

Motorsports Part 5 Repurposing the Past Swords Into Plowshares

By Bob Vitrikas

When we started off this series, automobile racing was in its infancy and competition venues were limited to private estate roads and hill climbs. Horrible as it is, war is also a great catalyst for positive change technically and culturally. Let's explore how World War II changed racing in the U.K..

3rd September 1939 | Los Angeles Times & Daily Mail newspaper headlines

EXTRA!
WAR! GERMAN TROOPS
INVADE POLAND
NAZIS BOMB WARSAW

Great Britain and France are at war with Germany. We now fight against the blackest tyranny that has ever held men in bondage. We fight to defend, and restore freedom and justice on earth.

I discovered a wealth of information regarding early post war automobile racing on the Scarf & Goggles Social Club web site

<https://scarfandgoggles.wordpress.com/2018/01/01/a-brief-history-of-british-motor-sport-part-3-1945-1953/>

Here are some fascinating bits of information I hope you will enjoy!

- 1945:

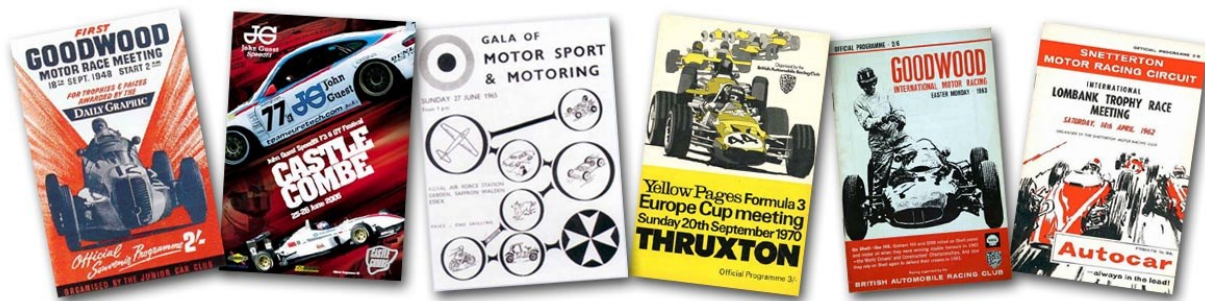
— The British were at the top of their game during WWII regarding their intelligence capabilities against the Germans. It was only natural that after the war one British intelligence officer investigated the Nazi sponsored pre-war German Grand Prix teams to see what could be learned to help the British gain supremacy in international motor racing. Like any good intelligence officer, Cameron Earl published his findings in 1946 and aspiring British race car designers read it from cover to cover!

— The British Racing Drivers' Club (BRDC) started a fund to help renovate the Le Mans circuit and facilities which were damaged by Allied bombers in WWII. Very sporting of the British don't you think? Especially when you consider the damage the German bombers did to the Brooklands facility during WWII. Did anyone come to the aid of the British to repair the damage done? I don't think so...

— English Racing Automobiles (ERA) was reborn as British Racing Motors (BRM), touting ambitious plans to build a supercharged 1.5 liter H16 engine along the lines of the pre-war German world beater teams. Despite great promise, this ambitious project was a reach too far and the BRM suffered failure after failure until the project finally took the World Constructors' title in 1962 with World Driving Champion Graham Hill at the wheel. BRM followed that up by coming in second in the Constructors' Championship in 1963, 1964, 1965 and 1971. BRM was closed down in 1977.

- 1946:

— In 1935 there were 68 airfields in the U.K.. By 1939 that number had risen to 100 and by the war's end in 1945 there were 720! By 1955 that number diminished to 210 and by 1960 there were just 130 left. A number of these disused airfields were quickly converted to circuit race tracks. One of the first was Boreham Airfield in Essex.



Many more would follow their example!

— Jaguar revealed their sensational alloy bodied XK120 roadster which became an overnight hit, proving itself and drawing customers by its winning ways on rallies and road races in the U.K. and Europe.

- 1947:

— The Silverstone RAF training field was selected by the BRDC and the RAC as the home for British motor racing.

— During the War Aston Martin stopped making cars and turned to manufacturing aircraft components. In 1947 tractor manufacturer David Brown bought Aston Martin and in 1950 began production of the famed DB series Aston Martin road cars which combined performance and luxury, a theme that continues to this day. Did you know that Lamborghini and Porsche also built tractors? Triumph (and Morgan) used Ferguson tractor engines in their sports cars for many years.

— Land Speed Record holder John Cobb raised the bar to 394.196 mph at the Utah Bonneville Salt Flats. American George Poteet currently holds the record at 481.576 mph.

— The Brooklands Automobile Racing Club and the Junior Car Club joined forces to form the British Automobile Racing Club (BARC) headquartered at what would later become the Goodwood circuit.

— Charles Cooper and his son John formed the Cooper Car Company propelled by the success of their lightweight rear-engine racing cars using 500cc JAP motorcycle engines and Fiat Topolino sub-frames. Ironically John Cooper worked on mini-submarine designs during WWII, later gaining fame (and fortune) with the Mini Cooper giant killer road car that established the Mini's reputation on the World Rally Circuit. Cooper's rear/mid-engine race cars won the Formula 1 Constructors' and



Drivers' Championships in 1959 and 1960 and spurred a revolution in Indy car design.

