

Great Dorset Steam Fair is back at last...

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The Great Dorset Steam Fair, knocked out by Covid for 2020 and 2021, came back in 2022, much to the deep joy of participants and



visitors.

Kim Henson reports...

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They say that you don't know what you've got until it's gone, and it has certainly been the case that the much-loved Great Dorset Steam Fair has been much missed by devotees. This is because until last week (25th to 29th August 2022) it had not been possible to hold the huge event since August 2019, due to the devastating effect of Covid-19 and the restrictions that came with it.

This meant that those who look forward to attending each year were especially enthusiastic about once again travelling to Tarrant Hinton in Dorset, to see the spectacle; it's a 'heritage' show like no other.

For those who may never yet have attended, I should explain that the sheer scale of the event has to be experienced to be believed. The site is vast - so big that typically it can take more than an hour to walk from one side of it to the other, even if you don't stop to look at some of the attractions inevitably passed on the way.

From a personal viewpoint, Covid years apart I have only missed one Great Dorset Steam Fair (still referred to by many as the 'Stourpaine' Steam Fair) since 1971, and my family always look forward to it each year too. There is something magical about the sights, sounds and indeed smells of the wonderful steam engines, which are always there in quantity and are still the main focus of the event, and many of which are working to demonstrate to people how they used to operate in their heyday.

However the steam machinery is only part of the story, for around the site attendees can also enjoy seeing horses working (including pulling carts and ploughs), birds of prey, sheep shearing, stationary engines, classic tractors, vintage and classic cars (with some towing vintage caravans) and commercials, heavy haulage vehicles, bicycles, motorcycles, historic



military vehicles, steam-powered organs large and small, plus steam-driven fairground rides and displays of all types of heritage activities.

Arena displays of vehicles (including cars, motorcycles, commercial vehicles, buses and tractors) in motion are always part of the daily programme, in addition to motorcycle and quad bike stunt shows, plus 'monster trucks'.



Horse-drawn farming activities...



Straw bale making with steam providing the power.



1910 5hp hot bulb R. Hornsby and Sons oil engine.



Heavy haulage galore...



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A magnificent array of tractors in action...



This Fordson had been used on the same farm by the same family for 44 years...



Happy sounds of organ-produced music across the site...

Incidentally, this year the classic cars section was divided into two; pre-1970 and post-1970 cars. Similarly the classic motorcycle section was split into 'older' and 'more recent' machines.



Part of the pre-1970 classic car display.

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A superb 1936 Carcruiser caravan.



Interior view of the 1936 Carcruiser caravan.

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1924 Super Sentinel steam lorry.



A recently restored 1951 Bedford.



[A pair of 1950s 1172cc sidevalve Ford vans.](#)

Always one of the most popular areas of the site is the so-called 'Play Pen', effectively a large area taking in part of a valley and with a steep climb out of it on each side, in which the steam engines and heavy haulage machinery is 'exercised' each day. A most amazing sight was that of the 'Battle of Britain' class railway locomotive No. 34053, Sir Keith Park, apparently weighing more than 90 tons, being moved on a low loader within the Play Pen.

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This year, as always, there was a tent showing 'How 'tw'er done in Granfer's day', a live

display of road building as it was done in the 1920s/30s, also thought-provoking displays recreating First World War trenches and associated horrors, plus, new for this year, a scenario depicting the aftermath of a World War 2 'blitz'. This included contemporary garage scenes, a WVS refreshments wagon and many unrestored cars of that era.



Road building as it used to be done.

The two different wartime displays serve to educate adults as well as children, and are (I feel) very worthwhile and extremely well done.

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On every evening of the Show, and especially the legendary Saturday night, the 'showman's engines' line up and are illuminated by lighting powered by their own dynamos as these magnificent machines also power the various old-time fairground rides.

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I should also mention the multitude of open air shows that also take place on the Saturday evening, with music and dancing a plenty, with excellent old-time music hall performances.

Throughout the show there are recreations of countryside and farming activities, including



wood sawing, threshing, steam-driven ploughing and dairy operations.

Live music stages galore operate each day, and bars selling beer and cider in particular abound. In addition there is a wonderful food hall with firms and individuals selling delicious speciality drinks and food items of all sorts.

Displays of country crafts are also available in abundance for all to see, in addition to which the huge craft tent caters for young and old alike with items on offer including clothing, jewellery, paintings, books and photographs, to name but a few.

For those who like classic pop and light music, 'Steam Fair FM', now celebrating 20 years of operating at the Great Dorset, starts broadcasting 24 hours a day in advance of the Show, and for its duration. All the music played is more than 25 years old. This year's featured group was E.L.O. (Electric Light Orchestra) and one of their tracks was played every hour. Wonderful!

VERDICT

Although I attended for all five days (my 1955 Austin A30 and classic Sprite Cadet caravan formed part of the pre-1970 classic car display) I didn't see all of the Show; I never do, but I very much enjoyed seeing the various displays I found and, like so many others, was very pleased to be back at the Great Dorset this year.



Sadly, of course, there were many enthusiasts and exhibitors who attended the 2019 Great Dorset who didn't make it to be at the 2022 event, and in a deeply moving, poignant tribute to all those 'absent friends', there was a respectful sounding, all at the same time, of steam engine whistles and vehicle horns across the Steam Fair site, at midday on the Saturday of the Show. Very fitting.



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