

Chairman's Report – 2020

by Jes 😊

As a committee, we started 2020 thinking that our biggest problems were a bit of an issue with car parking at Bruntingthorpe, a difficult start time at Wombwell, and that we hadn't yet found anyone to run the café at Shenington...

...what a lovely set of problems those were compared to a global pandemic.

So let's do that bit 1st.

Covid has effected the physical and mental health of so many people, both through the disease itself and the measures which have been necessary to contain it. We need to remember both of these equally in our dealings with each other, and with others, as we go forwards.

Every person will come through this differently, and every team will come through this differently. Some for the better, some for the worse, and some possibly not at all in a way we would recognise from before the pandemic.

For every person who has suddenly had huge amounts of time on their hands during lockdown to ride bikes, work out, diet and basically transform themselves into the next Geraint Thomas there will be a person who – for mental, physical, financial or professional reasons – has been unable to do any of those things. The way we approach racing, and the way we approach each other as individuals, in 2021 needs to reflect that.

Simply through circumstances, some teams and drivers may well be going much slower than you would expect (some may, of course, be going faster – well done to them of course) but the important thing will be that they are going again.

So 2021 will not be the time for the “yah, boo, we're better than you” attitude. It will be a time for enjoying the fact that we are out there again racing and respecting each other's efforts in how they have arrived at this point.

It will, as I have heard it described, be an “asterisk season” but it will be the most important season in the history of pedal car racing and we all need to work as a team, and a family, to make it happen.

Anyway, about 2020:

I would like at this point to pay tribute, once again, to the people who stepped up massively this year and found ways to get the sport up and running.

The effort involved in ploughing through ever changing government rules, regulations and (the worst sort!) “guidelines” – which at some points seemed like they were referencing each other in an endless loop – was immense. There were many zoom calls, much hammering of keyboards and many nights going to bed very late mentally exhausted by the whole process.

But we did it.

Blackbushe – although only a test day – was a celebration of pedal car racing and a huge lift for many people during a dark year. I am so proud of everyone who made that event what it was.

We then refocused for Curborough which was a different venue, a different set of rules, and, by then 5 weeks on, a very different set of circumstances nationally.

But we did it.

There would have been a 5 hour race and it would have been conducted in a covid-safe way.

However, the worst day for rainfall since weather began took that away from us.

I am both extremely disappointed and extremely proud of that day.

Disappointed, of course, because we didn’t have a race but proud that we had the courage and the integrity to put our duty of care towards our competitors and volunteer officials at the top of our priorities. There was simply no way we could have run the event on that day whilst both being covid-secure and keeping people warm – particularly the younger members of the sport.

Looking ahead, what we achieved was coming up with a method, and a set of rules and regulations, that mean we can race in 2021 even if “social distancing” and “covid-secure events” are still a thing. Those rules were submitted to the DCMS, Sport England and (via Swebbelli Racing’s risk assessments) to The Scout Association. It can’t be stressed enough how important having that “3rd party approval” is, particularly in the case of the scouts where many of our teams are from.

On to 2021:

We have a race calendar!

More on that from Rob, but we have a calendar for 2021.

However, things are not normal, and they are not going to be normal for a while.

We need to be flexible and we need to be accommodating:

1: Local Lockdowns may still be a Thing by the end of March.

If we are a few weeks out from a race and it looks like an area may be going in the wrong direction – either for the circuit itself or those we would like to come and officiate - we will need to...

(1): Not panic!

(2): Work on alternatives.

(3): If necessary reschedule or relocate.

And above all...

(4): Keep teams informed through clear, concise committee statements. (Not through individual committee members messaging people they happen to know in some teams for example!)

With the exception of Wombwell, our locations are rural. That works in our favour at least.

2: Since March this year it has been impossible for teams from NYA affiliated associations (i.e: scouts and guides in our case) to either share transport or to stay away overnight – either indoors or camping.

If this is still the case when we come to next season, once again, we need to think about how we can run races that make it easier for these teams. That may mean not running the same event we are used to.

Once again, *we don't want to* but if there's a choice between cutting a race from 6 hours to 4 hours, or doing something different on Shenington Weekend, *or accepting that the entire junior half of the grid won't be there* then that's the decision we will need to make.

This is just an example. If the last few months have taught us anything, it's that we don't know what circumstances may throw at us next!

