Winter 2022

CUTTINGS

BRITISH LAWN MOWER RACING ASSOCIATION

Like the proverbial magic roundabout, here we are again – another year gone and another season in the bag! Although the passing of our founder, Jim Gavin, in January certainly started the year off on the wrong foot, the show did indeed go on, and ultimately it proved to be a season full of new venues, the return of crowds and the weather was fairly kind to us too, there was even a new face or two!

Speaking of years, as I'm sure you know, next year is a very important milestone for the club, as on the 23rd of June, way back in 1973, Jim organised our very first meeting. Confusingly, for the pedants amongst us, this does mean that we've just completed our 50th season, but as the club officially turns 50 years old next year we're looking forward to celebrating our birthday in 2023. This is sure to add some more fun to the season, culminating in what promises to be a supersized 12 hour.

The eagle-eyed amongst you may have noticed that whilst I promised four issues of Cuttings this year, the post season edition did not materialise. I'm sure everyone reading this can relate to my pushing the mower(s) into the van at Capel and from that point forwards, forgetting mowers and concentrating on everything else that had been put to one side over the season. I've come to realise that alongside other Committee business, preparing the Event Sheets and two mowers for each meeting, taking part and then writing it all up is just taking more time than I can spare. So, whilst the timing is not perfect given our plans for our 50th, I've taken the decision to stand down from the committee and consequently this will be my last Cuttings. I'm not sure what this means for the future of the newsletter exactly, but needless to say, if you fancy taking over and/or joining The Committee, please get in touch!

So on that bombshell, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year on behalf of The Committee – and with the shortest day behind us by the time you read this, let's look forward to our biggest season yet!

Graham

Rules & Regs

As always, the highlight of the committee calendar is the Rules and Regulations meeting, where we laboriously pore through the handbook, teasing out the typos we missed the year before and propose the rule changes that will need to be ratified at the AGM.

By comparison, this session was relatively brief, the stickiest subject being that of engines. This resulted in us agreeing that a dyno session is needed, which we're looking to hold before the new season begins.

No notable changes were proposed in any group but we have revised our rules regarding minors in race control and the press. The former because we are concerned over the number of unaccompanied children entering the "restricted area" (though we do love involving them), and the latter to ensure that they are properly signed on and thus covered by our insurance.

5 Piston Rings, 4 Connecting Rods, 3 French Wins, 2 T-drives,

And a Loncin 413!

We still have a small number of Loncin 413s available for sale to members.

A further order has been placed, but these will be subject to a slight price increase and are not expected until midway through the year.



3s and 4s at The Dip earlier in the season (John Airey)

Dyno Might…

By now you'll be bored of me mentioning the club's engine dyno, however it is currently undergoing a much needed overhaul following the failure of its original console.

Long story short, the original console cannot be repaired, which has left us with the option of buying a replacement or finding another way.

Having obtained a quote, we are currently exploring the latter option which involves an Arduino and a friendly boffin.

Our intention is to hold a test session before the start of next season. This will see retests of existing engines alongside some new to give us an up to date baseline and ensure we're comparing Apples with Apples.

The Honda GX390 is at the top of our list for testing and we're open to further suggestions—although someone will need to supply the engine for test with no guarantee of approval.

We currently have no intention of increasing our existing horsepower limit.

Cheddar

As has been the case more often than not over the past decade—the August Bank Holiday took us once again to Somerset. After such a long dry spell in the South East, many were shocked to arrive at a field containing green grass! Once again we were not attached to a show, but as in previous years, racing took place on Sunday and Monday with the field available Friday night and Saturday for camping, socialising, mower testing and seeking comfort in the juice of the apple.

Despite being cloudier than most had been used to over recent weeks (and indeed months), the weather was very good to us and once again dust became an issue, though luckily most of this blew into Dan Jones' tent rather than causing any major issues to the running of the event. We're also used to the ground being quite soft, liquid even—this year it was anything but!

In contrast with much of the season, turnout was relatively healthy, with eleven Group 4s hitting the track (though Billy Callow's Huffy expired in practice), seven Group 3s and six Group 2s.

