



NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 14 – New Year 2019

Welcome to our last newsletter of 2018 (or maybe our first of 2019!). If we manage to get it circulated in time, a happy Christmas to all our members. Or perhaps to be on the safe side we'd better just wish you a happy New Year! There's been a lot going on so far in the closed season, so in this issue we'll be looking forward to what 2019 has in store and also, if we can do so without being too controversial, give you some background to some of the discussions and decisions that have been going on in the background ...

AUTOSPORT INTERNATIONAL

As usual our first big event of 2019 is Autosport International, at the NEC Birmingham, where we'll be part of the Oval Racing Show, open to the public on Saturday 12th and Sunday 13th January. If you're planning to visit the show on the trade days (Thursday 10th and Friday 11th) you'll have to come back at the weekend to see the best bits!

The show layout has been changed so that it's now occupying Halls 1 to 5 at the NEC, so you'll be approaching it from the opposite direction (handy for anyone thinking of coming by train or straight from the airport!) Our bit will be in Hall 3A where we have three generously sized stands that will enable us to show over 20 cars. We'll be joined on our stand by representatives of the UK Autograss Championship, and the Evesham club and Southern League promoting the Nationals, while the British Autograss Series are also supporting us from their own stand. There should also be a good selection of your favourite Autograss traders – we won't try to list them as no doubt some last minute deals will be done!

Autograss will yet again be in the Live Action Show which is still in the familiar Hall 5. This time we'll just have one segment in the show, which will be a mixed line-up of Class 7s and Specials. Invited to take part in Class 7s are Alice Bevans, Phil Cooper, Liam Evans, Andy Holtby, Paul Waldron and Phil Rogers as a reserve. In Specials we should see Clare Horner, Dan Mackenzie, Daz Mullen, James Poltimore, Russ Shepherd and Alex Hall (reserve).

There's a long list of cars lined up for the show stands – we've decided not to release the full list as we don't want to spoil the anticipation for you, but what we can say is that you won't be disappointed in the quality or variety of cars on show.

One appeal we'd like to make – we'd really appreciate it if those involved with cars for the show could resist the temptation to post photos on line of the cars in a finished state – again, we don't want anything to spoil the experience of visitors to the show seeing these stunning cars for the first time.



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GRASSING HERITAGE

We were also invited to include a couple of historic grass racers in the NEC show but as this is an area that hasn't received active promotion from NASA in the past, we think we've run out of time to source suitable cars. We do have to give a big thank you to Granville Cottle and his team from the Welsh Valleys who were willing to give up their Christmas to build an exact replica of a 1960s Jalopy racer. The project was thwarted at the last moment by parts availability, but the car will be built and we're sure it will be a valuable promotional asset for NASA in the future.

We're aware that we've lagged a bit behind most other motorsports in building on our heritage. One reason for this is that, with the way Autograss has developed, it would be very difficult for us to race "historic" cars safely in the way that the Heritage Stock Car movement, for example, can.

However, we know from the popularity of the "Jalopy Days" and "Retrograsser" on-line groups that there's massive interest in our sport's history. Our appeal for cars for the NEC highlighted that there are plenty of historic cars still out there, wanting to be saved before it's too late. Maybe not quite what we were asked to provide for the NEC – many of the cars mentioned were fondly remembered partly because, in their day, they were ahead of their time, meaning that to the public they're not visually different enough to what we race now. But those within the sport would love to see all of these cars again!

We're discussing putting together a register of Heritage Grassers – covering anything from early Jalopies or Bedsteads to cars superseded by recent developments. It's early days yet, but one suggestion is devoting a display area to these cars at the Nationals in future years, with track parades and even "demonstration" races a possibility. Anyone who'd like to see us pursue this idea is welcome to come and chat at the NEC!

MOTORSPORT WITH ATTITUDE

Most of you will be aware that there's a second major racing show that NASA will be involved with in 2019. "Motorsport with Attitude" is a new promotion, focused mainly on Oval Racing and other grass-roots and accessible forms of motorsport. The show will take place on Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th February (with build-up on Friday 15th) at the Peterborough Arena, which is what used to be known as the East of England Showground, ideally located just off the A1 to the north of Peterborough.

