



Event Report – Firle Beacon: Rally, Sprint, and Supercar Festival 30th – 31st July 2022

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Firle House.

A new event (in fact a 'returning' one) for the 2022 season and looking ahead...

By George Loveridge, ©Driving Around

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Back in 1949, the Bentley Drivers Club established a Hill Climb in Lewes, East Sussex near



to the Firle Estate. This 'Bopeep' hill climb ran for almost 30-years and unfortunately lapsed. However, now in 2022, the hill climb returns after much anticipation under its new title, 'Firle Beacon'. The event will try and become a regular feature on the motorsport calendar.

Location wise, Firle Beacon is in the foot of the South Downs near Lewes, between Brighton and Eastbourne in East Sussex, on the south coast of England. From London you'd take the M23 and exit onto the A27 towards Eastbourne.

The event promised plenty of action, both 'trackside' and in the paddocks, the main attraction being the Rallying side of the event. 120 Rally cars, of all ages and classes, took to the Firle course and completed a challenging tarmac and gravel rally stage. Despite its great number of entries, this was not competitive. To accompany the Rallying, there was a paddock full of Vintage, Classic, Retro, Sports, and Supercars ready to take on Firle's 'Sprint' course, a quarter-mile dash down from Firle House. Again, non-competitive and this element of the action was purely for spectator enjoyment.



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In addition to the excellent choice of motor vehicles; Jaguar E-Type, Frazer Nash, Mini Cooper, Lagonda, there was also a brace of retired NASCAR (photo below) which really tested one's eardrums when out on the sprint course.



This inaugural event took place over a weekend, the 30th-31st July 2022. The live action started at 10:00 on both days, and ran until 17:50 before closing. Spectators however were welcomed by the orange army (Marshalls) from 09:00.

As mentioned, 120 Rally cars attended and demonstrated at the event. The variety was spectacular, with a Sunbeam Tiger blessing our ears, an MG Metro going alarmingly quickly, even Colin McRae's former works Impreza. The Rally demonstration saw the cars sail up towards Firle House, make a sharp right-hand bend to rocket into a cattle grid to then make their way up a challenging gravel stage that finished in Firle Village. As they were not being timed, each car was released from the 'start line' at 30 second intervals from each-other and on occasion, a group B Lancia Delta Integrale would catch up with a Triumph TR7. Each car looked to be in fine fettle, all displaying a unique Firle Beacon livery with their own number on the doors. The aim is for 2023's event to be FIA and Motorsport UK approved so they can run it competitively.



The sprint element of the event would be somewhat misleading to those familiar with Motorsport. Ordinarily, a sprint course is a section of a racetrack that a driver and their car is timed over, but do not complete a full lap hence the title sprint. The sprint here was very literal - a 400m dash down the estate's driveway, before slamming on the brakes to gather at the bottom of the event. Drivers attending this part of the event were wearing crash helmets for their own protection, however drivers in race prepared cars also wore their respective racing overalls. Those in road cars went without at their own discretion.

Two classes for the Sprint section; Bo Peep, and Supercars. Bo Peep, giving a nod to the original hill climb, consisted largely of cars from the period; pre-war cars, 50s and 60s sports and saloon cars.



Whereas the Supercar section consisted of the NASCARs, some modern super cars, and other impressive machines. The two classes were run separately, as once the assembly area at the bottom of the sprint section was full, cars made their way back up to the paddock

behind a McLaren safety car, before the next batch of cars could make their descent. The sprint was very good to watch, for the pre-war Lagonda, braking from high speeds must have been rather 'interesting' for the driver, however the Ferraris and Alfa Romeos seemed to have no difficulty stopping from upwards of 100mph. A great spectator attraction.

Aside from the main action up the Rally and Sprint courses, there were also plenty of other activities for spectators. The main road was littered with clear signs directing you to the main entrance and spectator car park. There was a disabled car park at the foot of the sprint course with Golf Buggies on hand to assist with any rough terrain for wheel-chair users. Spectator and visitor parking was plenty, well laid out by the marshals.



[A clear map of the venue.](#)

There were three food areas, where there was selection of refreshments including drinks bars, a scattering of ice cream vans, pizza bars, burger vans and more. Unlike at most motorsport events where catering is limited and therefore expensive, Firlie provided a good choice at reasonable rates. To accompany, three large sections of toilet blocks and

sanitising stations were on hand; it looked somewhat overkill for the numbers in attendance but better to have too many lavatories than not enough.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

For the children a fun fair was available, along with a Formula One Mercedes experience. £8 per head allowed you two laps with Lewis Hamilton, pretty good value. Being held on a country estate, the different paddocks were easily defined and separated. In the middle of both was the Firle cricket pitch which hosted a small selection of interesting cars.

Notably, there was a rather sorry looking Monte Carlo Rally Austin A35 (this unrestored A35 is said to have been used by Austin as the only 'factory'/works A35 entry ever entered in the Monte Carlo Rally, in 1958), as well as one of Mr Bean's Minis. A favourable attraction was a black Lamborghini Aventador SVJ, regardless of your motoring outlook on life, this was very impressive especially with its scissor doors.





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Paddy Hopkirk Tribute



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What was rather fitting, on Saturday, day 1 of the event, just after the lunch break before the afternoon excitement, an announcement was made over the commentary talking about the sad passing of rallying hero, Paddy Hopkirk. Therefore, as tribute, a red, rally spec, Mini Cooper was sent up the course in his memory. Very touching considering that the event took place just 9 days after Paddy's death.

The event had a very smart looking website which provided all necessary information and was easy to navigate. I say 'had' as post event I seem unable to access it. Facebook and Instagram pages both dedicated to promoting the event, featured spoilers and teasers as to what the event would entail.

VERDICT

As a first effort, Firle Beacon was a rather good event. It had more than enough live trackside action to watch across the weekend, live paddocks that you could explore, and the



opportunity to talk to the drivers and mechanics (something that is becoming a rarity at current events).



There is certainly room for improvement; commentators with some more knowledge would be expected for instance. Value? Yes, very good actually. Prices from £32.40 for adults and £14.40 for children - there was a lot to see and do. But be mindful that your entry fee doesn't cover anything when in the event. Furthermore, ticket holders were by default also invited to a party on the Saturday evening at The Ram pub in Firle Village. A DJ was in attendance. Although free entry, it was unclear as to whether food would be provided.

I wish the event every success in the future, and hope to attend again.