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This very special Ford Capri has stood the test of time in many guises... and is still going strong

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In action the Capri can still bite, but clean lines with no aerodynamic spoilers allowed on earlier Capris, emphasising clean lines.



Jeremy Walton tells the fascinating story of a unique survivor Capri that still delights more than half a century down the line...

(All words © Jeremy Walton; photographs © Peter Osborne and Jeremy Walton).

One Ford's 50-year Promise delivered

From Royalty to World Champions, this Capri served them all...

Here we tell the story of just one original Ford Capri with an extraordinary 50-year action-packed history, which seems appropriate as Britain receives first supplies of the yet another Ford nameplate reincarnation [think Puma and Mustang], the all-electric Capri.

This story begins with a 3-litre Ford Capri built by Ford Competitions at Boreham airfield, Essex in 1973. From a conservative showroom appearance beneath a Vinyl roof, this dark blue Capri would perform in many guises and official badges [GXL, GT- even RS3100!] to serve an astonishing variety of drivers. They varied from British Royalty, and a British saloon car championship career with professional Tom Walkinshaw. Then—almost by accident- the versatile Ford voyaged to Austria as an 'RS3100' to be a winner once more with a future triple World Champion, Niki Lauda. Raced again and then preserved by private owners, the indomitable Ford resurfaced as a classic handled by later racing legends like Steve Soper. The author was reunited with the Ford he drove in Belgium's 1973 Spa 24-hour race mount after almost 50-years. This is their story...



Rewind 50 years to 1973 and future [1976] World Champion James Hunt nursed a privately entered Chevrolet Camaro to a slim win over speed shop entrepreneur Gordon Spice's Capri in the first *Avon Motor Tour of Britain*. Hunt had shaken off his 'Hunt-the Shunt' reputation and showed unusual restraint and the powerful brain of codriver Robert Fearnell. A clever victory achieved despite the Chevrolet V8 suffering a number of key afflictions, including saggy oil pressure.

The event was an innovative mix of race and [sanitised] rally trails, exerting the powerful commercial pull of TV and extensive media coverage. Major manufacturers and importers entered their best shots for a win in what looked like showroom cars, driven by high profile names of the day from World Champions past and future, celebrities and hardcore competitors.

Ford were never slow in coming forward to a major publicity opportunity, yet the best in a trio of comparatively unmodified Ford 3000 GXL Capris were David Matthews/ Charles Reynolds in fifth. HRH Prince Michael/ Nigel Clarkson's headline-grabbing Ford took 16th, just behind the winning Ladies Award crew of Rosemary Smith/Pauline Gullick in yet another Capri. That Royal performance on the Tour was just the beginning of our hero Capri, registered XWC 713L. That dark blue Ford, reborn in Ford corporate racing colours, would resurface in the Millennium after a parked life far from motorsports.



The start of it all, Prince Michael with Nigel Clarkson to begin the 1973 Avon Motor Tour.

I joined Ford in 1972 with the managerial edict that I was to cease motor racing. Yet: 'rules are made to be broken' and in June 1973, following that *Avon Tour* event, a senior Ford director confirmed that they wished me to race again. I had Belgian Spa experience in a class-winning BMW 3.0 CS on the longer and faster road circuit than today's layout. Presumably, I got that Spa 24 hour opportunity because Prince Michael's staff knew fatalities routinely occurred, thus a day and night competition was deemed unsuitable for British Royalty.

I would accompany Prince Michael's *Avon Tour* codriver, Nigel Clarkson, to Belgium: we would contest that July 24 hour European Championship race in said Capri, XWC 713L. Nigel had hired the ex-Avon Tour Capri and two more employees from Boreham. Mr Clarkson paid a billy bargain £500 for that factory deal. The Ford competed behind the quad headlamp 3000 GXL facelift moves, reverting to 3000 GT designation for the 1974 British Saloon Car season, replicated for 2021-22 classic events when owned by Mark Martin.

