

Scott Moran closed the gap on championship leader Wallace Menzies with fourth and second place finishes at the wheel of the four litre Judd V8 powered Gould GR59J



Wiscombe Park British Hillclimb Championship Wins for Menzies and Summers

Elite hillclimbers battle testing weather conditions

Words and photos: GEOFF PICKETT

A two day meeting, which encompassed both Interclub and National status competitions, one of which featured the British Hillclimb Championships, piqued the interest of hillclimb enthusiasts in the lead-up to the club's biggest event of the year. There is always the debate as to who will perform well on the testing 915 metre course but this season there was the additional factor of a new tarmac surface. The Woolbridge meeting in April was on the old surface whilst the events in May ran with a pristine new top coat which appeared to enhance the levels of grip despite the short period of time between laying and being in use. The big question was would it lead to a new course record when the top driver and car combinations in British hillclimbing made their annual visit.

Intermittent rain, firstly during the Saturday practice sessions and then repeatedly across the weekend, presented the drivers and their teams with a dilemma as to tyre choice. Slicks, intermediates or full wets. Drivers competing in the classes where racing tyres are allowed, would likely make a choice between inters and deep treaded wets to supplement a set of slicks which are more widely used. However, there are numerous options from hand cut slicks through to deep block treads ideal for more extreme conditions.



Two Fastest Lady awards (Interclub events) for Shelley Deacon

Clive Stangle shared the Mitsubishi Evo 5 of Jim Herbert

A number of the single seater cars were fitted with intermediates/wets on the front and slicks to the rear. Whichever tyres were employed the prevailing damp conditions certainly showcased the skills of drivers across the classes but particularly those in the top division who were managing sizeable power outputs, admittedly with the aid of electronic traction control systems. For example, the Judd DB 4.0 litre V8 engine, which is used by at least five protagonists of the BHC, was originally developed as an engine suitable for private teams contesting endurance sports car races and produces 670 bhp. The track conditions banished thoughts of a new hill record from most minds.

For the National championship classes each day of the meeting featured two practice runs and one timed ascent, which for championship contenders, became the sole opportunity to qualify for the prestigious Top 12 Run-Offs, the first of which took place midway through Saturday afternoon. Sean Gould posted a superb run of 34.10s to become the fastest qualifier with Matthew Ryder, driving the same Gould GR59J with 4.0 litre Judd power, a mere one hundredth of a second in arrears. Championship leader Wallace Menzies languished down the order as eighth fastest qualifier and would therefore be the fifth car to run in the first Top 12 stanza as Ryder made the first climb so that the GR59J could be returned to the paddock, fuelled and prepared for driving partner Gould.



Rod Thorne claimed two class wins in five litre Rover V8 powered Pilbeam MP43 sports racer

Menzies, more used to being one of the last, if not *the* last, car to run excelled with his early call. Only beaten off the line by Alex Summers (one hundredth of a second) the Scotsman attacked the hill in his 3.3 litre Cosworth motivated Gould GR59M and stopped the clocks on 32.93s. With another seven drivers yet to go no one knew if that was a winning effort but we did know that a bottle of champagne would be travelling north to Alloa as a new entry in the record book had been written with Alex Summers' year old mark being bettered by a mere one hundredth of a second.

The erstwhile record holder finished second to menzies with his Cosworth Indycar (V8, turbocharged, 2650 cc) edged DJ Firestorm three tenths shy of the new record and fourteen hundredths up on Matthew Ryder who in turn bettered the Scotsman (GR59-Judd) by just three. The following day conditions were more uniformly wet and this led to a different mix of machines qualifying for the points shoot-out with the 1000cc Empire Evo of Tom Weaver, the 1070cc Suzuki GSXR powered Force TA in the hands of Stuart Bickley and the twin-turbo Hayabusa Gould GR59 conducted by the experienced Paul Haines all making the grade which on this occasion saw Menzies fastest the last to run, on 39.64s, which was the only sub 40 second qualifying time. Scott Moran was the first to better 40.00s in the Run-Off with a climb of 39.87s which benefitted from the best launch time of 2.39s, a full tenth better than Will Hall in a similar machine. Summers was the penultimate runner and gave it his all being fastest at The Esses timing split with 19.49s and chipping six hundredths off of Moran's effort by the top of the hill. The reigning champion came to the line - no stranger to these pressure situations. The Cosworth XD delivered off of the line.



