

A SHORT HISTORY OF BRISTOL

Well not exactly, just one small aspect of that great city, namely the Bristol Italian AutoMoto Festival. Recently someone asked how it all started, which is a very good question as even though we are only eight years on from that point it all seems so long ago. Indeed, for some of us the Italian car road between there and here has been a rather tortuous one.

The idea for the event came from two members of the Alfa Romeo Owners Club Bristol & West Section, Nick and Martin Wood, who saw how successful the Bristol Bike Show



was and wondered if their format could be applied to a show for Italian cars in the same location. I have to admit that I was very sceptical at the time: Who, I wondered, would bring their cherished vehicles (especially the more exotic types) and display them on the streets of Bristol, something so different from the normal 'stately home + cars' format of so many vehicle gatherings.

Anyway, we somehow managed to interest the Council, got the word out and gathered a team of helpers from the Section and the Bristol Pegasus MC (who had a small display of their own) and the first event went ahead. While on much a smaller scale than the later full-capacity gatherings it was a remarkable success and confounded my misgivings, the only problem being the rain which went from initially being occasional to a full-on assault for the remainder of the day.

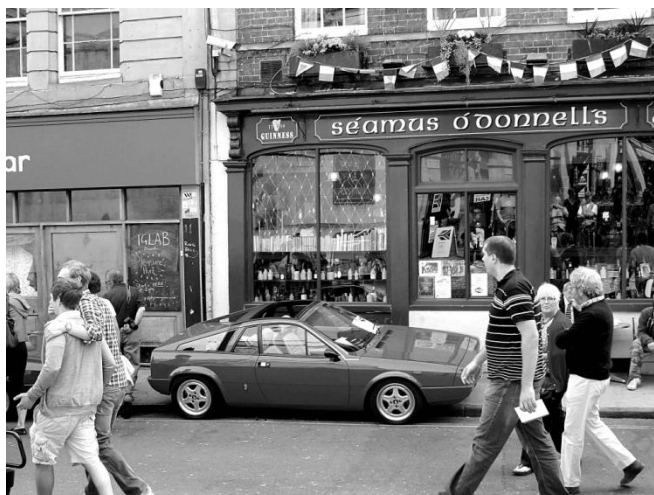
With the success of the first running a second the following year seemed to be the way to go, still with a 'just turn up' policy rather than any formal entry. At least it rained a bit less than the first year and while the Council were still not entirely happy with the rather loose organisation and consequent H&S implications, the attenders were up as the word spread that this day was something different - certainly within Britain- and just a bit special.

The event began by being held on the early May Bank Holiday Saturday, but after a couple of years Auto Italia decided to move their Brooklands show to the same day. We ran like that for a year or two,

but eventually decided that it was too much of a conflict for some of the entrants –and some of us too- and so brought BIAMF forward a week, where it has remained.

Every year saw some improvement in organisation based on experience, one of the most important being in year three with Paul first applied his management skills to provide full event planning. Apart from various procedures to keep the Council happy, this also allowed formal entries, the opportunity to supply them with directions, the use of specific entry points and limiting the number of attenders to the available spaces. This year also saw motorcycles and scooters invited for the first time and the name was changed from Bristol Italian Car Day to Bristol Italian Car Festival to increase its public appeal.

The streets we use have a capacity of circa 220 cars and a similar number of motorcycles, but the four-wheelers have to be allocated specific areas due to accommodating a featured marque, the numbers of certain makes/models and the irregular spaces provided by the ancient street plan. This is why regular attenders often find themselves in different places from year to year and why it is not always possible to park everyone together who would like to be.



The event grew in stature and size year on year and ended up being jointly organised by the B&W and Gloucester & South Sections on behalf of the AROC and many members were recruited for them over the years. However, in 2005 not only did B&W suddenly decide that they wanted to give up any involvement in the event but they also omitted to tell the rest of us, simply placing an item in the AROC magazine to the effect that the 2006 event would not take place! As all within G&S felt that the event should not simply be abandoned in this manner and as the G&S Secretary was anyway doing the majority of the show administration they issued a correction and the event carried on, being ably assisted by the Ducati O C Bristol Branch from 2007. They had come on board to coordinate the every-growing band of two wheelers and also to organise the now-famous mass ride-in.

After the AROC decided to victimise two members of G&S and then the whole Section during 2008, the event was independently run by the G&S Section of the newly-formed IAMC for 2009, when it also

finally got its own website. For 2010 it became an IAMC-organised event but with the Ducati O C still looking after the bikes and other helpers from the Italian car world chipping in, especially on the day when the assistance of all who marshal is greatly appreciated.

We are directly supported by Bristol City Council's Markets Division and they have certainly warmed to us in recent years, but even so the Markets Division has no influence over the Highways Division, who decided to allow the untimely relaying of the pavement in Small Street with a consequent five-car pile of rubble in 2009 and the erection of a huge amount of scaffolding in Corn Street/St Nicholas Street in 2010, which cost many more display spaces. On both occasions we only found out about these obstacles by chance very shortly before the big day, so we can only hope for better inter-departmental communication in future. Most traders in the area recognise the benefits of the extra footfall that the event generates, although there are always some who seem oblivious to this and others who arrange for deliveries after the 7am road closure, as the 'fruit & veg team' who assisted in Small street last year will recall!



So, eight years on and the event has been attracting capacity attendance on two wheels and four for years, along with many complementary reviews from a wide range of sources. We try to maintain the many things which make it a unique and friendly gathering in the face of ever-increasing bureaucracy, but the event management plan now runs to almost 50 pages and this year we not only had to apply to another Council department for a Festival Licence but even had to have two people on the information stand nominated to look after lost children and have criminal checks made against them. While over the years we have managed to make some substantial contributions to various charities, for the first time in 2010 we had to introduce a nominal entry fee due to the ever-growing costs of things like insurance and administration, but there will still be a worthwhile surplus to donate to Help For Heroes.

Many people freely give their time in connection with BIAMF and we are extremely grateful to them all, but as Paul allows its administration to take over his life for four months of the year he really deserves a special mention in closing, as without his work behind the scenes the day simply would not happen.

M J B