NASA's attendance at the show will be managed by the East Anglian League, but it's going to be a national promotion of the sport, not just local. As at the NEC, the British Autograss Series will be taking their own stand to boost the overall Autograss presence.

Live Action "Demo" races will be taking place throughout the weekend on a purpose built oval track just outside the main hall. The exact format isn't yet finalised, but we're collecting names of Autograss racers from all classes who are interested in taking part.



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As far as static displays are concerned, there are at least three different indoor display areas, plus masses of scope for outdoor displays (we hope you've noticed that the sun normally shines for most of February!). There's really no limit to the number of Autograss cars that can be accommodated. We're not looking just for "show" cars – new cars will be great but we'll also welcome "well-raced", "budget" or "club" cars, just so long as they're clean, tidy, usually in ready-to-race condition (although part-built cars would also be interesting) and, most importantly, fully compliant with NASA regs.

If you're interested in getting involved, please drop a message to Jeffrey Parish, or there's an online form you can submit with your details on the new "NASA forms" page which we'll link from the main website and Facebook pages.

DIRECTORS AND OFFICIALS FOR 2019

The end of November saw a good attendance for the NASA AGM, where the Directors and NASA Officials were able to present their review of 2018 and sum up some of the changes planned for 2019.

Two of the serving directors, Margaret Allen and Vernon Mackenzie, were re-elected for a further three year term, and we also had three new candidates for the Board. Diane Tomkinson, who of course has served several years both as Secretary to the Board and NASA Association Secretary, was elected, as was Ray Wyeth, who returns to the Board after many years as Southern League Chairman and a key member of the National marshalling team. Heath Luck was not successful in the election on this occasion, but we'd like to thank him for putting his name forward. We therefore go into 2019 with a strong Board of nine directors, compared to the minimum number of seven who served during 2018.

The new Board has already had its first meeting and allocated the main areas of responsibility among the directors. Margaret Allen will continue to oversee all financial and insurance matters, while Barbara Harper will continue as our membership and registration co-ordinator, ably assisted by our national network of registration assistants. Barbara's responsibilities again include entries and the allocation of places for the two National Championship events. Vernon Mackenzie remains the director in charge of scrutineering and technical regulations. Phil Rogers continues to oversee marshalling matters and Martyn Tinker will be leading safety and disciplinary matters, although Ray Wyeth now steps in to back up both Phil and Martyn. Jeffrey Parish continues as Company Secretary, with responsibility for statutory and legal compliance and updating key documentation, while Jason Baker will oversee promotions and marketing, as well as maintaining NASA's website. That just leaves Diane Tomkinson who will continue to carry out all the tasks she previously managed as Association Secretary, so Di will remain the primary point of contact for the Board, also managing our social media presence.

All NASA approved championships and series have a liaison director (or two) appointed to look after them. These will be Phil Rogers and Diane Tomkinson for BAS, Barbara Harper and Jason Baker for UKAC, and Jeffrey Parish for the All Ireland Series and the British F600 Championship. Vernon and Diane will be the liaison directors for the men's Nationals while Barbara and Margaret will work with "local" director Ray on the Ladies' and Juniors' Nationals.



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Apart from the Board of Directors, the main change is in the NASA Marshalling Team, where Stuart Thomas steps up to re-assume the position as Chief Marshal, with Paddy Bubb as his deputy. We'd like to thank Dave Bennett for his invaluable contribution as Chief Marshal over the past two years.

The team of NASA Assistant Scrutineers is unchanged with Ady Taylor, Dave George and Rob Simmonds in the key positions.

Emyr "Oily" Evans will enter his second year as National Association Chairman (technically the Chairmen of the League Representatives' Committee) supported by Lynn Thomas as Vice-Chair. This committee will be looking for a new secretary due to Di Tomkinson's election to the Board, so anyone interested should contact Oily so that the committee may make the appointment at their February meeting.

NEW TYRE RULES

One of the main challenges for our Scrutineering and Technical teams over the past 18 months has been the updating of NASA's tyre regulations. The new regulations, which take effect on 1 July 2019, are now published on the NASA website.