Sue Avent and Rodge Knowlson took the helm on Sunday and this resulted in three things – the joker lap included a roundabout (which we've not seen for a few years), racing concluded with a cider relay race and the naughty spot was on duty! The race schedule itself took a fairly conventional path, in a clockwise direction, consisting five heat races, two British Championship rounds and concluding with an Eliminator race the aforementioned cider race. Once the pack had been whittled down to just two, the Eliminator culminated in a very close sprint between Sean Tanswell and Stuart Johnson, with Sean just pipping Stu to the win. As is customary, the cider race saw the field split into two teams, each completing one lap on the mower before negotiating an obstacle course on foot, downing a can of cider and tapping the next victim on the shoulder. As always, racing was clean, no cheating was observed(!), one team won, one team lost—but that's not really the point—smiles all round.



All Groups take part in the Eliminator race (Callum McIntyre)

On Monday Ian Tanswell took over the reins, and with a few minor changes the track was reversed (the roundabout too becoming a continental anti-clockwise affair, which did catch a few people out!) and racing concluded with a further five heats and the remaining two British Championship rounds. The day did suffer a little from reduced numbers as the bumps took their toll on man and machine, but not such that the quality of racing suffered greatly.

All in all a fun, if bumpy, weekend in the West Country, with many choosing to make the most of it by taking advantage of the extra nights' camping, or indeed bolting the event on to one end or other of a week away.

Group 2: Graham Tibbenham (187), Mike Cresswell (154), Jenson Cresswell (141)

Group 3: Dean Fuller (205), Stu Johnson (170), Pete Sque (167)

Group 4: Kenny Goodesmith (213), Karl Selby (154), Alfie Smith (145)

Full results are available at speedhive.mylaps.com/Events/2041524

The 12 Hour

Unbelievably, and for the first time since 1978, we've not held a 12 hour for three consecutive years; with COVID striking down 2020 and 2021, then the lack of a field in 2022 putting paid to this years event.

As part of our 50th Anniversary celebrations we have been absolutely committed from the outset to put on this event by hook or by crook. Things are looking positive at this point in time; with the date set for the 12th and 13th of August and it looking likely that we'll be using the same field we used way back in 2018, which many of you will remember went down very well.

We're looking to make this a bumper event, slightly longer, involving racers from around the world, providing more for families and spectators alike and even giving an opportunity for the 'crusties' of years gone by to drag their mower out of the shed and remind themselves why they put it there in the first place.

As we discussed at last year's AGM and at the recent open forum at Capel (and here ad nauseum) finances are a major issue, particularly when considering the 12 hour. We will be looking to reach a decision as to what entry fees will look like this time around early next year, but needless to say, they will be higher than we're used to and with no title sponsor yet in the bag, the lions share of the enormous running costs are going to have to be covered by racers and spectators.

On this front, we're still actively looking for sponsors and ask that if you have anything in mind, even if it is just an idea as to how we can get the club's name out to those who could help us—please get in touch! Likewise, we will be looking for teams willing to "adopt a foreigner" or perhaps lend a spare machine, particularly recognising the hospitality the USLMRA have shown at their 10 and 25 year celebrations. Please let us know if you'd consider this as it'd be a great help!



Karl Selby Mastering the bumps at Blacklands Farm (Dan Jones)

Blacklands Farm

The weekend following Somerset, the bank holiday giving just 4 days for any remedial works and bruises to heal, saw us visit another new venue for the penultimate event of our 2022 calendar.

On first look, the Blackland Farm Girlguiding Activity Centre seemed to offer the perfect venue: local to most, check. Offering the very rare treat of on-site toilets and showers, check. And being a non-agricultural field trodden only by tiny feet, mill-pond smooth – Er, no!

Mower racing has the uncanny ability to find the smallest divot and turn it into a trench, and sure enough the persistent dry spell saw top soil quickly shifted off corners into the air and the rough to expose the washboard below.

Despite the venue, turnout was again relatively low, with Saturday attracting five Group 2s, five Group 3s and eight Group 4s, with two additional Group 3s and a rare appearance of Mr Chairman's Group 2 rounding out the Sunday roster.

Ian Tanswell once again manned the helm on both days, both of which saw racing proceed in an anti-clockwise direction due to fears over runoff areas, given that a troop of Brownies were enjoying the peace and solitude of the neighbouring field.