3: We need more help to run Covid-Secure races and we need to keep Covid-Secure events simple.

Blackbushe proved we knew how to run events in these times.

Curborough would have proved we knew how to run competitive events. I am confident enough in what we did to think we can do so again in March.

However, the levels of help needed to run at these times is higher than normal.

We will still need Chris' team of pit-lane helpers for example if we are still having to clean cars. I feel this is vital to help the teams keep themselves and others safe. If done right, this can actually become a bit of a fun part of the event. At Blackbushe, some teams were enjoying counting down the time until the car could be released a bit like the start of a Rally stage.

If we are still in a Covid-Situation come the start of next year, we are going to have to make similar requests for help from the teams at Wombwell that we did at Curborough or we will not be able to go racing. Please remember that the level of help will depend to a certain extent on the venue.

If we are still in the situation of having to socially-distance during events at the start of next year, then we need to run simple events. Our dummy-start at Blackbushe proved that lining up the grid is something we only want to do once during the day. We had cars going all the way round the track to the start line as requested, we had cars not

listening to what they were being told and going the opposite way, we had cars not ready etc etc. And that was just 12 of us!

For the moment, we will need to do races where the grid is lined up, the race starts and at the end of the day the race has finished and we all go home. Simple, 1 race events.

I keep saying:

This isn't normal. It's Covid. We have to do what we can do and be happy we are doing something!

So what is the Vision?

Let's not beat around the bush. At present we are in "survival mode" as are many sports.

However, we need to look beyond so we'll assume that Covid is no longer effecting us. Brilliant!

But are some Elephants in the Room which we've chosen to ignore as a sport for several years and which absolutely have to be addressed if we are to carry on racing in a safe manner and, unfortunately, several of them revolve around needing more people to help run events. That's the biggest challenge we face at present.

So let's do the Bad Stuff first and get it out of the way.

After this break, we can't afford to sleep-walk back into where we were before.

(1): We have to separate timing and scoring with race control.

You cannot expect Dave, Rose and Hair to ensure the technology is providing us all with accurate scores if they are also expected to rack up the grid, deal with any problems, remind teams of driving standards etc etc.

This, unfortunately, requires a dedicated person (or preferably a couple of people) who's job that is for the duration of the event.

For most races, we can get away with 2 in Race Control and 2 in Timing & Scoring. I suggest for 24 hour races these numbers are 4 for both.

(2): We need to make sure we are marshalling at the correct levels.

At some circuits (Wombwell, Kinsham, Curborough) we are lucky and the whole of the track is visible from race control. At others (Blackbushe, Shenington) we need to ensure we have marshals to cover the various areas where this is not possible.

This can be done using a rota from the teams although this is not ideal, particularly not at Shenington.

(3): We need to address the issue of driving standards. *We want everyone to feel safe on track.*

This is controversial. But don't panic, no one is about to get booted out for being too slow, too fast, too silly or too annoying (OK, perhaps the last one...).

But we absolutely have to get away from the mentality that "it'll probably be alright".

Part of this is covered above with Race Control and Scoring separating.

Part of this is communication with the teams as to what is required of drivers and, if there is a problem during an event, addressing it rather than pretending it isn't happening.

It is easy to point fingers, and on this topic people sometimes point them at each other in the heat of a race, but we have to remember that we pride ourselves that all classes race on the track at the same time.

This means mutual respect.

From the fast teams, that means respecting that when there is a "yellow" it means "no overtaking" and if you are stuck behind the slowest PC4 car then that's just bad luck (for example). And it means the pit lane really is the pit lane, not a convenient way to avoid said PC4 car if you find yourself "boxed in". And it means that your car and drivers have the ability to run at the pace they are capable of in a safe manner.

For the junior teams – and in particular those in charge of them - that means respecting that there are people out there driving their cars on the limit who cannot suddenly take avoiding action if a driver changes their line in a corner. So it means you must be confident in the competence of *the children in your care* to drive the cars in a suitable manner before you put them out on track. And it means that your car has to be suitable for the age and size of the drivers.

In both cases the important things are: **Visibility, Brakes, Handling, Stability, Confidence and Competence.**

How are we going to achieve this?

Above All we are going to achieve this by Talking not Typing

If you have problem, a worry, some feedback or a question about an event, a rule, or if there is a pub near by please get in touch.

The preferred method will be to set up a “zoom” call with anyone who wants one. Probably a couple of the committee members so that we can consult.