We're aware that a lot of members have been querying the need for change in the tyre rules. We had no choice but to update this area as the existing "agreement" with "Option A" tyre suppliers was due to run out at the end of 2018, and at the same time we needed to address some widespread concerns among members about tyre costs and wear rates. This is always a delicate balancing act between the differing expectations of those who race largely at championship level and the lower budget club racers, while at the same time recognising the commercial realities for the tyre suppliers.

We found that the agreement inherited by the current Board gave no guarantees to either the suppliers or NASA, which we felt was unacceptable; the suppliers need the certainty that NASA cannot pull the plug on them at a moment's notice, and NASA need assurances of adequate tyre availability for members.

The "new" rules are actually very little different from the previous ones, but the main focus has been on making the rules enforceable. The old rules, for all but Class 1, stated "Control Tyres Option "A" must have a minimum nominal shore hardness of 60. when measured at a nominal temperature of 20°C. (There is a tolerance of -5 shore hardness to allow for manufacturing variance. The absolute limit is 55). Control Tyres Option "B" must have an absolute minimum shore hardness of 55. when measured at a nominal temperature of 20° c."

The inclusion of the word "nominal" made this rule very hard to interpret and the requirement for testing to be carried out at one specific temperature made enforcement almost impossible in practice. It did appear, though, that some "Option A" tyres were being manufactured at a shore hardness below the minimum of 60 (but within the permitted tolerance) and after use were returning readings well below the tolerance level, which was obviously distorting their performance compared to other available tyres.



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The intention of the new rules is that these loopholes will be closed and that the playing field will be levelled to some extent by reducing the performance differential between different types of permitted tyres. Our preference would be to see more than one "Option A" supplier competing in the field, but time will tell whether this comes about.

For "Option B" tyres the minimum hardness has been increased from 55 to 60 shore to be consistent with "Option A" and the price limit has reduced from £60 to £50, all in the interest of reducing potential costs to competitors.

The implementation of the new rules has been deferred until 1 July to allow competitors to use up stocks of existing tyres.

One point apparently causing confusion is the definition of "wet weather" tyres, that aren't subject to shore hardness restrictions. To clarify, the "wet weather" refers to the definition of a specific tyre. The track conditions don't have to be declared as "wet" for these tyres to be used, but we don't think this is open to significant abuse as the tyres in question simply won't work, or survive, in dry conditions.

The onus for ensuring that tyres comply with the rules is entirely with the competitor – clearly suppliers can't guarantee what may happen to a tyre once it's left their hands. Anyone concerned about this rule leaving them exposed might be advised to acquire a durometer (a very cheap and simple instrument) to check their own tyres before and after use.

CLASS 4 CHANGES

The most significant change to the NASA rule book for 2019 concerns Class 4, where there'd been a long running debate within the scrutineering team (and thrown open for any interested members to contribute). The issue was that, although in some areas this remained a healthy, and even growing, class at club level, numbers at major meetings had dropped off significantly, possibly due to the dominance of a handful of cars.

Although various options were considered, the scrutineers' committee came up with a package of measures, which will be monitored during 2019. There are three main changes:

Firstly the engine cc limit for BMC (Leyland, Rover etc) A series engines will be increased to 1340cc, while all other engine types remain at 1130cc – this change being available to the Mini or Metro racers in the class.

Secondly, applicable to all eligible cars, the original gearbox/transmission casing may be swapped for a standard production unit from any manufacturer's range – no longer restricted to the unit originally fitted to the car or engine.

Thirdly, NASA are looking for members who are willing to trial a Citroen/Peugeot using a 1360 engine with restrictions, on an experimental basis for 2019.



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CLASS 2 ADDITION

The other significant rule change for 2019 is that, following an extended period of running with “experimental” status, the Toyota Yaris will be added to the list of eligible Class 2 cars. Specifically, the Yaris 1299cc VVTI 16v (2sz-fe) engine, 3 or 5 door bodysells manufactured after 1st January 1999 and before 1st January 2006 may be used, with a specific set of rules applicable to the car – the detailed rules will be available shortly on the NASA website.

NEW RULE BOOKS

The massive task of re-formatting all NASA’s technical rule books is now complete and the new rule books are now at the final proof reading stage. We expect them to be published on the NASA website very early in the New Year.