For our 24-hour outing, the Capri was prepared again at Boreham, but it was far from a purpose-built competition saloon. XWC 713L received a mildly uprated V6 [perhaps 27 bonus horsepower] and heavy duty suspension, steel 13x 5.5-inch steel wheels and discarded *Avon Tour* special road/track Dunlop



tyres. Mandatory safety items like the single transverse tube roll bar and fire extinguisher were installed. Kerb weight increased on a showroom item, a 24-hour event requiring night lighting and basic safety equipment.

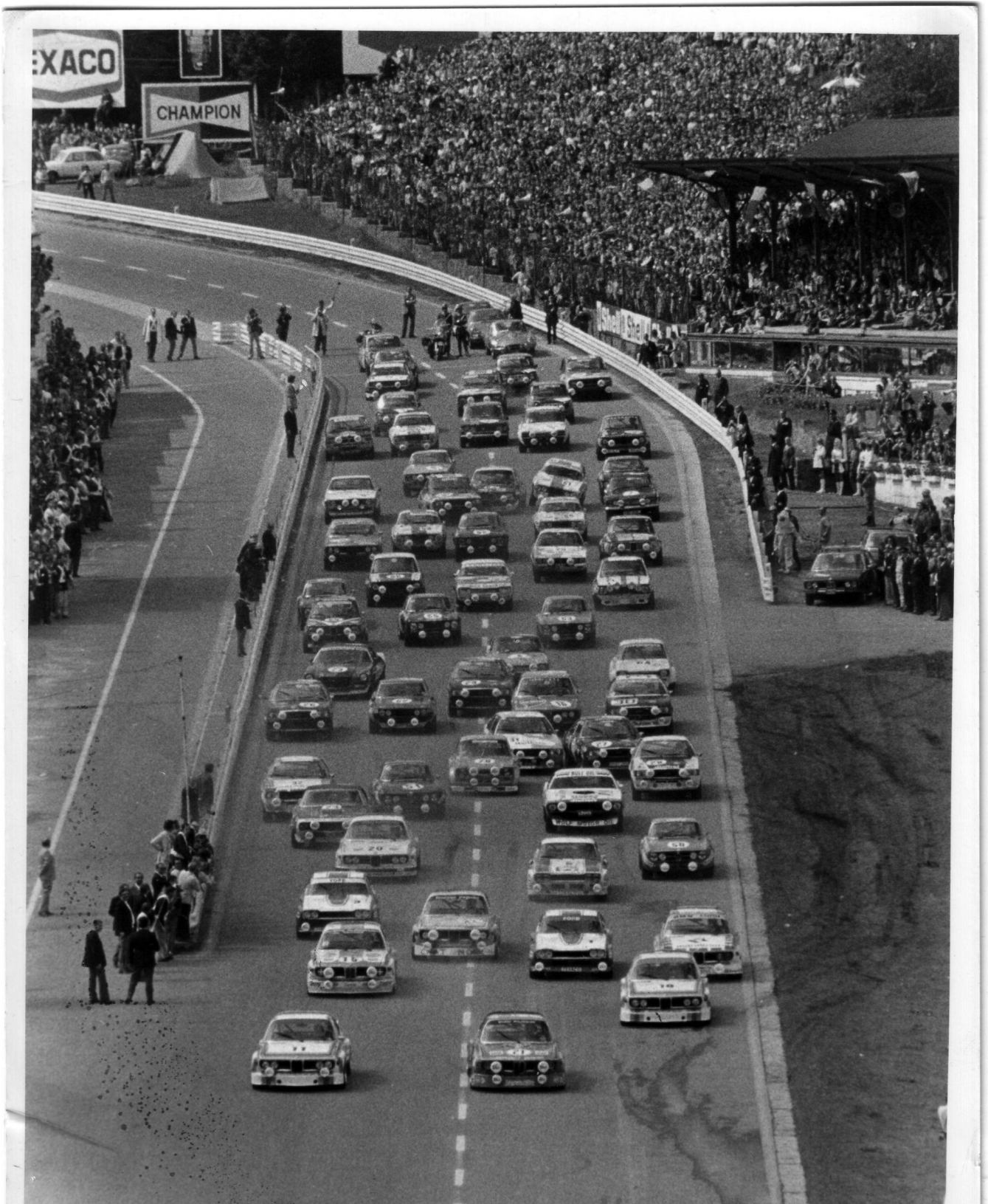
Credited with 160-165 bhp, this Capri would nudge toward 130 mph on Spa's downhill contours, versus independently measured 124-5 mph for rare press test RS3100 Capris on an official 148 bhp. By then the 3-litre mass production Capris were quoted at 138 DIN bhp, the extra horsepower on 713L- and siblings- extracted via vigorous camshaft profiling, some basic cylinder flow rate labour and full length dual exhaust systems.

