

GOODWOOD FESTIVAL OF SPEED

Having been to the Goodwood Revival meeting, I had always meant to get around to visiting the associated Festival Of Speed but had never done so. However, the prospect of a free ticket finally motivated me to head for the south coast on a damp July morning. Leaving Bristol at 7am, I was soon asking my companion if it was 7.30am or pm, such was the darkness of the skies. No doubt my having cleaned the car to remove the evidence of a recent speedy trip to Cornwall was responsible for this glitch in the run of otherwise very hot and sunny weather, but things soon took a turn for the better and before long we had to make the choice between sunroof or airconditioning.

All went well for about two hours with virtually no problems with the commuter traffic, but then a line of warning triangles on the A27 appeared on the satnav and we came to a halt within ten miles of our destination. The next two hours (!) were spent either stationary or crawling along and even when we finally gained access to the parking field the attendants were far too slow in relation to the volume of traffic: The BIAMF marshals could have taught them a few lessons! There being no indication of the pedestrian exit from the field we joined the others in a rather indirect route to that point, where a block of portaloos had been thoughtfully stationed. We were then faced with the choice of queuing for a ride to the entrance in a tractor and special trailer or joining many others and taking a chance that it would not be too far up the road. We chose the latter option, as it was far more pleasant to walk than stand after that length of time sitting in the car and found that it took exactly as long as it would have had we waited, which was fine.

The entrance was adjacent to the hillclimb collecting area and so we were thrust into the active part of the occasion straight away. Wanting more information I went to purchase a programme, but felt that £12 was totally exploitative –was this the Goodwood Festival of Greed?- aside from the impracticality of lugging around something the size and weight of an issue of Auto Italia

all day. Not being entirely ignorant of the cars present and using the many information boards proved an adequate substitute and we soon worked out the irregular geography of the site and were able to visit everything which we wanted to see with virtually no doubling back.

While the centrepiece of the event is the 'hillclimb' over which most of the entries run with differing degrees of competitiveness there were many trade stands, from an Audi display housed in a building which would have done credit to one of their dealerships to a large tented area for small businesses, where I found long-time AROC event supporters David Thomas and Richard Crompton plying their wares as an alternative to being refused space at National Alfa Day. Some manufacturers had chosen to emphasise their history or sporting heritage within their displays, but Alfa had strangely ignored both in its otherwise excellent stand where the current range was shown to great advantage in a deep metallic red identical that of the featured 8C coupe, the cabriolet version also being presented but in white.

It is certainly true to say that there are few events in the world which manage to collect such a diverse selection of interesting and historically important cars –and motorcycles- and with free access to virtually every exhibit it was something of a fantasy motor museum. Many were from factory collections and on the Italian front the Alfa museum sent a few choice exhibits -which pleasingly included a 33TT12 which was missing when I visited Arese- and there were also a number of significant Ferrari GP and sports models, although I suppose that every Ferrari is pretty significant! Famous motor sporting figures past and present were also to be seen and while grandstand tickets were extra there was free access to tiered viewing platforms. The 'Style et Luxe' section presented some fabulous rarities too, although some were probably deservedly so!

Being a Friday the crowds were thankfully not of weekend proportions and having spent a hot and dry day abrading Lord March's parkland and lawn while seeing some truly remarkable

machinery in action and close-to we made our way back to the car, pausing as a pre-war Auto Union arrived noisily at the collecting area followed shortly by Stirling Moss in a 1950's Mercedes of the type which he actually raced, this small occurrence symbolising what makes the event so special. We expected to queue to leave the car park, but it was still a full hour before we reached a clear stretch of the A27, although some spirited driving and only one other hold-up saw us in the marquee at the Chepstow Folk Festival by 10pm after a quick freshen up, winding down with some Festival Ale and reflecting on 295 miles of sometimes frustrating travel but a most interesting day.

I do not know if anything can be done to alleviate the traffic problems which the event causes, but I am surprised that anyone in the locality puts up with such a degree of disruption and also find it hard to believe that the traffic could not at least be better managed. This negative aspect of the event would certainly make me think twice about attending again, but it is the wonderful sights and sounds of the day which will surely remain the strongest memory.

MJB