2019 FIXTURE LIST

The 2019 fixture list booklet has now gone to press and will be available for members to pick up on the NASA stands at Autosport International and Motorsport With Attitude. Clubs or leagues wanting a supply for their own members can also collect them from the show. The fixtures will go online on the NASA website very early in the New Year.

Highlights to be found in the book include three new tracks for 2019. Down Autograss, with the lease expiring on their spectacular Banbridge track, have found a new home slightly closer to the border, just outside Newry. North Shropshire club will be back in action on a new track at Moortown Airfield near High Ercall, just a couple of miles as the crow flies from STAR’s existing track. Thirdly, Stroud & District Club have their new venue just off the M5 to the north of Bristol, although the exact location details weren’t made available to us before the fixture book went to press.

The fixture list includes 243 race days (slightly down from the 256 listed in 2018) of which 176 are single-day meetings; 12 are two day events with separate days’ racing, one three-day event, six single meetings across two days (the North of England, MAP Open, Yorkshire Open and Fastest Man on Grass, plus the annual two day events at Cork and West Waterford), the five rounds each for BAS and UKAC, three rounds for the All Ireland Series and of course the two National events hosted by Evesham and Southern League.

Between Scunthorpe’s Practice Day on February 24th and Nottingham’s Winter Series Final and Scarborough’s Bonfire Meeting on November 10th there are meetings scheduled on 38 consecutive weekends, with the busiest single day being May 12th with thirteen meetings scheduled. The busiest league on paper is Southern Ireland with 27 race days, followed by Northern Ireland with 22 and East Midlands with 21. It all looks enough to keep us all out of mischief – now we just have to trust that the weather will co-operate a bit more than in 2018!



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NATIONALS UPDATE

Plans are now stepping up for the two National events in 2019 and you can expect to see a lot of promotion for our two flagship events, kicking off at the NEC in January. Just to remind you while you're filling in your 2019 diaries, Evesham club hoist the Men's Nationals at the John Wilkin Raceway (Dodwell), Stratford-upon-Avon, on the August 3rd and 4th, and the Southern League host the Ladies and Juniors at Bearley Raceway, near Martock in Somerset, on August 31st and September 1st.

We've confirmed already that the 2020 Men's Nationals will return to the Yorkshire Dales club, while we're talking to one Midlands club about the 2020 Ladies' and Juniors' although applications for this are still open.

CHAMPIONSHIP SCHEDULES

We'll shortly be contacting the organisers of all Championship Series to organise their Championship Permit applications for 2019. We issue permits for anything which falls above the scope of a club or league, or single venue, based championship in order to protect both the clubs and the existing championships from any further pressures on the fixture list. We're expecting four such series to apply for approval in 2019; the British Autograss Series and UK Autograss Championships have both announced their expected five event schedules, while the All Ireland Series has now settled on a three round format, with each of the six clubs in Ireland hosting a round every two years. The British Formula 600 Championship proposes an eight round format, including a double-header in Scotland, returning to a series based on club events.

The F600s also have a stand-alone Nationals event, scheduled for the Whiterose Rosebowl meeting (held on Scunthorpe's Blyton track) on June 1st and 2nd, while the Stock Hatch Nationals is hosted by Yorkshire Dales club as part of the Yorkshire Open meeting on June 29th and 30th.

DISCIPLINARY NEWS

Some incidents at the UK Autograss Championship's presentation function were brought to NASA's attention. It was considered that the UKAC committee had taken appropriate action and NASA didn't need to take these further, other than monitoring the future conduct of those involved.

All disciplinary hearings and appeals in respect of 2018 events have now been concluded. In the case concerning incidents at the North of England Championships at York in May 2018, Junior member Kaiden Cheetham's five year exclusion from attending any Autograss event was reduced on the appeal committee's recommendations to a three year ban from holding a NASA licence with a three year good behaviour order, while Paul Moran's three year ban from holding a NASA licence was reduced to a 12 month ban.



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JUNIOR AGE LIMITS

A proposal arose at the NASA AGM to consider lowering the minimum age of Juniors from 12 to 10. This is a subject that many have discussed over the years, but it's now reached the Board's agenda by the "traditional" route of a member raising a question at a league meeting, whereupon his league chairman brought it to Walsall – it's good to know the time-honoured system can still work! If this change is made it would be for the 2020 season, which means that we need plenty of discussion and feedback through your club and league representatives in the early part of 2019.