July 19th Belgian saw scrutineering in a public park opposite the spa baths of Spa town—a 10 mile ride away from the track start at Francorchamps—but Capri was an hour late, and the front steel wheels visibly wobbled via slack wheel nuts! Friday practice and qualifying went off deceptively drama-free, but it was obvious this Capri would be no match for the well prepared and talented team of Dutch Opel Commodore conductors. My 4m 58 sec time was only good for the last third of the 60+ vehicle grid.



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Above: The 60-strong pack leave the line at Spa 24 hours, 1973. Author is at the back avoiding Alfa Romeo accidents. Shared with Nigel Clarkson the Capri finished 13th overall.



Above: Jeremy awaits his turn for twilight action at Spa.



Above: Excuse the grainy colour print, but it shows how onlookers could get close to the 1973 Spa action and how close to a production specification the endurance Capri became.

Mechanically, the 3-litre Ford performed just as faultlessly as 'my' 1972 BMW, but the unique race/rally tyres stripped treads as soon as we dropped below a tardy 5 minute lap time in daylight temperatures. The afternoon start was also problematic, I took to the grass in avoidance, while local clowns ran into each other at the start of this endurance event!

I was able to see my journalistic mates waving from the café porch on the inside of *Burnenville* curve: Capri would have been hitting 120 mph there, about 40 mph slower than the leading Group 2 BMW CSLs and RS Capris. We settled into 2-hour stints, some of which I enjoyed, some just survival stints in



heavy rain from 2am onward. Weaving a path through the wreckage of the tragic Hans Peter Joisten Alpina BMW multiple pile up was the worst memory. Top driver prospect Joisten's death was the headline item, especially as his Fiancé [Christine Beckers] was also a competitor that year. However, three more drivers lost their lives in differing incidents, so I was glad to finally give the Capri over to Nigel Clarkson after more than 12 ½ hours race driving: Nigel completed the last half hour of the event as a 'thank you' for enabling the deal. Appropriately, we finished 13th overall...

Tom time

Ford competitions and Advanced Vehicles Operations tragically lost the skilled driving services of Gerry Birrell in June 1973. Another quick young Scot, Tom Walkinshaw, was invited to fill the chasm left by Gerry's talents in RS road car driving development and a British race programme. That meant a British Championship series challenge, via the Group 1 + conversion of that XWC713L Capri. Sounds straightforward, but Ford's European motorsports programmes—as for their closest rivals—had to improvise around 1973-74 fuel crisis and the curtailment of prestige motorsports.



The badge under which the Capri scored most success with Tom Walkinshaw in the 1974 British Saloon Car Championship.

Ford of Britain saw cost merit in production race rules for the 1974 premier British series. They recreated XWC 713L as a contestant for class honours



[2500 to 4000cc] in the multi class British Saloon Car Championship. Unfortunately for European manufacturers, large displacement American V8s remained and the Chevrolet Camaro was the way to win for ambitious privateers. However, there would be one magnificent overall victory for Tom and Capri on Scottish home ground.

Back with XWC 713L, we met up again at Boreham 7th March 1974, as the now corporate blue and white coupe now in final preparation for the British Saloon Car Championship [BSCC], race-focussed with Shell Sport as title sponsor. Now the Capri was a honed package: the interior had been stripped of all but mandatory showroom trim and furniture, suspension retuned to the much higher spring rates for smooth circuit racing, damped by Bilstein.

The 3-litre V6 now offered an official 175 bhp and was the work of Racing Services at Twickenham. For Tom's 1974 season, the Capri's brakes remained production discs front, drums rear, albeit with anti- fade Ferodo DS11 and VG95-branded friction materials. I often dismissed the production Capri disc-drum brakes as unworthy in the affordable 3-litre Capri recipe for speed.