Saturday saw six heats and two Championship rounds. Engine issues for Dean Fuller in Group 3 saw him only compete two heats and the Championship rounds. A similar fate was doled out to Charlie Thurston in Group 2 who soon realised that he was unable to top up his oil faster than his engine could pump it out, eventually returning to the track on another mower hastily delivered by Pugs Reeves. Chris Gaymer & Adam Cox once again shared their Wheel Horse throughout the weekend; a decision to allowing them to also race with Group 3 permitted each of them maximum time behind the wheel and saw both improve their skills vastly of over the course of the weekend.

Sunday consisted five heats and the remaining two Championship rounds of the weekend. Group 2 was down two, Mike Cresswell having hurt his thumb the previous day and Paul Johnson once again suffering lay shaft woes; it did however gain one in the shape of the lesser spotted Ian Ratcliff. Group 3 gained Sean Tanswell and Oliver Cann on a spare Tanswell machine. Dean Fuller, initially took it easy on a new engine, but soon returned to form, lapping Championship rival Stu Johnson at one point as he suffered his own engine issues. Unusually the final Championship round saw Alfie Smith retire with his own engine problems, however by this point in the meeting and indeed the season, it made little difference to results.

Overall the weekend went very smoothly, with plenty of close racing in all groups; the venue proved to be a success and one we hope to return to. The Weekend saw two of the three British Championships sealed, however the two remaining steps on the podia for Groups 2 & 4, and the top two in Group 3 were all still to play for going into the next event.

Group 2: Graham Tibbenham (202), Jenson Cresswell (199), Paul Johnson (98)

Group 3: James Weaver (213), Pete Sque (199), Stu Johnson (171)

Group 4: Alfie Smith (261), Kenny Goodesmith (194), Karl Selby (161)

Full results are available at speedhive.mylaps.com/Events/2044572.

Capel

With something of a history of being cancelled due to wet weather and the recent drought having very much passed, it was a surprise to some that mother nature once again smiled on us and our final meeting of 2022 went ahead as planned at Capel! Indeed, whilst some of us struggled to get into the field across wet grass, dust once again was the order of the day, though thankfully wind direction and the sheer size of the field meant that this was confined to the track.

This final fling attracted five Group 2s, six Group 3s and eleven Group 4s. It also attracted the media, with separate groups of Youtubers filming on the Saturday and Sunday.

This time occupying the South East corner of the field, skirting the hedges and curving around groundworks, Saturday's track took an anticlockwise direction, plunging down the hill into a sweeping righthander, then bearing left into a very tight uphill double hairpin – the combination of which did make the correct choice of gearing a challenge.

Joining us in Group 4 was newbie Tom Simpson on one of the lesser spotted shaft drive Honda machines (initially turning up with no intention of racing – many thanks to Roger Knowlson for his help in getting this on to the track) and Youtubers Scott Mansell (no relation) & Will Chandler who work with Group 3 Regular Callum McIntyre at Driven Media. Scott with around 20 years 'proper' racing experience got the hang of Stuart Johnsons John Deere very quickly, but described it as the most physically demanding vehicle he's ever raced (the full video can be seen here: youtu.be/2GTZ8K27t8A). Scott Herbert's engine gremlins were at it again, resulting in no laps being recorded over the weekend.

Due to a delay in starting caused by first aid issues (thanks to Kenny Goodesmith for offering to stand in), only three heats and an animal race were held alongside the two requisite Championship rounds. The very bumpy conditions

continued overleaf

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proved challenging for many, being hard on both body and machine. Some drivers had issues wrangling airborne mowers into bends causing some to overshoot, the most extreme case of which belonging to Tom Simpson who found himself deep in the undergrowth at the bottom of the field during the Animal race.

With top positions taken in the Group 2 and 4 championships, battles were on for the remaining steps on the podium. Charlie Thurston and Jenson Cresswell locked horns in Group 2 and Kenny Goodesmith continued his charge through the pack attempting to knock Graham Tibbenham off the third spot in Group 4. Group 3 however made for some very tense moments as Stu Johnson managed to best Dean Fuller twice in a final push to knock him off the top spot; finishing within 10 points of his target – two wins would do it!