Roadgoing Specialist Production class success for Richard Burnett in his Westfield Aerorace

Geoff Blake took Modified Specialist Production class honours in the Sunday event

Not the fastest (2.55s) but by The Esses it was all looking very familiar with the triple champion taking the virtual lead on a staggering time of 19.11s. The Sawbench hairpin was dealt with, neat and tidy as ever, full attack along Castle Straight and find the braking point for the left-hand Martini Hairpin but the final bend of the Wiscombe course and the finish line never saw the current master of British hillclimbing as Menzies bailed-out and directed the GR59 up the escape road. Nil points. As a result Moran has reduced the championship leader's advantage to thirty points but I guess a bookie would not be quoting attractive prices at this stage of the season.

Club members in the National event classes saw success with Peter Ede taking the honours in the Modified Specialist Production car division in his two-litre Dunnell powered Westfield and Steve Chaloner hustling his Citroen C11 in to second place behind Eric Morey's one litre turbocharged Hillman Imp on a climb of 52.34s. Jim Herbert in the Modified Series Production class in which they were up against the rapid 3.3 litre turbocharge Subaru Legacy campaigned by Damien Bradley and Steven Darley. The latter qualified for Sunday's Top 12 Run-off. Stangle finished fourth in class with Herbert taking the runner-up slot.

Meanwhile the Interclub status event catered for the regular drivers in the Tillicoultry Quarries (owned by Wallace Menzies) sponsored Wiscombe Park Championship. As Association of South Western Motor Clubs classes were not employed the results were determined by comparing each time against the appropriate class record and this system saw current TQ champion leader Julian Rinaldi taking two class wins at the wheel of his one litre turbocharged Ford Fiesta. Likewise Rod Thorne claimed a brace of victories with his Rover V8 powered Pilbeam MP43 which sported a new rear wing. In the Modified Specialist Production class Westfield SEiW driver Geoff Blake had to give best to the rapid Daterham piloted by Paul Reynolds in the Saturday event but twenty-fours later later it was Blake who was travelling home with the winner's trophy.

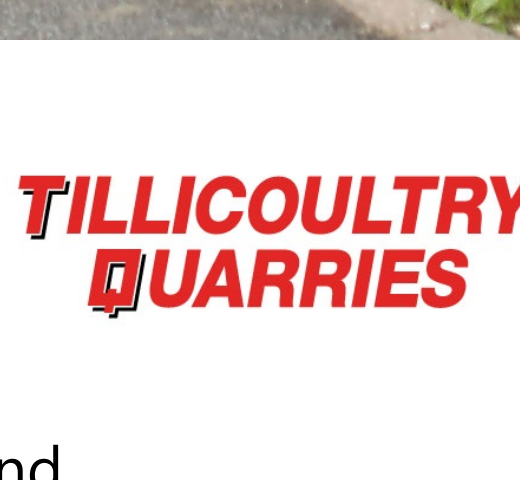
Peter Ramsden pirouettes his Toyota MR2 on the approach to The Gate. Points for artistic impression?



A broken driveshaft and associated problems sidelined Andrew Forsyth from the Saturday Racing Car contest the following saw Ed hollier best to his 1000 cc Tony Hill to Fastest Ben of the Day, a feat he repeated the following day. His best climb was 36.76s. Tony Wiltshire and Ben Wheeler took the other podium places in Ralt RT34 and Empire Evo 2 respectively. In the Sunday event a refettled OMS CF04 carried Forsyth to the class win ahead of the MWR Storm of Tom Williams.



Trevor Willis worked hard to keep the 3.2 litre Powertec engined OMS 28 in the mix with 5th and 6th place performances in the Top 12 Run-Offs



Full results of the Woolbridge at Wiscombe weekend are available at www.swtimekeeping.co.uk/times-from-2023



Wallace Menzies. Championship assault still on course despite a trip up the escape road.