

Graham Blake

Competition Secretary

I have always been interested in motorbikes and cars from an early age. My parents would take me to scrambles most weekends during the 60s with visits to Wiscombe as well. But the highlight was our annual trip to Earls Court for the Motor Show where I would come home laden with brochures. In 1969/70 I rebuilt a Triumph 3TA which I used to ride to school, then built a Triton from bits (difficult pre eBay) and consequently failed most of my exams. In August 1970 I started at Patrick Engineering which was owned by Mr Stevenson who had a son called Alistair, yes, that well-known trials competitor. It was him that got me involved in the Woolbridge Motor club. Shortly after passing my test and getting my first car, a Triumph Spitfire, being a gobby teenager and giving Alistair abuse mostly about his old MG TD, a bet was placed. So, in February 1972, I joined Woolbridge and entered an autotest, me in the Spitfire and Alistair in the TD. I can't remember who won but a lot of cones got destroyed. Colin Pook used to turn up at Patrick's to visit and at the time had a Triumph Vitesse with triple Webbers. What a noise when he blasted up the road. My next car was a 2 litre Vitesse and I used it for autotests and even did the Vogue Motors classic trial in it though there wasn't much left of the exhaust after attempting Meerhay. 16 I moved into rallying in 1973 and bought Adrian Patten's old Cortina GT. I did a few stage rallies with Craig Strong navigating. I also met Rex Ireland at college and navigated for him but this was an expensive sport for an apprentice engineer so I started doing car trials. Using the Cortina to start with and then moved on to Imps and Minis. In 1975 I bought a Ford Pop Special called a Chandler with the side valve engine from Eric Moxam. I used that for a few years and then in '78 bought a project IbeX trials car with a crossflow engine and set about rebuilding that. I later changed the engine to a Renault 16TX and made a new front axle. I had many a successful year, winning many trophies and 4 Woolbridge Trials championships. This car is now in the hands of James Forsyth. During this time, we had some great battles with John Forsyth and Frank Wilson. John was a great friend and a big influence later when I started doing hillclimbs regularly with the Westfields. In 1985 I bought a Series 1 Land Rover which I still have and competed in 4x4 trials against the likes of Gary Makepeace and Rod Thorne. I have done several hillclimbs and sprints over the years in various cars from Hillman Imp, Scimitar NSU TTS, Golf GTi: the NSU was an ex-works rally car built for the cancelled 1967 RAC rally and the Golf GTi was a Mk1, both of which I wish I had kept. Shortly after my son passed his test and started to show an interest in motorsport, we did a few trials in the IbeX and even an autotest in a Clio. But as with all youngsters, speed was more interesting. So in 2005 I bought the first Westfield with a crossflow and started doing hillclimbs and sprints with him regularly. We soon outgrew the power and I fitted a Zetec and a Quaife gearbox. This was sold to Hayley Thorne after I bought another Westfield with a Vauxhall red top engine, now on slicks. This was a cracking car and Geoff soon got some pretty impressive times in it, but unfortunately I crashed it big time at Wiscombe. So, a third one was purchased, and I rebuilt the engine using SBD parts and achieved my best time at Wiscombe: 42.56, a long way off the 40.12 of Geoff. This car has had a few records with Geoff driving and we are still using it. Resuming my interest in 12 car rallies after my sister Elaine foolishly mentioned she could read maps and was not sick in the car, we started using my Peugeot 106 Rallye which I also competed in car trials with. My Daughter Debbie said she would like to have a go at hillclimbing, so she started in the 106 Rallye and it soon became clear she was very capable and surprised a few people. Debbie is 17 now competing in my Cooper S JCW which myself and Elaine also use for 12 cars. I won the Victor Ludorum Trophy in 1988 and again in 2020. In 1975 the club ran

a coach trip to Monaco where I had the privilege of watching Nikki Lauda win. I also marshalled with the club on several RAC rallies. One memorable one was watching Bjorn Waldegard in the Lancia Stratos with flames coming out the back in the King Alfred Tower stage. Watched probably the best driver of all time in my humble opinion, Gilles Villeneuve, make his GP debut at Silverstone in 1977 and went to most GPs all through the eighties. Later I went on several trips to Florida with John and Rod to watch the Daytona 500, the Rolex 24 Sebring 12 and Indy car at St Petersburg. Since 1976 I have owned a Triumph TR5 which I have driven around Silverstone, Castle Coombe, Rockingham, Nurburgring, Le Mans and Spa. I've been to every Classic Le Mans and many more. I never get tired of driving this car especially after I fitted triple Webbers on it. I also own a 1993 Italian job Mini. This was rusty (surprise) and drove to Uploders to do a trial with Anna as passenger when the throttle cable broke halfway through. So, I connected the choke cable to the carb and drove home using the choke with Anna changing gear when required, this is something you could not do with a modern car. In 2018 I rebuilt it and finished it off on the Monday and drove to Dover on the Tuesday to do the Italian Job run with 20 plus other Minis. We drove to Turin and took in the various passes and landmarks where the film was made: a fantastic experience with only the heater matrix leaking on Annas feet in the car. So, since 1972 I have met a lot of people involved with the club and made some good friends but none of my motorsport adventures would have been possible without the help of Alan Kennedy whose knowledge of engines and all things car related has been invaluable to me and still is to this day. Graham Blake