We are currently just running the Curborough double lap in July and the Thoresby Park weekend in September and are hoping for an increase in membership and competitors to boost our numbers. We are fortunate to have a great team of marshals who support us every year and run our events with their professionalism which results in safe racing and a friendly atmosphere and new marshals are always welcome.

I always enjoy my marshalling and have trained many marshals to keep safe and enjoy the startline discipline with me. It is said that the startline can be a dangerous part of the circuit (as is any part if care is not taken) which I

have twice had cause to remind me. At Mallory Park, when positioning my driver to his grid place, the car behind me (nearer to the front of the grid) was trying to position himself and selected reverse instead of first. His rear wing pitched me forward but fortunately without injury. At Silverstone I was standing on the grid after the green flag lap and displaying the yellow to hold the cars for their start, I saw warning flags and heard whistles blowing and ahead of the pack flying out of Woodcote comes this Formula Ford at race speed, flying straight past and only just missing me! He was reprimanded by the MSA who kindly came down to ask if I was OK and relieved him of his licence after the race. One hit and one miss in 37years - not a bad record.

I have greatly reduced the number of days circuit marshalling and I retired from my full time work three years ago but I intend to carry on enjoying the club events and hopefully the popular 'Plum Pudding' Boxing Day meeting at Mallory Park if it returns this year. There are many memories from my marshalling and the invites to celebrations and memorials to our racing greats at Mallory Park and Donington Park. The BMMC have been very supportive and, in recognition, awarded me the Gold Badge in 2006. This is a BMMC recommended award to a senior official for their service and I was told that it was the first time it had been awarded to a lady recipient although I stand to be corrected on this.

I made my own personal commitment to NSCC in 1983/84 and chose to continue giving my best in whichever discipline I took on from those small beginnings in 1983 and I am still (stubbornly) passionate for its continued success. I have, as they say, been there, done it and yes, got the T shirts during my time in motorsport but more important than all this I have made many good and long term friends and I have great respect for all who volunteer, work and contribute and the drivers who compete in all forms of motorsport.



At Silverstone for the GP