

As a committee member, it feels like we've been talking about the 50th forever – but all of a sudden there it was; gone! And what a year it's been! Four new venues on the calendar, plenty of old favourites and arguably the most successful 12 (ish) hour ever.

We got off to a rocky start way back in April at, or at least just outside of, Spring Live in Ardingly. Our attendance in 2022 was postponed due to worries over noise and the mess we'd make, which resulted us racing in the car park in 2023. Due to wet weather, it was boggy to say the least and ultimately, we had to call off the Sunday. Thankfully we made a good impression, and it seems highly likely that we'll return in 2024 – hopefully within the fence and in reach of the toilets!



There wasn't an improvement in the weather in the subsequent weeks and owing to the vast experience that we have of racing The Dip in all conditions, the decision was taken to cancel this meeting.

Following this we ran the annual double 4 hour at Matterley Basin near Winchester which attracted a very good number of tractors, though attendance in other classes was a touch sparse. On this point, it's worth noting that numbers in general were better in 2023 than in the previous year, though Group 3 appears to be continuing to struggle, whilst Group 2 has been experiencing a much needed renaissance, with the average age in the class generally dropping to well below 70 (except when Mr Chairman races ☹).



In a complete 180, the next meeting was a particularly dry and dusty sprint event at a new venue in Alfold. This also saw our first visitation by the new breed of online celebrity (Callum doesn't count, he's part of the family!) and saw us racing a miniature Silverstone. The separate camping field was very much appreciated, as it kept the dust at bay and saved families from having to have anything to do with that noisy racing that some of us are so fond of. The land owner really enjoyed their weekend and hopefully this is another venue we'll see again.



Motorfest in Chelmsford was our next stop, this proved to be another event that was popular with families, as there was plenty to do and the weather was excellent – though the ground was rock hard and dust was a constant worry! Thankfully the wind was blowing in the right direction, which is a perennial issue with our (continued) attendance at shows.



Following the club's official 50th birthday on the 23rd of June, the ever popular Heddington and Stockley steam fair was next, which brings with it even more entertainment for families (though by this point pockets were starting to ache from buying ice creams!) and the all-important beer tent. The weather was a touch threatening, particularly on the Sunday, but thankfully only short showers were experienced, and the meeting was another success, particularly as we were once again gifted a section of the larger back field.



Trooper Field was the final new venue of the season and was by far the smoothest! It's fair to say that it was wet, but thankfully the ground held up really well and we managed to see it through to the end. Due in part to the weather, I suspect The Trooper Inn did rather well out of the club on Saturday evening. Chris the landlord is extremely enthusiastic about the whole weekend and is not only keen to expand the event next year, but also plans to build a mower himself! Hopefully this is the start of something good!



Then the jewel in the crown – The 500! To properly mark the 50th, the classic 12 hour was carefully expanded to 500 laps, making it around 14 hours and all the stops were pulled out to attract the public. And my word did it work! If it's any measure of success, the bar was supplied with 1000 branded reusable pint glasses and around 100 were returned, and the pizza wagon sold over 100 pizzas! Thankfully and unusually, financially speaking, this year the event actually made the club a profit and for our supported charity Prostate Cancer, we raised £6000 so well done to everyone. The 50 pit slots were easily filled, possibly because of the four year break, and entrants from as far afield as The US of A attended with the seemingly unstoppable Bullseye racing taking the win. Undoubtedly there are many lessons for us to learn from both successes and failures, but perhaps this is the shape of things to come?



Next stop Cheddar, for our now traditional August bank holiday visit. Once again this hosted a joker roundabout and the compulsory cider race. Unfortunately the weather wasn't completely on our side, but it did generally hold while racing was in session and the ground held up fairly well.



I think all will agree that the weekend at Blacklands Farm was hot. Very very hot. This was the venue for our World Championships, which all in all ran really well, but boy was it hot with very little breeze. Thankfully as a rare treat this venue comes with showers, which I think everyone made the most of – we were also miraculously visited by an ice-cream van just as we finished on Sunday. Despite the heat (did I mention it was hot?), Alfie, Sean and Mike took the top spots after very credible performances in their respective groups.



And finally, in a change from our scheduled trip to Capel, we instead rounded off the season at The Dip, having denied Chris his own personal meeting in May. The Dip proved to be as good as it gets, having had a decent watering recently to keep down the dust, but remaining dry throughout the weekend. Although the evenings were getting noticeably colder, it proved the perfect setting for our end of season party on Saturday, which as ever went down really well and saw some particularly creative 'silly hats'. Sunday saw the conclusion of the British Championships, which were noticeably closer in all Groups, though ultimately Alfie, Dean and Graham all retained their titles. Due to popular demand a ladies race was run, which delivered some very memorable moments, particularly when Emma McIntyre and Laura Goodesmith saw red as the 1 lap board came out. As is tradition, the season was drawn to a close with the obligatory 'lucky dip' race, which was won by flying newbie Talon Winchester on Sam Line's tractor.



In all then, a very successful season from our point of view, with plenty of new shoots appearing in terms of new racers, new venues and perhaps a new era for the 12 hour. As always, the committee will continue to work through the winter as we start to look towards 2024 and we sincerely hope to see you all when we embark on yet another year of measured insanity! Thank you all very much.

As ever, all results can be found on MyLaps website - <https://beta.speedhive.com/organizations/23693>

Just a reminder - always check our website <https://www.blmra.co.uk/> regularly as it now gets updated with news and information all the time.