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Motoring For Fun – MSV’s ‘Drive!’ at Donington Park in Three British Classics.

Published: January 20, 2022

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/motoring-for-fun-msvs-drive-at-donington-park-in-three-british-classics/>



George Loveridge describes an enjoyable ‘classic’ day out to



Donington Park...

Giles Dive, Jim, Guy, and George Loveridge take their classic British cars to Donington Park for trackside action at one of Motorsport Vision's 'Drive!' events.

All words and photos ©George Loveridge

At the close of 2020, I was checking my emails when a notification from MSV (Motorsport Vision) popped up, advertising a new event for the new year. 'Drive!' is a motoring experience where the petrol head, or general punter, can drive their own car around one of the 5 main circuits run by the organisation. Labelled an 'experience', as included in your £29 entry fee are your three laps of your chosen circuit, photos of your time on track, goodie bag themed on said circuit, and an audio guide of where you are driving. Naturally, being the aforementioned petrol head, I immediately booked a slot for my closest track, Donington Park, and a date convenient, Saturday 23rd January 2021. However, when 2021 started, the pandemic had other ideas and sadly, the event was cancelled as at that point, restrictions concerned, it was just about legal to go for a walk...

Thankfully, a similar email arrived again but approximately a year later as 2021 concluded. But this time, three tickets were booked for a slightly different date, and this year we would not be in a national lockdown.



In my infinite wisdom, I had booked a 10:00 arrival time at Donington, and despite this being the closest circuit to home, it was still 70 miles away, which meant a relatively early wake up call, for a Sunday anyway. At precisely 07:53am, the four of us met in our three cars at the local petrol station to fill up with V-Power E5 (other high-octane fuels are available). Owned by Jim but piloted by Guy, the Mk 1 Jaguar took quite a lot of filling, a big tank required for the big 3.4 litre straight six. Likewise for Giles in his treasured Triumph TR6, the 2.5 litre, 6-cylinder does like to sing, but it has quite a thirst as a result. Contrastingly, the humble Herald's 1300cc 4-cylinder engine, owned by me, would be considerably more economical than the 'competition'. One caveat however, I would be deafening myself in 4th gear on the motorway, while the other cars both had overdrive and



therefore would be cruising at lower engine speeds, therefore being arguably more economical.



Having filled up with fuel, we embarked on the 70-mile journey to Donington Park, a relatively straight forward blast down the M1, dodging the early morning lorry racing in lanes 1 and 2 of the motorway. In convoy, we received plenty of positive passing remarks from other road users. The Valencia Blue, Imperial Maroon and Old English White coloured classics do make a change from the greys and blacks of the other cars on the road. One benefit of driving early in the morning, especially during the winter, is that as we drove over Sheffield, we were presented with a cherubic sun rise, filling our fields of vision, but the



increased brightness also highlighted the road grime that was inevitably etching its way onto our cars. Cringing at my waxed paintwork being vandalised by road dirt, I had to remind myself that there is of course no point of these cars if they just sit in the garage not being used. With that in mind, my odometer clicked over, in the Herald, to 81000 miles, I gave the top of the dashboard a celebratory double tap and carried on with the journey. Enjoying my company of course; the muscular lines of the TR6 sports car, juxtaposed by the view of the grace of the Jaguar.



We eventually arrived after about an hour and twenty minutes on the road and rendezvoused in a lay-by just adjacent to the main entrance of the circuit. If you have ever



been in a convoy, regardless of vehicle type, be it the daily run around or concours winner, one must always discuss the journey that you have just been on with the other drivers. 'Gosh that van off the 24A junction...' '...That Clio came past at quite some speed...' or something similar.

Once on site, we could see that the orange army were out in full force providing help where required - marshalls of course being crucial to the survival of motorsport events. A winding section of traffic cones directed us to the Garage 39 Restaurant where we were given our goodie bag and had our pre-printed conformation bar code scanned by a cheerful volunteer who was delighted to see some 'proper cars' at that morning's event. As a fellow car enthusiast I empathise; I also would be cheered up by seeing three rare classics as opposed to ordinary hatch backs or SUVs; but you must remember that the aim of this event is to get people on track in their everyday cars. I digress. The young lad, having scanned our tickets, directed us to another marshall, who then asked us to not join the existing queue of other cars waiting to go out on track, but start a new line with us at the front, together! This ensured that the three cars would be photographed together while out on the circuit. That was the plan anyway...

