

## Yorkshire Centre

### Harewood Past & Present –

## Where Yorkshire Motorsport has always been on the Up and Up!



Main Photo: Tony's brother John at Harewood in 1968, in his MGB. Inset Photo: John Cooper from Cleckheaton approaching Farmhouse Bend at Harewood in his "Team Opus" Austin Healey Sprite at a meeting during 1967

It's been a long, cold winter but now that the first green shoots are appearing it's time to look forward to the inaugural event of 2011 at Harewood Speed Hillclimb – The Spring National event on Sunday, April 17th. Overlooking the lovely Wharfe Valley between Leeds and Harrogate, the Hillclimb course boasts the longest permanent track in the country.

I attended the majority of events during 2010 as I was engaged in carrying out press relations activities on behalf of Harewood Speed Hillclimb. I knew the venue well, as I had been a keen supporter of my older brother John, back in the 60's, when he was campaigning a variety of modified sportscars at hill climbs and sprint meetings throughout the north of England.

We were fortunate to come from a motorsport-orientated family. Dad had been a motor cycle trials and car endurance run competitor in the 1920s and 30s, while building a career in the motor trade, which by the late '60s had grown to a couple of sizeable garages in Cleckheaton selling and servicing British Leyland models. Dad also specialised in supplying 'one off' more exotic motors to the local industrialists and mill owners, so the normal fare of Austin and Morris vehicles in the showroom was often spiced up with the odd Jaguar, Bentley, AC, Porsche or Jensen.

I was doubly fortunate, as I was lucky enough to inherit my brother's hand-me-down cars, starting with a mildly modified Austin Healey Sprite and eventually moving

up to an immaculate and rather scary MGB roadster, complete with racing tyres, chromed roll cage, highly "breathed on" engine and, most importantly, a truly earth-shattering stereo system (well it was the 'swinging' '60s!).

Perhaps all the added speakers weren't the most sensible items to be lugging around in a car intended for outright speed, but they proved very popular with the mini-skirted young ladies of the day, which to me was a rather higher priority than shaving a few tenths from the 0-60mph performance - and with petrol costing around 25p PER GALLON the joys of top-down motoring on roads far quieter than those of today could be savoured to the full.

Both John and I had some memorable visits to Harewood. He was very impressed with the technicalities of the course and I was pleased that after the events the social delights of the Scotts Arms at Sicklinghall were a brief and very pleasant drive away. Harewood was never especially rewarding to John and I believe a third in class in the MGB was his best ever result there, although he did enjoy class wins at the both the Castle Howard and Baitings Dam hillclimb courses. The models of sportscars on track 40-odd years back are still very much in evidence today, including Mini Coopers, Austin Healeys and MGs large and small, E-Type and XK150 Jaguars, Lotus Elans, Porsche 911s, even a stunning Ford GT40, so at the time it did feel like a real golden age of innovative car design and excitement. Drivers such as Ken Lee in his Mini Cooper S and Alan Staniforth in his Terrapin were setting class records on a

regular basis, although the track was a good bit shorter than it is today, as a fast and twisty downhill section now challenges competitors before they power across the original start line, but the scenic beauty of the hillclimb's superb location remains exactly as it was.

Now the organisation behind the events is far more professional, with a state of the art video coverage facility, digital speed displays, in-paddock motor shows and an army of enthusiastic, orange-clad marshals to control the action. The spectacle is also much more interesting, with up to three cars on the course at any one time. Perhaps best of all is the fact that Harewood now hosts rounds of the National Championship, plus numerous single-make and car club series during the season. The weekend the Ferrari Owners Club turned out in force last year left a lasting impression on me, as the cars were not just stunning to look at (because spectators enjoy full access to the paddock, the competing cars can be examined at the closest quarters possible) but also they sounded absolutely glorious as they charged up the course.

Through business connections I had become friends with local competitor, Richard Vaughan, and I spent time with him on each of my visits during 2010. He'd just moved up from a Lotus 7 lookalike to a single seat OMS Suzuki and seeing how he came to grips with this very rapid, though extremely skittish car, as the season developed was quite fascinating and ultimately very successful.

On a slightly downbeat note, it struck me as strange that the pleasure of spectating at Harewood is still, almost half a century on, completely dependent on the whims of the weather. I was surprised to find that there is still not one place to shelter where it's warm and dry if it's a wet day. I was delighted to sit in on a Driving School day last year and was very impressed with the event, which is centred on and controlled from, the farm buildings half way up the track. It seems a shame to me that these characterful buildings have not been developed to provide better facilities for spectators to retreat to in inclement weather, although doubtless there must be good reasons why this has not come about.