- 1948:

— Silverstone was converted into a world class Grand Prix circuit, hosting the first Royal Automobile Club (RAC) grand Prix race.

— Ian Appleyard and Dick Weatherhead won the Rally des Alps in a pre-war SS100 Jaguar.

— Another airfield was converted into a race track which would gain fame and glory as the Goodwood Circuit. The first meet was organized by the BARC. Goodwood continues to make history, hosting two fantastic vintage race meetings each year.

Father and son team of Charles and John Cooper spawned a revolution in race car design, picking up where the pre-war V-16 mid-engine German Auto Union cars left off.

- 1949:

— Silverstone hosted a second Formula 1 race, the first British Grand Prix, equal to the French and Italian grand prix as the most prestigious races of their kind.

— Goodwood hosted its first Formula 1 race.

— Tony Vandervell, manufacturer of the “Thin Wall” bearing, broke away from the BRM venture, bought a racing Ferrari, painted it green (British racing green), named it the “Thin Wall Special” and raced it in Formula Libre and occasional grand prix races.

— Britain’s Board of Trade (BoT) wasn’t impressed with Vandervell’s purchase of a Ferrari race car and threatened to make it illegal to import foreign race cars.

Vandervell argued that it was only for testing and developing engine bearings for use in British motors. Vandervell paid the customs and duty taxes and the BoT allowed the car into the country. The significance of this was that many amateur racers couldn’t afford to import race cars and thus turned to British designed and built race cars. Today the U.K. is the world center (centre?) for motor sports research and development.

- 1950:

— Silverstone hosted the first points-scoring race of the FIA Formula 1 World Championship. Underscoring the importance of the race, King George VI, Queen Elizabeth and the two royal princesses were in attendance. BRM made a long awaited debut at Silverstone but got off to an embarrassing start when the driveshaft shattered at the start. Angry Brits threw pennies at the car as it was wheeled off the grid.

— The 24 Hours of Le Mans is often called a British race held in France. Brit Sydney Allard driving a car of his own design, an Allard J2, won the 8 liter class with American co-driver Tom Cole, finishing a credible third overall. Aston Martin finished

first and second in the 3-litre class. The Jowett Jupiter of Tommy Wisdom and Tommy



Wise beat the MG TC of George Phillippo and Eric Winterbottom in the 1.5 litre class.

- 1951:

— Jaguar developed a competition model of the XK120 known as the C-Type which finished first in the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Aston Martin took first, second and third places in the 3-litre class and a Jowett Jupiter led the 1.5 litre class home.

— Frazier Nash became the first British manufacturer to win the incredibly tough Sicilian Targa Florio endurance race.

— Ferrari notched its first Formula 1 victory at the British Grand Prix held at the Silverstone circuit.

- 1952:

— Goodwood hosted the first night race in the U.K.. Floodlights illuminated the grandstands and the pits, curbs were painted with a luminous paint and of course being British, a beer tent was erected. Due to licensing laws, they had to stop serving beer before the race ended. Boo hoo! Aston Martin came first in front of the Jaguar team. The nine hour race proved too long to hold the attention of race fans and as a

Ever seen a Jowett Jupiter? Here's the winner of the 1.5 litre class at the 1951 24 Hours of Le Mans race. They previously won the 1.5 litre class in the 1950 Le Mans race.

result it was not well attended.

— A young engineer, pilot and budding car manufacturer by the name of Colin Chapman started his business under the name of Lotus Cars. Lotus went on to become



one of the winningest race car builders of all time.

— British cars and drivers took first (Sydney Allard driving an Allard) and second (Stirling Moss, John Cooper and Desmond Scannell driving a Sunbeam) in the grueling Monte Carlo Rally.

— British entries again took top places at Le Mans in the 5 litre (Nash-Healey) and 1.5 litre classes (Jewett Jupiter).

- 1953:

— Here's a big one; gas rationing ended in Europe, leading to a huge investment in automobile racing. One example was Shell which introduced a premium grade fuel for the first time since 1939. Their sponsorship of Ferrari continues to this day. Ferrari once famously refused to race at the American 12 Hours of Sebring because the race was sponsored by AMOCO and all competitors had to use AMOCO gasoline. But not Ferrari!

— Once again the British came first overall at Le Mans with Duncan Hamilton and Tony Rolt driving a C-Type Jaguar. Ken Wharton and Laurence Mitchell took top honors in the 2 litre class driving a Frazier Nash.

The first Lotus production race car was sold from 1952-1957. Approximately 110 were made and kicked off the ever green Lotus 7 now known as the Caterham. This Mark VI is seen in more modern vintage racing action.

— Jaguar continued their winning ways on the rally circuit taking first place in the RAC Rally and the Acropolis Rally.

— This was a banner year for opening road racing circuits on former airfields including Snetterton, Oulton Park and Crystal Palace joining the Silverstone, Goodwood and Brands Hatch circuits.

In the ensuing years Britain's motor sports exploits continued to grow. Land and water speed records were set, grand prix races were won, driver and constructor world championships were achieved, rallies were conquered and if you wanted a winning race car you turned to Britain for the technology. With this foundation to build on, what achievements lie ahead?