

Herne Bay Motor Speed Trials – 21st June 1924 & 20th June 1925

Almost one hundred years ago, Herne Bay seafront was alive with the sound of car engines, as the town played host to Motor Speed Trials for two consecutive summers in the mid-1920s. The events were arranged by the Kent Automobile Club, a body that was established in the west of the county in the early 1900s to represent the interests of motorists. In



Competing cars lined up outside the Pier Theatre

tend to their cars. The idea of the Speed Trial was that cars would travel as fast as they could along a measured distance of approximately ½ mile along the seafront. The start line was marked on the road between the pier and Lane End and proceeded in a westerly direction along the front towards Hampton with the gentle rising gradient providing a good test for competitors. Once each run had been completed, cars returned to the paddock via The Broadway, Avenue Road and Station Road. Race headquarters were established along the seafront at the Connaught Hotel, with timings and regulations in accordance with the rules of the Royal Automobile Club.



The start line

Programmes detailing the races and competitors were available and offered for sale on the day by the ladies of the Herne Bay Bohemian's Operatic Society. It would be very interesting to see a copy of this programme, but no copies have been traced so far. Details of the day have been found in contemporary press reports and these give a listing of some of the names of the winning drivers, the cars that they drove, and their times. The list includes some very desirable vehicles by the well-known racing car manufacturers of the time including those by Austin, Frazer Nash, Amilcar and several with the very desirable Bugatti badge. It would be interesting to know if any of the cars that raced that day still survive.

There were no less than 17 race classes and a large number of the entries were drawn from motor clubs as far away as Essex and Hampshire. Notable drivers participating that day include "Count" Louis Zborowski, the grand prix driver who lived at nearby Higham Park, Bridge. Zborowski was well known for his large engine motors and drove two that day, a six litre Hispano Suiza and a 12 ½ litre Mercedes in another class. Local drivers were well represented and the

its day, the club had some eminent members, including Sir David Salomons, the pioneering Kent motorist responsible for some early motor shows at Tunbridge Wells. Motor Speed trials were popular events staged at several seaside locations, and they are known to have been held at various times at various towns including Bexhill, Brighton, Poole, Southend and more locally at Ramsgate.

Saturday 21st June 1924 was reported to have been a warm sunny day, ideal weather for the Speed Trials. The assembly area for the race meeting was in the area in front of the Pier Theatre, effectively forming a square that served as a temporary paddock where drivers and mechanics could

list of competitors was graced by at least three ladies, Miss Ivy Cummings, Miss Cynthia Turner and Miss A A Dawes, each of whom had competed in races at the well-known Brooklands circuit and other prominent motor venues.



Local garage sponsorship

It seems that the day was a great success, so much so that the organisers were able to repeat the event with an equally warm reception on 20th June 1925. The write up of the event in the *Herne Bay Press* again reveals a number of the leading female drivers of the day, notably, Miss Ivy Cummings, driving a number of Frazer Nash cars. Sadly, “Count” Louis Zborowski who along with his cars was one of the stars of the 1924 event, was not present as he lost his life the previous October whilst racing in the Italian Grand Prix at Monza.

The format of the 1925 event seems to have followed a similar route to that of the previous year, with a start line close to Lane End and a course stated to

extended 760 yards to the timed finish line along Marine Drive West (Western Esplanade). As before, competing cars were grouped and classified according to engine size, with awards for 1st, 2nd and 3rd places, the winner’s names and their cars being listed in the following week’s newspaper.



Front of Dyball's silver medal

After the races were completed, medals were presented to the winning contestants by Lady Burgoyne, wife of Lieutenant Colonel Sir Alan Burgoyne, MP for Aylesbury and the appointed race starter for the day. The presentation took place at the recently opened Central Bandstand and one of the medals awarded that afternoon, has been located and is illustrated here.



Back of medal showing Dyball's name

This silver medal was awarded to Mr M S Dyball who achieved 2nd place driving a Vauxhall in the Standard Sports cars 1500cc and over class.

A wonderful collection of fourteen photos providing a flavour of the 1925 event can be found at:

<https://austinharris.co.uk/event/kent-club-speed-trials?page=1>.