The 2019 Great Dorset Steam Fair – the hottest in its history

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This year’s Great Dorset Steam Fair, the largest event of its type in the world, was sun-bathed and VERY hot throughout, but enthusiasm was undiminished by the heat, as Kim Henson explains...

It is unsurprising that with exceedingly high temperatures each day (well into the 90s Fahrenheit/30s Celsius), some would-be visitors chose to take their families to the Dorset beaches rather than to this year’s Steam Fair at Tarrant Hinton. That said, there were still many stalwarts (and some newcomers) who flocked once again to the huge site amidst Dorset’s rolling hills, not far from Blandford, to take in the atmosphere of hundreds upon hundreds of exhibits, re-living days gone by.

They come each year to watch, listen to and enjoy being close to the wide variety of veteran, vintage and classic vehicles (notably cars, commercials, military vehicles, motorcycles and bicycles), ancient machinery of all types, steam engines and organs galore (too many for most to attempt to count), animals, live music, ‘countryside occupation’ exhibits – and so on.

The first ‘Great Working of Steam Engines’ took place in 1969, becoming widely known as the ‘Stourpaine’ rally, these days it’s the ‘Great Dorset Steam Fair’.

It has grown to become a mammoth event of its type, on a 600 acre site, with approximately 200,000 people in attendance, and an amazing variety of exhibits.

THE STEAM ENGINES



The working steam engines look magnificent in the daytime, but during the evenings, the line-up of brightly-illuminated engines has to be seen to be believed.

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This year the Show also hosted a tribute to the many different steam engine firms that hailed from the Lincoln area, with superb displays of ‘before’ and ‘after’ restoration engines alongside each other. The exhibits included steam lorries, stationary machines and traction engines.



For many Steam Fair goers, the so-called ‘play pen’ (a huge roped-off area where the steam-propelled vehicles can be ‘exercised’) is where they need to be, to watch the traction engines and heavy commercial lorries driving up and down the steep slopes of the valley, often towing/pushing heavy loads. For maximum effect several machines are linked together to propel the huge loads, while steam-driven cars and buses breeze by at a faster pace!



As in previous years I enjoyed just standing for a while and watching as these machines did what they do so well.

WARTIME COMMEMORATION

Every year since 2014 the Great Dorset has remembered the Great War, paying tribute to those who perished in it, and thankfully the re-created World War I trenches have been preserved as a reminder to everyone what war can mean. Visitors passed respectfully through the trenches, manned by soldiers in 1914-18 uniforms, as some graphic details were imparted of what life was like in such trenches in France and Belgium.

This year there were two new aspects to the wartime area, one of which was a recreation of underground tunnels, as used by both sides in the 1914-18 conflict, and to deadly effect. Again Show visitors passed through in their hundreds each day.

Another new feature was a recreation of a northern French village in the Second World War, depicting devastated buildings and vehicles following local fighting/bombing. Points of special interest here included a ‘garage’, complete with vehicles, a French village bar, and live performances of wartime songs from several acts.



CARS AND BIKES



Once again the vintage and classic cars were worth seeing, including examples from the earliest days of motoring up to the 1980s.

There were many classic caravans in attendance too, dating from the 1920s to the 1980s.

This year there were two Model T Fords on show, one of which is brought annually from Ireland to Dorset for this event.

Many of the cars had fascinating histories, notably some that had been dormant for decades before being rescued and put back on the road to be used and enjoyed once more.


CDU 275



A rare and pristine Vauxhall Viceroy dating from 1981 was one of the newer exhibits in the classic car area (and parked next to an early Bristol in 'original 'condition).

There were excellent line-ups too of historic bicycles and motorcycles.

COMMERCIALLY SPEAKING



Vans, pick-ups, open and closed lorries of every size and type, and indeed heavy haulage; the hundreds of vehicles on display were many and varied.



Nearby was the military vehicle display, including examples from the early days of the last century to those that had served in more recent conflicts.

TRACTORS, STATIONARY ENGINES, COUNTRYSIDE OCCUPATIONS AND OTHER ASPECTS



The tractor display is huge and always worth exploring, as are the stationary engines, many of these operating belt-driven machinery – ranging from an ‘egg washer’ to water pumps.

Additionally there were displays of road-building as it was carried out in the early to mid 20th Century (including manual labour and contemporary machines), plus working horses, and a marquee showing ‘How it Was Done in Granfer’s Day’ (with country crafts and activities), also a huge craft tent.

There were also several live music/beer tents, and many general stalls where money could be spent…



A superb model of a ‘cider mill’.



These amazing candle-operated steam-powered boats were available for sale...



A small section within the huge craft tent.



John Knott brought along his 1967 Cheltenham Springbok caravan plus his wonderful collection of 1960s and 70s vinyl discs, bringing back musical memories for many visitors to his classic set-up. John also exhibited his 1934 Morris Eight Tourer (please see below).



John and Heather Knott's lovely 1934 Morris Eight Tourer ('Jimmy') celebrated its 85th birthday at this year's Great Dorset...

GOOD NEWS?

After last year's shambolic arrangements for getting visitors onto the site (with delays of many hours being commonplace – understandably deterring many from coming again this year) credit where it's due and this year delays were minimal. The same applied to vehicles and people leaving the Show; a well-organised team this year worked hard to keep the traffic moving and minimise delays.

NOT SO GOOD…

Once again the ‘monster trucks’ and car crushing displays within what always used to be a show ring exclusively dedicated to preserved vehicles (after all it’s a ‘preservation’ show) is regarded by many enthusiasts as incongruous, undesirable, and with possible safety implications too.

While some visitors like this sort of ‘entertainment’, the view was once more widely expressed that it’s a shame that it couldn’t be held elsewhere, away from ‘preservation’ aspects…

VERDICT

Overall, again this year’s ‘Great Dorset’ was a wonderful show.

NEXT YEAR’S DATES…

Next year the Show is scheduled to start on Thursday 27th August and finish on Bank Holiday Monday, 31st August. Tickets are scheduled to go on sale from January 2020.

For further information about the 2020 event, please go to:

https://www.gdsf.co.uk/