Motor Sport Recalled At Beaulieu…

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With assistance and ‘moral support’ from Murray Walker OBE, Sir Stirling Moss, is seen here having cut the ribbon to open the new ‘Chequered History’ display section at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu.

Sir Stirling Moss opens ‘A Chequered History’ – incorporating two new motorsport sections – at the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu in Hampshire, Kim Henson was there…

It was 53 years ago that Sir Stirling Moss retired from motor racing, after an awful accident at Goodwood, and indeed he was fortunate to survive it.

Therefore it is an immense tribute to his bravery and driving skills that so long afterwards he is still regarded as one of the greatest British motor racing drivers of all time.

Sir Stirling was recently at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu, in the company of ‘The Voice of Formula One’, Murray Walker OBE.

The occasion was the opening of the Museum’s new display ‘A Chequered History’, incorporating collections telling two separate stories – ‘Grand

Prix Greats' and 'Road, Race and Rally'.

Before the opening ceremony, in front of an audience of invited guests, Murray Walker interviewed Sir Stirling about some of the high and low points of his motor racing career. In response to Murray's probing questions, Sir Stirling told a selection of true stories, many of which underlined the very real dangers of pushing Grand Prix cars to (and beyond!) their limits.

The questions covered the immensely broad spectrum of motor sport in which Sir Stirling participated, from Formula One involvement at the highest level, to sports car racing and rallying. He had first become involved in motor sport in 1948, with a 500cc Cooper.

One of Sir Stirling's favourite competition cars was the C Type Jaguar (which he explained was, in his opinion, "more driver-friendly than the D Type, especially on twisty circuits").

By contrast, the car he liked least was the V16 BRM. He said that it was technically less than perfect and hence difficult to drive, although the concept was good. In short, he felt it was "The worst car I ever drove!".

Sir Stirling also commented that in his opinion "Juan Manuel Fangio was the greatest racing driver of all time" (he had raced with and against Fangio).

One story told by Sir Stirling, and which I found fascinating, related to when he was racing at 175 mph on a banked track, within inches of the top of the banking and the unforgiving barriers of the time (more than 50 years ago)…

This is how Sir Stirling's described the incident, "I suddenly realised I was in trouble when I found that my arms had crossed on the steering wheel"! He continued to say that he could then do nothing but hit the brakes and close his eyes, while waiting for the car to fly through/over the barriers. He added that to his great relief he then found the car gracefully pirouetting down the banking, finally coming to a halt safely on the grass on the infield,

without any damage to the car nor the driver!

Another difficulty arose when Sir Stirling found that halfway through a race in which he wasn't expected to do well, he found himself winning. The plan had been for him to come into the pits for an intermediate tyre change, but he said that, "There was no way I was going to stop once I was in the lead". Therefore he carried on driving, with his tyres wearing out and becoming ever more slippery as the race progressed.

In due course 'white spots' became visible on the front tyres, indicating that the rubber treads were disappearing. The white spots became 'white lines' and, eventually, the tyres turned 'completely white', with no trace of rubber tread remaining. Amazingly, they held up and despite the car's inevitable sliding on bends, Sir Stirling held on too and won the race!

Just one more anecdote related to the days when Sir Stirling was racing a Mark VII Jaguar saloon. In those days seat belts were not required, and he recalled that it was impossible not to slide around on the car's bench type front seat, during 'enthusiastic' cornering!

'A CHEQUERED HISTORY'

Recently the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu has become even more interesting to visit then before (even for people who are not 'car enthusiasts' as such), with the introduction of a number of new, cleverly thought-out displays.

The latest example has been the opening, by Sir Stirling Moss, of a new display section entitled 'A Chequered History'. Within this are two separate areas… 'Grand Prix Greats' tells the story of motor racing from Edwardian days to the 21st Century Formula One battles (including engineering and driver aspects), while 'Road, Race and Rally' highlights sporting cars and those used for other types of motor sport.