Sunday saw a reverse of direction, dropping lap times slightly as the double hairpin switched to downhill, though the adverse camber still made it a challenge to negotiate. Due to the lack of heats on Saturday, five heats were squeezed in alongside the last two Championship rounds and a 'Lucky Dip' race.

To round out our star-studded weekend, we were joined by presenter, author, DJ, activist and Masterchef winner Riyadh Khalaf, borrowing Richard Atherton's Murray. As any master chef will tell you; the first bite is made with the eye, and consequently his morning was spent personalising the Murray, which included a pink fluffy steering wheel cover, furry dice, tassels, flowers and eyelashes – what it however did not seem to include was any sort of practice…

Racing continued to be fast furious and dusty, though the field did start to suffer from the usual attrition that a bumpy field attracts. The morning Championship sessions saw Charlie secure the second spot in Group 2 after a very close and very exciting race, Kenny closed the gap to Graham to just 9 points and after an extremely exhilarating race, Dean (professing to be more of a Sunday racer) pulled it out of the bag and secured Group 3 – Stuart's disappointment being palpable.



One giant leap for Mowerkind! (Dan Jones)

Ridge Farm; famous for performances by the likes of Queen, Ozzy, Muse and Pantry, can now add Khalaf to the list. Either oblivious to the risk, or in possession of massive cojones; he gave it everything, and (perhaps as a testament to the handling of the Murray) somehow hung on, whilst Alfie and Kenny made their presence known in a mock race which was maybe three times the speed of that seen earlier in the year at Godstone Farm (resulting in celebrity Patrick Christys and his mower parting company).

Following the fall of the chequered flag, a Group 4 heat proper was held, which Riyadh decided to also enter. Starting at the front he led the charge; absolutely barrelling into the first hairpin, somehow keeping the wheels beneath him. Kenny and Alfie managed to pass him on the bottom straight, at the end of which Riyadh had a bit of a tank slapper that resulted in him missing the left hander at the end. What followed was something of legend: unnoticed by most, nestled in the bushes beyond the usual runoff area was a pile of earth, perhaps three foot high. He hit this flat out and launched himself deep into the hedge whilst doing his best dolphin impression. After a brief moment of disbelief the red flag was raised, which unfortunately Nick Clarke missed and Alfie, immediately ahead of him, saw, leading to an incident that resulted in Nick being ejected from his mower and hurting his arm. Thankfully though, neither party was seriously injured, Nick continuing to race and Riyadh seemingly completely unscathed and more worried about any damage to Rich's Murray.

Later video review showed that unfortunately the film crew just hadn't been in the right place at the right time: the bonnet mounted GoPro saw a selection of fluffy clouds replaced by a tangle of brambles and their drone caught him leaving the track, but not launching himself. Luckily however Hayden Clegg saved the day with footage taken on his phone—the completed video of which can be found at youtu.be/yZj7ypcDKeo.

The final set of Championship rounds followed this, which were a tad lacklustre as the only position still up for grabs at this point was third in Group 4, which Kenny managed to squeak by just one point (boo!), taking the full 25 points to Graham's 15 for a third place.

The day, and indeed the season, was then rounded out by the customary lucky dip race. This attracted 10 competitors, each drawing a number from a bucket and running to the appropriate machine. Some would say Pete Sque drew the short straw, winning Charlie's Group 2, however ultimately he beat his own mower which was in the hands of Jenson Cresswell (some of us consider Group 3 the short straw!). Alfie drew Graham Tibbenham's number and so had the option of Groups 2 or 4 and not unsurprisingly took the latter, however after losing an argument with a block, he did opt to give Group 2 a go later in the race. Ultimately Graham won on Jenson's Group 2 (with a whole new level of respect for Jenson's performance this season!), Nick Clarke took second on Stu Johnson's Group 3 and Dean Fuller took third on Kenny's Group 4, each completing 8 laps. Special mentions go to Gary Botting and Alfie for setting the joint fastest lap on mowers built by the other!

Prizegiving included the presentation of British Championship trophies, with all nine podium finishers present. Meeting trophies were ball-peen hammers So there we have it, Capel done, 2022 done, 50 years done, rock on 2023!

