

CASTLE COMBE

18th October 2008

Those of you who are of more senior years may remember the end of the Second World War and the political quagmire that Europe became with a Communist East separated from the West eventually with a 'No-man's Land' filled with landmines down its entirety, and a sturdy wire fence on either side to deter people from either side visiting the other by illicit means. Films from the 60s were full of portrayal of derring – do. Countries behind the 'Iron Curtain', as the fence became known, were part of a mysterious block of land called the USSR. Every now and then news would leak out of a serious rebellious nature by one of the nations enclosed and we would hear, and see on black and white television, scenes of devastation where tanks and soldiers of the Soviet communist government would try to quell these uprisings. What we didn't see were the Red flags of the invaders, simply because everything in those days was reported in different tones of grey. But, even as children, we would understand the term 'REDS'. In 1956 I watched the Hungarian uprising, and in 1968 watched events unfold in what became known as the 'Prague Spring'. People lost lives needlessly.

Red flags can signify a warning, martial law, defiance, or left wing politics- the earliest recorded mention of a flag warning being in 1777 to alert people of an approaching flood.

Having only recently joined your ranks I was vaguely aware that Castle Combe in October has, in the main, been a wet meeting. Last year, according to Peter Rafter's report at the time, was a beautiful autumnal day, quite in contrast to the year before which was very wet. Wet does not make for an all-round enjoyable experience- driving may be slower, but damp invades everything.

Being keen on weather watching for these events, the met office's forecast appeared to improve during the previous few days, promising us a dry day for the end of season bash. Being a mountain leader, I am used to incorrect forecasts.

Living in Bristol I awoke to rain. Aaaaargh! This had stopped by the time I had reached CC, but the cloudburst was moving towards Swindon and caught those coming from that direction. Fellow competitors, like me, were just a little hesitant, hoping that the rain would keep away. It didn't. It came, it went, it came back to stay.

The track was wet when the first intrepids went out for their first and only practice, a two lap affair when only the first lap is timed, but the second time sheets show finishing speed in MPH. Some thought later that they'd done exceedingly quick lap times until they saw the writing at the top of the sheets.

At this meeting, Morgans are put into classes according to size of engine, and tuning thereof- ranging therefore from Class 4 through to Class 12, and therefore sharing the grid with others in very strange beasts.

Now references to Red Flags return here, for not only did it rain slightly, but rained constantly, it seemed, for the remainder of the morning. Now water, oil and grass cuttings left on the track from the previous day's mowings do not make a good surface for those tiny patches of rubber to glue to the tarmac and the meeting became a long drawn out affair- it was like May 1st in Moscow! One red flag followed another while our pilots discover the grim truth of the slipperiness. Class 4's intrepid Anne Benischek discovered the hard way how to upset the Red flag army- the tyre wall had done its job properly at Quarry, just after the rise before the corner, unfortunately leaving Anne's car much the worse for wear- she was able to drive back to the paddock under her own steam, BUT with much bent bodywork, (the car's, you understand), and steel steering rod underneath appearing now to be in the shape of

a rainbow. Her practice incomplete, would it be the finish for Anne? An early departure, perhaps? To the tune of hammered bodywork, and 'that's bent and please remove all that grass; take out the grille and bash that.....' The others waited their turn, four at a time to go to the grid. Wetter and wetter it became. Anne wasn't the only one to.....erm... stray from the straight and narrow, and several came back just unable to understand how slippery it was out there- spins here, spins there, red flags on a regular basis; and not all for the Morgans. Cars were coming back with grass all over the place, and in the conditions the marshals were struggling to keep the stuff off the track.

We were called to assembly probably a good half hour before our off time; all the time our cars, clothes, helmets covered with raindrops. I, in class 6, was in a class with just two other competitors, both pristine Reliant Scimitars. But they weren't for long. The one in front followed Anne into the tyre wall at Quarry- and stopped just before by red flags, not seeing very much out of either my visor or the flyscreen, I presumed that I was allowed back to the start line for a second go- proceed carefully! All was well and off I went, at a leisurely pace, but as is my wont these days- since I joined your illustrious club- just a little too much enthusiasm at the Esses produced a full 360 spin- only to carry on with little delay; no grass collecting this week, either. And only now do I understand..... As a result of several drivers' impaired visibility the Red Flags they thought they had seen was actually one of our loyal Morgan supporters wearing a bright red anorak. When it was realized what a serious effect this was having on the morale of the meeting, she was asked to remove it by the marshals. Would you believe it? The rain disappeared when she donned a green one instead, the sun started to shine, and the afternoon looked promising.

I am not aware of any further damaging mishaps to the Morgans. Lunch was delayed whilst practices continued, such had been the slowing effect of the conditions. Lunch, eventually, was called for 1 pm with practices to be continued afterwards, seriously impinging on our timed runs.

Sadly for me, work called and I was going to have to be back in Bristol for 5.30, meaning that I would have to leave at 4.30 whatever I would have achieved.

Times tumbled in the drying conditions; Anne was allowed to have a practice out of turn and so rejoined the fray.

Now who is this chap Paul Bryan who keeps achieving 1sts? How does he do it? And before the track is fully dry! Paul and Greg managed their quickest times during their first timed runs, whilst everyone else, whilst I was packing up to go, achieved their best on their second runs. In the dry everyone achieved very respectable times, on what can be described as a very challenging circuit with not much room for mistakes.

As I left at 4.30, the two Reliants in my class were just lining up in the holding area. I hope that the later classes managed their second runs- perhaps with lights on?

I hope that you all had a safe journey home.

Thank you, Pegasus MC for what must have been a testing day for you. May I take this opportunity to thank all those hillclimbers and sprinters who have given me such a warm welcome in the last few weeks, and a big hug to Brenda, too.

Thank you
Andrew Potter