The main concern is that Autograss may be losing potential members to other motor sports. Certainly in Oval racing, where drivers from 6 to 9 years old, many of them from families with an Autograss involvement, compete in "Ninja Sprints", their only option at ten years old is to go into one of the stadium or SEGTO Junior classes, from which they may never transfer to Autograss. We can remember the overnight boost in numbers when we lowered the age from 14 to 12, and our clubs could certainly benefit from a similar growth now.

One suggestion so far has been to reduce the Junior Class 1 age to 10, but keep the Junior Specials at a minimum of 12. We've been asked whether reducing age limits will impact our insurance costs – initial indications are that this is unlikely to be a problem if we continue to manage the risks as well as we have in the past. The problems of potentially making one car fit both a 10 year old and an adult driver have also been raised, but we've observed that there are now few shared cars in the Junior ranks and we'd expect most of those who want to introduce a 10 year old to the sport would want to build them their own car. So please let us and your club and league reps know what you think.

STOCK HATCH FUTURE

The future of the Stock Hatch class has been discussed for many years, especially over the past few seasons when its inclusion in some national series has possibly taken the class away a little from its original principle as an accessible class run purely at a local club level.

The Board has now received a formal approach from the Stock Hatch Steering Committee to bring Stock Hatch into the National class line-up. There'll be no change to the way the class is run in 2019 but we'll be discussing the options for 2020.

This is another potential change where we'll be very much influenced by feedback from members through clubs and leagues because, if this change takes place, every club and league (and the NASA scrutineering team) will need to become involved in policing the class, whereas at present Stock Hatch is only significantly represented in around half of the 20 leagues. Obviously the class is very strong indeed in the three Yorkshire leagues and in Scotland, with other strong areas in the East Midlands, CGTRO, Fenland and East Anglia, while Stock Hatch is now taking off well in Kent and the Southern League. The class is being promoted in both Northern and Southern Ireland, but has very few competitors there at present.



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We understand that more leagues are planning to adopt Stock Hatch in 2018, but we'd like feedback both from leagues that already run this class and those that, for whatever reason, don't.

SOCIAL MEDIA ABUSE

The Board's been concerned about the amount of negativity being displayed by a small minority of members on social media (mainly Facebook postings). It's frustrating for some of us when trying to develop the sport when a recurrent pattern emerges. We throw out an appeal for member feedback and ideas on a particular subject, and for a long time very little comes back to us, either in direct feedback or through meetings. The few members who have shown an active interest work with us to reach a solution, and as soon as it's announced dozens of members and ex-members come out of the woodwork to attack it! We'll be monitoring all this and any members who seem to have a lot to say for themselves might be summoned for a chat with the directors concerned, to see whether we can channel their obvious interest in a more constructive way.

VNUK UPDATE

Our last newsletter included a lengthy summary of the state of play on the "Vnuk case", or the proposed European Motor Insurance Directive, a proposal from the European Commission in response to a case decided several years ago by the European courts, which was seen as threatening the existence of all motor sports in Europe, by requiring all motorsport vehicles to carry compulsory third party insurance.

We referred our members to a campaign being led by the Motorsport Industry Association to lobby MEPs and national Ministers to exclude motorsport from the scope of the directive. Thanks to everyone who participated in the lobbying campaign. Nothing's certain or finalised yet, but the motorsport industry's combined voice seems to have been heard. The latest news we've had is that the European Parliament, in its response to the European Commission proposals, has stated:

"It is also appropriate to exclude from the scope of Directive 2009/103/EC vehicles intended exclusively for motorsports, as these vehicles are generally covered by other forms of liability insurance and not subject to compulsory motor insurance when they are solely used for a competition. Being limited to a controlled track or space, the chance of an accident with unrelated vehicles or persons is also limited".

We'll keep you posted on any further developments, but our interpretation is that the threat to motorsport has now been recognised and a realistic outcome now seems much more likely.

NEWSLETTERS ...

Any comments on this newsletter, or information or issues you'd like covered in our next issue, please get in touch – email jeffrey.parish@national-autograss.co.uk