

CSCC Anglesey 24 – a test of man & machine

Anglesey Circuit, 1st/2nd July 2023

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I currently race with the Classic Sports Car Club and to celebrate their 20th Anniversary, they held a race meeting over more than 24 hours, all day Saturday and through the night continuing until about Sunday lunchtime. There were five grids of cars and each grid had four 40-minute races in the 24-hour period including one race in the dark. The result of each race would be based on the cumulative result of the four race sessions. This really appealed to me; I like longer races and the new challenge of racing at night but I was a bit apprehensive – I race in Swinging Sixties so all the cars are over 50 years old and I'd had a few reliability issues leading up to this meeting.

In preparation, I had given the car a good service, fitted new brake pads and ordered a new set of tyres to be taken to Anglesey by the supplier for fitting once the tyres on the car were worn out. Working lights, reflective numbers and lights to illuminate the door numbers were required for the night race. There was lighting along the start finish straight and in the pit lane, with reflectors around the corners but most of the circuit was in darkness and the remote location of the circuit means that it is very dark at night. I also took along a spare 998 race engine and four-speed race gearbox, in case of any problems meaning the tow car was full for the drive down.

The schedule was busy, starting with a briefing, soon followed by qualifying, the first race



Anglesey circuit known for its scenic location
All photos: Jeff Bloxham

session after lunch on Saturday, the second race session early evening, then scrutineering of the extra lighting followed by a few laps of night acclimatisation, the night race at about 2.45 a.m. with the final race session taking place on Sunday morning.


Karen and I had booked three nights at a nearby hotel from Friday to Sunday, though we hoped that we wouldn't be using the room on the Saturday, provided that the car was still running OK. We would be finished by Sunday lunchtime, but I wasn't prepared to drive four hours home without a decent sleep first.

There were 26 cars entered in the Swinging Sixties group one grid for up to two-litre cars and I was in class B for up to 1400 cc up against eleven Midgets and Sprites, all with 1380 cc. Class C is for Mini-based cars and had two Minis: a Mini Marcos and a Mini Gem. And in the larger classes there were Alfas, BMWs, MGBs and a Cortina GT. I qualified in 14th position but was promoted to 13th as one driver was disqualified for a yellow flag infringement. Subsequently, one of the Alfas withdrew as his bellhousing had cracked, a problem that he thought he had solved.

All races were a rolling start and this worked well. Any thoughts of taking it easy quickly evaporated as the first race session got underway. I made a good start and was running at the tail of the lead group in eleventh place with no pressure from behind. On the third lap there was an incident involving two cars behind me, a Mini and a Sprite. This led to a lap or two under code 60 (like a virtual safety car, all cars have to slow to 60 kph with no overtaking). Four of the leading cars decided to take their mandatory pit stop, as the pit window had just opened at the ten-minute mark. The code 60 was soon replaced by a safety car and lots of cars pitted on the next lap. My



Karen assists with a speedy pit stop



stop was very slow, but all cars that had pitted were held at the exit of the pit lane until after the safety car had passed, meaning that we all lost a lap to the four cars which had stopped previously. We had been told that this would happen during the night race but is not usual for normal races. Retrospectively, this was modified to say that it would happen for all races! Once the race resumed, I lapped consistently in eleventh place, gaining a place when a car ahead of me retired giving me tenth of the 22 finishers, with three retirements, two of which were fixed for the next session.

After letting the car cool down a bit and changing out of my race suit, I gave the car a checkover and ensured that it was all ready for the next session. As I had plenty of time, I decided that I would fit my reflective numbers and door lights in preparation for the night race. This race began well but the Cortina GT had a problem at the top of the hill and stopped on track on the first lap resulting in a safety car so that it could be taken away by a truck that could lift it. Once the race resumed, it was uneventful. After my appalling first pit stop, we planned that Karen would help this time. The problem is that it isn't possible to see my belts to do them up because the HANS device (a type of head restraint) limits movement of your head. So we had a signal to let Karen know that I would be coming in on the next lap and she could be down off the pit wall ready for my arrival. To complete a pit stop as a single driver, you have to stop, switch off the engine, undo your belts, get out of the car, close the door, open the door and get back in, do up the belts, close the door and restart the engine. This time it went much better and I had one of the fastest stops. The pit stop was followed by some quick laps (for me) – I was passed by two cars but passed two others and there were three retirements all of which left me in eighth place.

After changing, we left the car to cool down and went for a meal in the café which did a fantastic job throughout the whole event catering for everyone. Next up I checked the car over again, had the front tyres replaced and completed the scrutineering checks on my lighting. It wasn't too long before everyone was being called up for their night

acclimatisation laps. As it wasn't fully dark yet, I decided to wait for a later session which went well. It was soon apparent that most people had fitted extra LED light bars and similar; I had good headlights which were adequate but not great.

We now had a couple of hours spare, time to try and grab a few zeds! We set the alarm for two a.m., reclined the front seats of the car and managed a couple of hours to recharge the batteries a bit.

So, on to the night race – this went very well despite my eyesight not being as good as it was in my youth. My lap times were a couple of seconds slower than in daylight, but this seemed to have been the case for many of the drivers. Survival was the objective and we got a rest when a car retired in a dangerous place at around half distance and the safety car was deployed for about ten minutes. I had been passed by a Midget just before my pit stop but during the safety car laps it pulled over to the side of the track and appeared to have a problem. It turned out later that he was struggling to get second gear but myself and the BMW in front of me passed him while he was stopping. I thought nothing more about it until I was called up by a clerk – my in-car video was viewed and I was given a verbal warning for overtaking behind the safety car. I wasn't to know that the Midget was able to continue and the warning was the least that the clerk could do once the report had reached her. The Midget withdrew after this session. Once the safety car ended, I finished the race in seventh place, fractions of a second ahead of a fast but unreliable Sprite. I later found out that I was in a net sixth at this point. 21 cars finished the night race with just one retirement. My pit stop was again very quick, with Karen's assistance, so this will be a permanent improvement to our events.

At the start of the final session, I was passed by the quick Sprite, but was running well in a comfortable eighth place. My lap times were consistent and faster than I had qualified but this race was to have six retirements, the race duration proving a bit too much for such elderly machines. Sadly, I was the first to stop after ten laps with a nasty noise from the nearside-rear wheel. I checked that the driveshaft was tight, which it was, but the wheel was wobbly; it was later found to be a broken driveshaft. Definitely a case of what might have been – as a result of other retirements I would have finished fifth overall if I had continued where I was running when I retired. But I enjoyed 140-plus minutes of racing plus qualifying. Even Karen enjoyed the weekend – she doesn't usually

like to watch me racing. I ended up being classified 18th overall.

After the awards were presented, we packed up and returned to our hotel for a splendid Sunday lunch and a nap. It was a fantastic meeting with officials and marshals working in shifts and all doing a brilliant job.