Now parked in paddock garage number 4, we awaited our 10:00 session.



This gave us time to have a look at the bag of treats that we were given. The contents of the bag included: a 2022 Donington Park year planner, a brochure advertising other driving experiences offered by MSV, an additional set of MSV leaflets, and two rather nice souvenir window stickers badged, 'I'VE DRIVEN DONINGTON PARK!'. Part of me was disappointed that the gift set didn't contain a pen. As whom doesn't love a free pen? But I could visualise the draw at home full of complimentary ball points that hadn't seen the light of day since the event from which they came. So, a wise move from the organisers there.



Another feature of the Drive! experience was the audio guide that uses your phone's location while on the circuit to provide you with trivia while navigating your chosen MSV track. In theory, a very good idea. In practice, the guide only woke up when I was halfway around my first lap and took a minute or two to realise what corner I was at. Although having said that, I was pleasantly informed that 'Superbikes will take Redgate at an angle of 45 degrees'. Something that I previously didn't know, but also didn't necessarily need to know. A nice gimmick, nevertheless.



We were soon called onto the circuit, the 'pack' of cars behind a BMW safety car. Our online safety briefing said that while trackside, we would be driving at 'comfortable road speeds'. So of course, the cars in-front of us raced off at the earliest opportunity. Feeling somewhat guilty in the Herald, holding up the cars behind, I had to remind myself that it was not a competitive event and that the day was about enjoyment, so as I flew through the Craner Curves at a blistering 30 mph, I turned up the audio guide. As mentioned prior, our aim was to stick together in the three classics to ensure prime photo opportunities. Giles, however, soon got quite a shock in his TR6, as when exiting the Melbourne Loop, he suddenly found himself going around a few more loops. He had managed a full 360 degree spin. Not something I had expected to see out of my wing mirror but very entertaining all the same.



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Also very sobering, a reminder that the surface wasn't as dry as it first appeared. Luckily, he was able to regroup, un-damaged, but three cars behind. With our plan for photos and Giles' pride in tatters, we cracked on.

A few technical details of our cars on this Donington 'adventure'...



The Triumph TR6, the sports car in our convoy. A 2.5 litre fuel injected in-line six engine, providing 150bhp and 143lb ft of torque to the rear wheels via a 4-speed manual gearbox with overdrive. Taking the chequered flag, far from the top speed of 119 mph, Giles looks like a naughty schoolboy following his wee mishap a few corners prior.



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My 1969 Triumph Herald 13/60, a small 60s family car. The little 1.3 litre in-line four only squeezes out 63 bhp and 73 lb ft of torque, but it is relatively light, and in my three years of ownership I have carried out some subtle performance upgrades, such as uprated spark plugs, coil, HT leads and electronic ignition. With that considered, the Herald is more at home on a B-road, and I only hit 60 mph, short of my top speed of 85 mph, but was still ample fun on track.



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The luxury saloon, Jim's Jaguar MK 1, with Jaguar's legendary XK series engine. This car is an SE model, formerly owned by British racing driver, Cliff Allison. The SE Jags were equipped with a C-Type competition head, amongst other performance upgrades. 541 BPT has the same specification as Mike Hawthorn's MK 1 that sadly took him to his death. Jaguar's fettling returns an impressive top speed of 130 mph, 210 bhp and 109 lb ft of torque, accompanied by a 4-speed Moss gearbox with overdrive also. The track of the rear wheels being slightly narrower than the front provides for some interesting handling characteristics but is equally at home on circuit as it is cruising through border crossings on a grand tour.



Conclusions:

MSV's Drive! is a good idea. The concept is simple and was executed well by the team at Donington. A £29 entry fee is very agreeable considering that most track days are upwards of £150 per car, and often per driver. This is not an outright track day however, only three laps are permitted and under road conditions; perfect therefore for anyone with a licence to get on track at a relaxed pace. Although, if you're after some hotter, high-octane action, events do exist elsewhere. To my delight, the Herald returned 35.23 MPG across 155.9 miles, the distance from home, to Donington, three laps, and home again. I would highly recommend this event to any motorsport and or car enthusiast. Had they been closer geographically, I would like to have attended the same event at Brands Hatch, Cadwell or Oulton Park.



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