Group 2: Graham Tibbenham (152), Jenson Cresswell (138), Charlie Thurston (122)

Group 3: Stu Johnson (157), Dean Fuller (152), Pete Sque (129)

Group 4: Kenny Goodesmith (156), Nick Clark (149), Alfie Smith (144)

Full results are available at speedhive.mylaps.com/Events/2056649.

NWLMRA 6 Hour

With the additional hour or so of driving to the new Lancashire venue seemingly putting off all but one BLMRA entrant, it seemed only fair to ask that he write the report.

The following was therefore penned by our very own Ironman and Chairman (Iron Chairman?) Ian Ratcliff:

Instead of their usual venue in Retford, this year's 6 hour was moved to Kirkham, near Preston, Lancashire. Probably because of the extra travelling involved, only 7 teams entered. This necessitated a change to the race programme. Both days started with a 40 minute practice, then a 40 minute qualifying session followed by three 40 minute races with a 20 minute break between each session. Although you could stay as a team, most split to be individual racers, so on Saturday we had 15 mowers on the grid for the start of race one. It was a good format although Daz, being on his own, found the 20 minute intervals barely gave him time to sort the computer out in time for the next race.

As most know, I have a Group 2, and although there are few of us in the south, up north they are rare. Daz managed to persuade Doc Dave to drag his mower out, coerce a colleague to join him as a team mate to race against me.

The Saturday started dry and actually improved as the day wore on. The ground started soft and didn't improve. Once the long grass disappeared on the corners mud quickly followed. Mud and group 2 don't go together well and soon Dave's novice team mate was struggling badly, so we made our own track alongside so as to be able to continue. It wasn't long though before his clutch gave up completely and had to retire, leaving me to cut a lonely furrow, as the groups 3 and 4 continued to pass. It always amazes me that after they have passed they invariably wiggle the rear end to return to the racing line, and in the process lob copious amounts of mud from the rear tyres at face height.

Unsurprisingly, at the end of Saturday, Rozer was in the lead with most points.

After enjoying a club bbq and a beer or two in the evening, it was time to head back to the Travelodge for the night.

Sunday was a repeat of Saturday. Puddles appeared overnight, so the track was moved slightly and off we went again. During all the races there was a high rate of attrition; fortunately Stewart was on hand with tractor to return broken mowers back to the pits. I had to use his services in race 5 when the clutch shaft broke, and again in race 6, when the chain came off after not tightening up a nut when replacing the clutch shaft earlier. Shoddy workmanship again.

Congratulations to Rozer for finishing 1st.



The Iron Chairman trying to recall if he had done that nut up—he hadn't... (Daz Whitehead)

Podium: Mark Rostron (70), Dean Todd (62), Ian Ratcliff (61)

Full results are available at speedhive.mylaps.com/Events/2061020

Website Woes

As mentioned previously we have engaged a web designer to take a look at redesigning our website.

Essentially the plan was to explore the use of existing e-commerce modules on the Wix platform. Unfortunately, this is proving much tougher than anticipated due to our fee structures and the many clever things that our existing site does in the background (preparing sign-on sheets, interfacing with MyLaps etc.).

We have discussed rationalising some of these things and considering what we can face administering manually, but it is starting to make the vastly more expensive Barkweb option look more attractive—particularly as they created and host our existing site and have offered us a substantial discount—though we are still talking many thousands of pounds.

What this does mean is that a new site may not be ready before the start of the 2023 season, although this is certainly still our aim and not something we as a committee are happy to knife and fork our way through again.

Having now joined the committee Mark Akeroyd has volunteered to revisit the project that was started earlier in the year to see what Teamapp can do for us. Early thoughts are that it has merit.

Watch this (web)space...

More Web Worries

Another source of internet irritation is merchandising.

I'd previously reported how we've started using Teespring to take care of our merch—they provide the shop, and prepare and post the items to order, kicking us back a small commission and making it one less thing to worry about.

Unfortunately, having tried to use this service, both for personal use and to prepare prizes for World Championship winners, we've found them to be a tad unreliable (we decided not hold fire on awarding the "World Champic" hoodies until they can correct the mistake!).

Back to the drawing board on this one too then!



Club Founder Jim Gavin waving the Chequered Flag in style! (BLMRA Archives)

Committee News

As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, Mark Akeroyd joined the fold earlier in the year and is a very welcome addition to the team following the departure of Jason Ingold earlier in the year due to other commitments.