Within the 'Grand Prix Greats' collection are the wonderful and evocative 1912 Sunbeam Coupe de l'Auto, the 1924 Bugatti Type 35, the BRM V16 dating from 1950, Graham Hill's 1967 Lotus 49, and Kimi Räikkönen's 2012 Lotus E20.

As well as the cars, displayed too are historic photographs and artefacts, including helmets, race suits and trophies.

By contrast the 'Road, Race and Rally' display includes such iconic vehicles as the British Allard Chrysler dragster dating from 1961, Ari Vatanen's Ford Escort rally car from 20 years later, and Stig Blomqvist's Audi Quattro (the car that he drove to victory in the 1984 Rally of Argentina).

Road-going sports models on show range from a very small 1930 MG Midget Type M to a Ferrari Dino of 1974 to a 2009 Bugatti Veyron (the fastest roadster in the world – with a potential top sped of 229 mph with the hood down!).

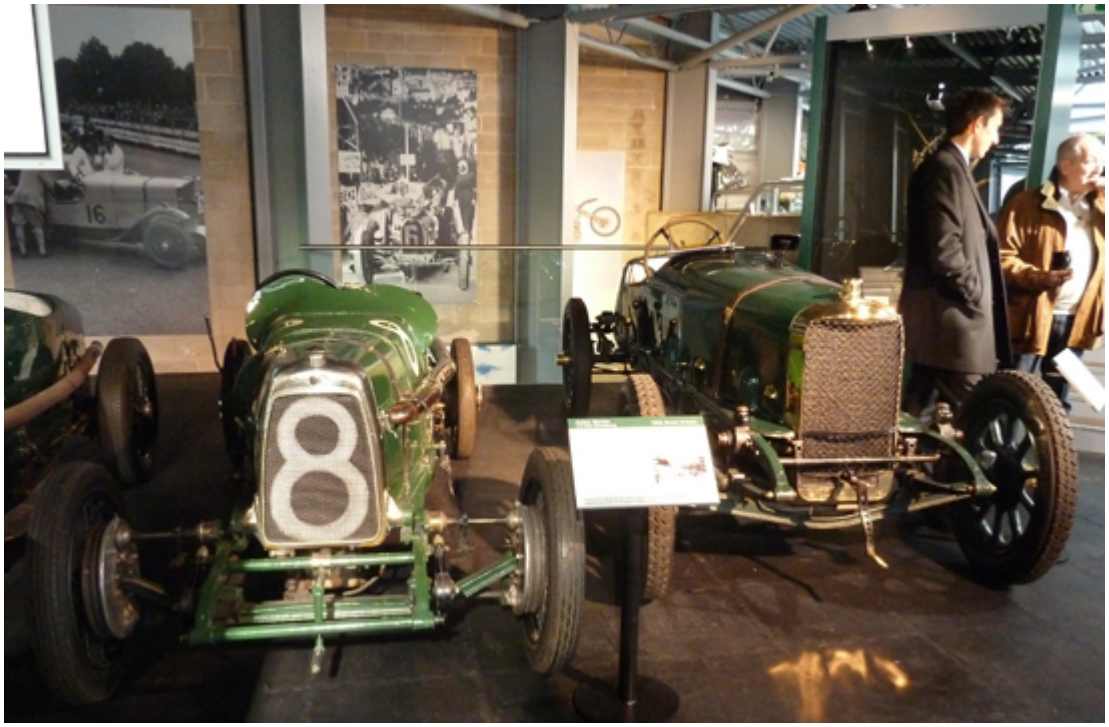
In addition there are a 1970 Ford GT70 plus a 1984 RS200, a BMW 320i Super Tourer (the winning car in the 1995 24 hour race at Spa Francorchamps in Belgium), and a 1997 BRM P301.

The new motor sport displays have been generously sponsored by the DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund.

WHEELS-ALIVE SAYS, "IT'S WELL WORTH VISITING!"

In order to find out more about the displays, in addition to the whole Beaulieu attraction (which includes the National Motor Museum, World of Top Gear, Beaulieu Abbey, Palace House and its lovely gardens), please go to: http://www.beaulieu.co.uk/attractions/2015-displays or telephone 01590 612345.

