

## A story of Johnny Blades, the Works Clan Crusader and the Cadwell Park crowd

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# Making *Blades of Glory*

It was early February 2020, the UK was in lockdown for the second time and I was trudging around a deserted Cadwell Park, armed with a tape measure and clutching a handful of racing car photos.

I was about to bring Johnny Blades' Works Mod Sports Clan back to life for the first time since

1973 when it won the Northern Mod Sports Championship. In a manner of speaking.

Having produced a short documentary about Andy Dawson and Alan Conley and their rally successes in the Works rally Clan Crusaders a few weeks earlier, I'd had a long discussion with Paul Haussauer, Clan

This time, I wanted to bring the story – and the car – truly to life. Cadwell, which nestles in the Lincolnshire Wolds happened to feature in the Blades story as the scene of one particularly visceral battle for glory with a Lotus Elan.

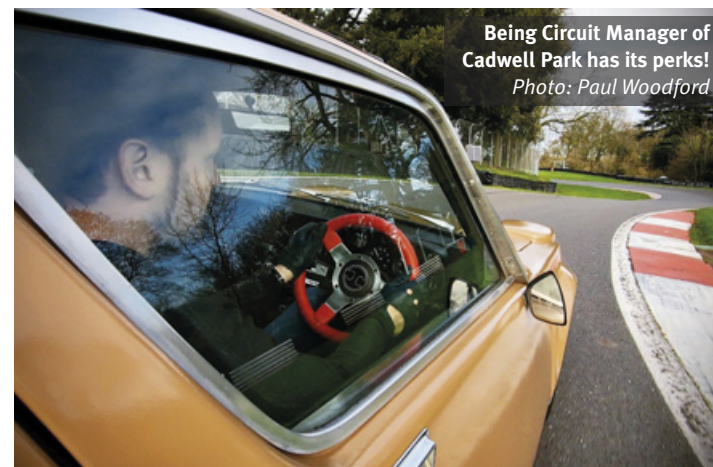
The scene was set. The only thing missing was the car.

I spent a few hours that day measuring various parts of the race track, pit lane and paddock buildings; cross referencing the measurements with video frames and layering over images of my own Clan Crusader in the

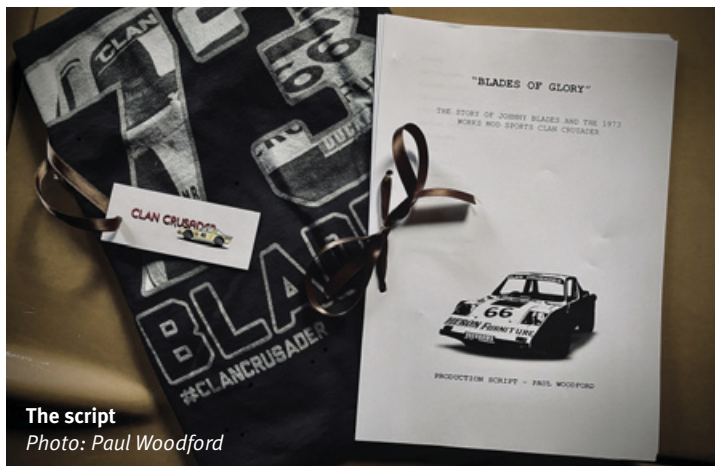
same locations from a recent photo shoot. This meant I could get the perspective of the car and the framing of the shots right.

I'd driven my brown Clan Crusader to the track to use for positional shots, and in the end I shot some 'hot laps' which ended up making the final film edit, linking parts of the story and race track together.

My next challenge was the distinct lack of clear images of Blades' Heron Furniture-sponsored Clan race car. Coupled with this, I wanted to put the Clan in shot with some of its



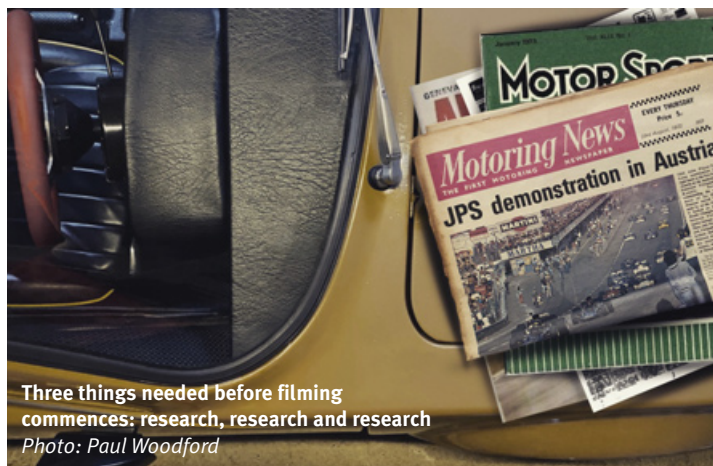
Being Circuit Manager of Cadwell Park has its perks!  
Photo: Paul Woodford



The script  
Photo: Paul Woodford

Motor Company MD who had told me the story of the Works racing programme he embarked on with Whitley Bay tailor, Johnny Blades.