We've discussed an invitation we have received to create an inter-club UK Endurance Championship. We're very much game for this, although it is dependant upon race calendars and so discussions will be ongoing until all clubs know which way is up.

Belt Doctor (www.thebeltdoctor.com) are now offering members 25% off all products using code BLMRA. Additionally if we generate sufficient sales, they are offering to provide us sponsorship, so we encourage you to consider using them.

Finally, throughout the season we've asked for volunteers to help tow club equipment to race meetings. Thanks very much for to all who helped out. Whilst we will continue to try to avoid it, no doubt we will need to call on members again—so if it's something you're able to help with please let us know.

2023 Fees

With very little price difference between them, we've decided to consolidate Individual, Family and Junior memberships into a single 'Full membership'.

The below fees are now in effect:

Full membership £55

Endurance only membership £30

Camping only membership £20

As usual, don't forget to renew by March 1st to ensure you keep your race number!

2022 Championships

Numbers were down slightly this year, which did take some of the lustre off Championship rounds—particularly in Group 3 where two or three competitors was not an uncommon sight.

Ultimately the 2021 Champions in all Groups retained their crown—but there were thrills and spills along the way, with much of the excitement occurring further down the pack.

Unbelievably, nobody on the Group 2 podium was over 40 and the average age was sub 24! This really does give some indication of where to look for the stars of the future and some hope to the future of the Group.

The list of multiple championship winners now sits at 17, with Dean just 2 wins away from equalling Andy Stemp's 11 wins in Group 3, Alfie 2 from Mark Robinson's 4 and Graham just 19 away from Mike Cresswell's 21...

This year we were keen to award the Championship trophies at the last meeting of the year as this makes it far more likely that winners would be present and gives a sense of closure to all involved.

Trophies were made appropriate to each Group; 2 incorporating a sprocket, 3 a toothed belt pulley and 4 a vee belt pulley. Winners in each Group were once again presented with a framed "king of the lawn" shirt.

Below are the top three in each Group:

Group 2 British Championship

1. Graham Tibbenham (451)
2. Charlie Thurston (332)
3. Jenson Cresswell (303)

Group 3 British Championship

1. Dean Fuller (448)
2. Stuart Johnson (424)
3. Peter Sque (303)

Group 4 British Championship

1. Alfie Smith (472)
2. Karl Selby (304)
3. Kenny Goodesmith (248)

Endurance Championship

1. Alfie Smith (20)
2. Pete Sque (20)
3. Charlie Thurston (12)

Full results are available at:
speedhive.mylaps.com/
Organizations/23693/Championships

Final Thoughts

Does anybody remember the drought?!

With snow, freezing conditions and the odd torrential downpour abounding, the conditions of the summer now seem a lifetime away (although South-west Water do still have a hosepipe ban in force!) <insert butt joke here>.

Whilst our perennial venue deficit did result in an impromptu summer break, in retrospect this may not have been an entirely bad thing; with air cooled engines and racers tending to overheat, and dust and fire thriving in such conditions.

All that said, we did have a few moist moments; but thankfully, in general, the weather was very kind to us, and the parched earth quickly took care of anything that did come our way.

It does however mean that we struggled with dust at times, with very bumpy track conditions and of course we have needed to rake corners to help restore fields—for your help on this front we thank you.

There is no avoiding the fact that numbers have been down and weirdly we've actually seen more Group 2s than 3s this season. This does give us something to think on as we enter our 50th year, though undoubtedly the spiralling cost of everything– particularly fuel, has played its part (a gallon of petrol in 1973 cost 39p incidentally).

We saw a number of new venues, which we hope not to be one-offs, and we hope to return to a number of shows—these proved to be very busy this year as people desperately try to make up for the isolation felt over the last few years.

There is the promise of new talent emerging in all groups as the next generation come of age, perhaps even a passing of the baton in some cases as Dads step back into a 'team manager' role (no less work, but more ale). Certainly this is going to make life very much harder for those that may have become used to a status quo, as they have set the bar very high and can only improve!

We have big plans for 2023; we hope to achieve these and we hope that you will come along for the ride.

So that's it from me, it's been a pleasure!

See you next year.