I often visit the Museum and the other attractions at Beaulieu; I find that there's always something new and interesting to see, in addition to the variety of car-related shows that take place there, also the spring and autumn Autojumbles of course.



Shown here are just two of the amazing old racing cars on display in the ‘Grand Prix Greats’ collection at the National Motor Museum. On the left in this shot is a 1922 Aston Martin Strasbourg, while on the right is a 1912 Sunbeam ‘The Cub’. Wonderful, both!



Still absolutely passionate (and deeply knowledgeable) about motor sport, Murray Walker OBE is shown here sat on a front wheel of the 1996 Williams-Renault FW18 car that forms part of the ‘Grand Prix Greats’ collection at the National Motor Museum.



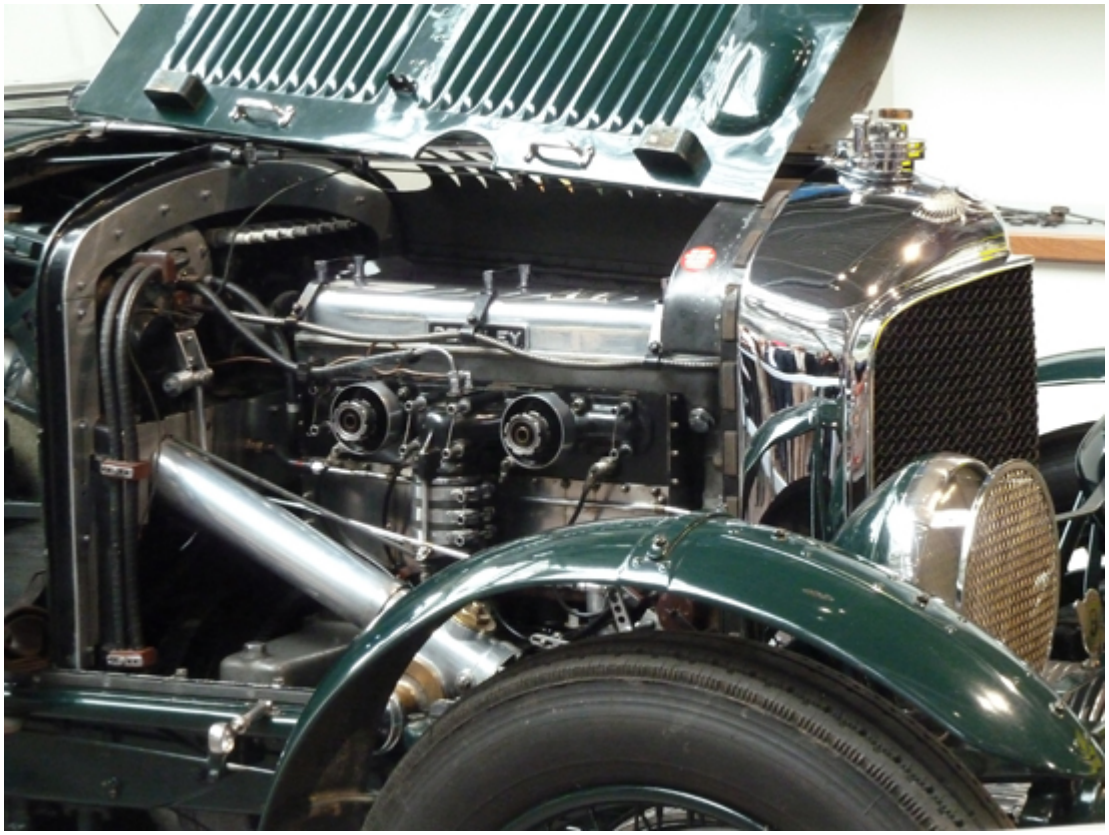
Within the ‘Road, Race and Rally’ section of the National Motor Museum’s ‘Chequered History’ display are ‘cars for sport’ and ‘sporting cars’. In the foreground here is a 1974 Ferrari Dino (ahead of a 1965 AC Cobra and a 1969 Jensen Interceptor).