Please, let’s talk anything through before we go all “keyboard warrior” on each other!

It’s so easy to misunderstand a typed response, much better to talk face to face – even it that means via a webcam. We have this wonderful communication technology so let’s use it to communicate.

But Specifically:

Not overnight!

The first two are all about people.

If we don’t have the people we can’t run the races.

To start with, some of us are going to chip in and help but that is not the long term solution (after all, we want to race pedal cars!). In fact, that solution probably ends after June.

However, **if every team managed to find 1 or 2 people who were willing and able to do 1 or 2 races a year this would solve the issue.** Please can we think on this. We do not want to “press gang” anyone into race control or, as someone so eloquently put it “coming all that way just to wear PPE and wave a flag” but there are people out there who are happy to do such things – and good at it! You must know someone, or know someone who knows someone.

Unfortunately at present, Shenington possibly aside, we are not in the position to offer donations to groups – such as the local Round Table - in return for their services. But we might be in a position to offer the loan of a car for a future event. Let’s think about this, be creative, and not be afraid to ask.

The third one – standards on track.

This is more difficult because 1 person’s Master at Weaving Through Traffic is another person’s Lunatic and 1 person’s Plucky Kid Having a Go is another person’s Mobile Chicane.

But frankly, as long as the Master Weaver knows the Mobile Chicane is going to stay on their line, and as long as the Plucky Kid knows the Lunatic can see them and has good brakes, then we can all get along.

Also, **the respect must extend to the volunteer race officials.**

These people are giving up their free time so you can be safe on track. Please bear that in mind if and when you get a reminder that you need to take a little more care out there.

What I would like to do is to reintroduce the pre-season test day – or at least a pre-Shenington test day because that is where we have the most new teams. This should be at Shenington if we can get the track.

I would like, on that day, for the first hour to be dedicated to PC3 and PC4 teams, then feed in the others.

I think this may be asking a bit much in 2021 given the calendar congestion post-covid.

So I am going to suggest that we extend FP1 at Shenington by 30 minutes and that 1st 30 minutes will be junior teams only. It’s a start.

2022 and beyond.

"Why don't more people know about this?" is the question I am often asked.

Simply, this is our fault.

We can change this only by publicising the sport and making sure everyone knows it is an open, friendly, welcoming place to be.

1: We need to increase our social media presence.

We do facebook. Which is great if your *like really really old? Like 35?*

But we need to be on platforms which younger people still consider to be important!

Someone here must be able to help with this. We have a twitter account. Can someone take on posting a picture every day? We have Instagram, can someone do the same?

Nothing looks less inviting than an account that hasn't had any content added for weeks and weeks.

I am 46, I am a Digital Immigrant. I don't even know what all the platforms are let alone how to get on them.

What we need is a Digital Native, or several Digital Natives, to take this on.

2: We need to publicise each race as if it's the only one in the country.

Shenington, and before that Ringwood, have proved that you can actually get people to try a pedal car race.

What's daunting for many is "come and do 6 races a year totalling 50+ race hours all over the country".

What's not so daunting is "come to Curborough and see how many laps you can do".

For every 10 teams you get to a local race, you may get 3 who take it on and do a few more and you may get 1 who becomes a season long championship contender.

To make this work, we need to grow the local base at each event.

How?

- Calendar stability (within reason).
- Races are accessible (a day out) or something special (24 hours / night race etc).
- Making it "an event" where possible rather than "just a race". With things like catering, dare I suggest memorabilia, getting the local press involved etc.
- By re-starting the Pedal Car Amnesty after lockdown so the hardest part (building the car) doesn't have to be the 1st hurdle.

Where I would like to see us by 2025 is a sport where there are 10 or so "local" teams at each race complimenting the "full season" entries that do all of them.

We can only do this through everyone going out there and gushing about how much they enjoy racing, and then coming through and providing that enjoyable experience when they arrive.

Finally!

(for those still actually here...)

The best ways to describe what we do are still the ones we came up with over 20 years ago.

“The Most Fun on 4 Wheels”

and

“Fast, Friendly and Fun”

Let's work together to get this fantastic sport back on track.

Nothing beats the buzz of a night stint at Sherington or sliding through the Blackbushe complex on a damp day.

So, firstly, let's work together to get racing restarted and **then let's get out there and tell everyone what fun we are all having on 4 wheels.**