I was inspired to follow up my rally film by telling the story of Blades' last plight in the world of motor racing, in 1973. I had access to an unused race circuit: Cadwell Park, where I worked as Circuit Manager, and I was in need of a project to boost my spirits after a tough year.



Three things needed before filming commences: research, research and research  
Photo: Paul Woodford



Photos of Blades Clan in action are surprisingly rare



Blades Clan in its final incarnation a poignant closing shot in the film

contemporary Mod Sports racing rivals.

As if that wasn't enough of a challenge to get my head around, I wanted to bring Blades' Lotus 69 F2 car back to life for a shot where I'd demonstrate the origins for the Clan's suspension set-up, and I also wanted to include a later reincarnation of

the Clan when it was raced by Stan Share aka 'Stan the Clan'.

I found the best photos of the cars that I could, and set about painstakingly reconstructing them as transparent layers; redrawing sponsor logos, adding detail to suit particular parts of the documentary, and adjusting perspective to match up the cars with the shots.

Having got static images to work, I decided that in order for the cars to be believable I had to be able to interact with them on screen. Another filming set-up day ensued, this time I took my 13-year-old son, Mason, with me to help with the filming. I'd never done anything this technical before!

I'd put together a shooting list so we knew exactly which parts of the film needed building. Walking round the Blades Clan and Lotus 69 on the track to talk through technical details on both cars was relatively easy. But walking through the middle of a Clan, Ginetta G15 and Lotus Elan, and gesturing towards each car in the right perspective and at the right depth on screen took a lot of getting right.

My final challenge was to create a closing scene where I'd walk past the Works Clan in its Stan Share livery, before walking out of shot behind the car. Again perspective was key here, and we must have shot the scene over 20 times.

As luck would have it, a crow landed behind where the car would virtually be parked in the scrutineering bay and that helped me position it in relation to where I'd walk out of shot. The crow even made it into the final film edit!

With the 'star cars' built and rendered in video format, I



Rivals Ginetta G15 and Lotus Elan

continued my research of the Blades story. The core plotline came from Paul Haussauer, with a variety of Facebook groups, forums and other sources providing useful links and missing pieces of the jigsaw.

Only when pulling the storyboard together did I realise how thin on the

ground detailed information about 1970s racing is. I almost had to build the season as I'd built the cars; piece by piece, cross-referencing various accounts, magazine articles and first-hand accounts.

The storyboard and script were written as effectively a walk round a lap of Cadwell Park. The first shot is on the start/finish straight, the script then takes me round an entire lap, and back to the paddock where the story concludes with the help of the aforementioned crow.

Mason and I returned to Cadwell Park to film the story in sections, spending two full days filming in the cold, atmospheric February sunshine. The temperature was dropping to 3 or 4 degrees during the late afternoon as the sun started to go down, so numb fingers, toes and noses fill my memories of those two long days.

Each piece had to be cross-referenced with the pre-built shots of the recreated cars, to ensure the perspective and lighting were aligned. If this had been done in isolation, the edit would have shown up the 'built' scenes. Some shots were filmed on both days to give me different lighting options in the edit.

This whole process was produced from start to finish on my iPhone, including creating and



All the best motoring films have a sprinkling of autumn leaves...  
Photo: Paul Woodford

Paul with Assistant Film Director Mason  
Photo: Paul Woodford

layering the images of the cars and editing the film. The biggest challenge though, was still to come...

Having spent the best part of a week editing the documentary together, I realised the file was too big to export to my phone from the video editor app, leaving me with no choice but to

re-edit the film in two pieces, before stitching the two together and exporting to an iPad. In order to do this I had to wipe the memory on both devices – completely.

I'd scheduled the film to be premiered on Facebook and YouTube at 7 p.m. on 8th March, after which I'd planned a live chat

with someone who knew Johnny Blades and had helped with my research.

I spent a stressful couple of hours before trying to get the film to upload in time, and with twenty minutes to spare I finally sat down and wrote out the description for the film post.

My journey was done. I'd managed to tell the story of one of the most fascinating underdog stories in British motor racing, and I'd recognised a lifetime ambition of producing a feature-length racing documentary. I'm really not sure I'll ever have the time in my life to embark on such an all-consuming project ever again, but deep down I really hope I do.

To my humble amazement and delight, people in the Clan world really got behind the film, and various images emerged, from people watching with their families, to setting up home cinemas with big screens to join in the premiere.

Releasing *Blades of Glory* remains one of the proudest moments of my life, and what happened next completed the picture. I was contacted, first by Julian Blades – Johnny's son – thanking me on behalf of the family for the work that had gone into telling their father's story.

Then John Burn, Blades' mechanic who features so heavily in the story, contacted me to let me

know that not only did he enjoy the film, but it was almost entirely accurate. Given how many lines I'd had to read between, and blanks I'd had to fill, that was the biggest result of all.



1973: Mechanic John Burn with Blades Clan



You can watch  
*Blades of Glory* at  
[www.CarFilms.co.uk](http://www.CarFilms.co.uk)