The National Motor Museum's 'Grand Prix Greats' area incorporates informative and easy to read 'story boards' describing the history of motor sport over the last 110 years or so. The photographs included on these boards are worth close study too.

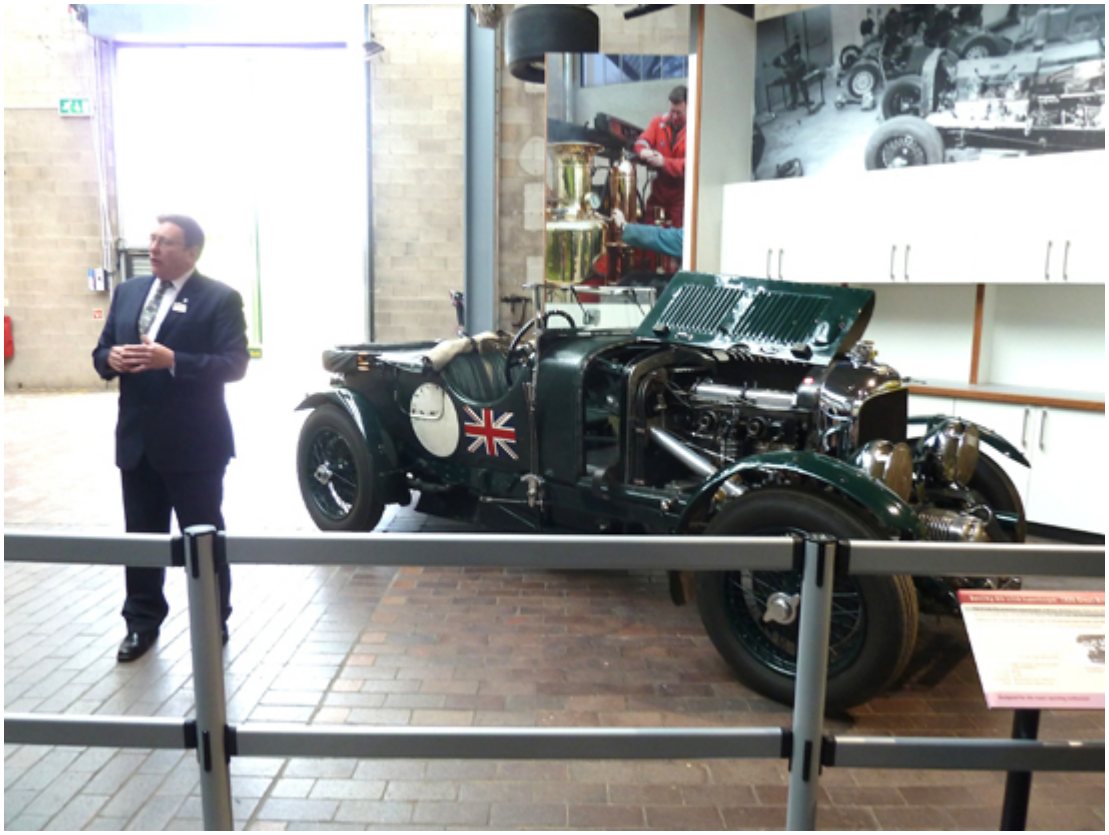


The ‘Grand Prix Greats’ collection includes interactive photograph/video displays. Visitors are able to select one (at a time) of six time frames, to view amazing images and video film showing motor racing progress through the years.



A highlight for me when attending the opening of the National Motor Museum's 'Chequered History' displays was the moment when the Museum's Chief Engineer Doug Hill fired up this engine – fitted in the Museum's 1930 4.5 litre supercharged 'Blower' Bentley. Doug knows this car and its engine very well, and personally has driven many thousands of miles in the vehicle. It weighs two tons, produces 200 bhp and is capable of 102.6 mph!

In case you were wondering…



...this is what the magnificent Bentley looks like. Here, just before the 'start-up', Doug Hill is explaining the finer points of dealing with and preserving the 4.5 litre engine, which requires a range of 'sympathetic' techniques in order to get the best from it.