A passenger ride with Tom around the Boreham perimeter circuit in the revamped Capri proved impressive late braking potential, partially because of Capri's sub-1000 kg homologated race weight, but mostly owing to Tom's talent. Tom 'TWR' Walkinshaw drove the quickly redeveloped package for an underwhelming debut at Mallory Park just days later. I was assigned to follow the UK series and support Tom's efforts with media coverage.



Capri highlights in the Castrol-backed UK series were one outright win in Scotland and a 6-strong string of class victories. The Ford season took months to get rolling, but double class results at both quick Thruxton and twisty Brands Hatch spoke of successful redevelopment.

It became a slow start to the Capri season. Mallory Park on March 10 started our schedule, Peter Hanson [my BMW driving partner at 1972 Spa] blitzed the next highest total of class wins to Tom in the GM Dealer Team Opel Commodore GS. If Peter did not win, Tony Lanfranchi was competitive in a BMW dealership 3- litre CSi BMW coupe. My diary noted of a Ford competitions staff meeting: “everyone touchy about Capri performance, or lack of it!”

More than half the British championship race calendar passed before a Spring Bank Holiday at Thruxton yielded a first Walkinshaw-Capri win. The July Grand Prix supporting race underlined this form with a third overall to compliment class victory before the biggest audience of the season. Over the August 17-18 weekend, Tom motored hardest on his Scottish home tarmac and thumped in a pair of outright victories on the short Ingliston showground circuit, one for Capri and the other for a Ford redevelopment of RS2000 Escort. The Escort RS2000 win was remarkable as an RS2000 never beat the class-dominant Dolomite Sprints again.

The Brands Hatch final was dramatic, as was often the case for the title-deciding *Motor Show 200*. Late October showers left the lightly used Brands Hatch GP long circuit slippery between showers. A chaotic race—stopped



after 18 of 20 scheduled laps—saw neither outright championship contender finished in this crash-fest. Barry Williams [Mazda] spun Tom aside in the excitement. Both restarted, but Tom managed third overall, comfortably ahead of the class opposition.

October 1974 was the last I saw of XWC for five decades—although I took one of its siblings [XWC 718L, now dressed as an RS3100!] around the RAC Rally a month later.

<>

Future triple World Champion steers 713L to victory & classic value

Thanks to hindsight and online Autosport: *Ten Tenths* Forum, plus Author Tom Saltinstall, we now know what happened to XWC 713L and sister Avon Tour contender XWC 712L in October 1973. An Austrian Celebrity double header race-within-a-race for Group 1 saloons scooped the fact that future Ferrari World Champion Niki Lauda was out of BMW contract at Alpina-BMW, recruited for Ford's 24-valve Cologne Capri RS3100 team in 1974.

Despite recent 1973-4 research I have not been able to substantiate a published assertion that another multiple World Champion—Suzuki motorcycle 500cc rider Barry Sheene—also appeared in a period Brands Hatch celebrity race with this Capri.

The 14 October 1973 Austrian weekend featured a Capri Comparison [*Capri Vergleich*] at Oesterreichring. That delivered race-within-a-race battles between four prominent Austrian racers: Niki Lauda, Dieter Quester, quick

formula racer Helmut Koinigg and Formula2/sports prototype racer Kurt Rieder. Quester was famous—married into the German BMW hierarchy and BMW-contracted for decades, usually in saloons.



How production 3-litre Capris became RS3100s for an Austrian celebrity driver race, XWC 713L taking a win for future triple World Champion Niki Lauda.

The organisers elected Dieter to swap Capris with Niki. They participated in 2 x 10 lap heats, qualifying for an overall result, steering XWC 713L and Y00 399L, 3-litre Capris temporarily exported from the UK and dressed in RS3100 spoilers and alloy wheels.



Heat 1 was bad news for Niki who finished third as Rieder won. After a Capri swap, the second heat returned a Lauda Ford win. Quester and Lauda battled after the Rieder Capri reportedly suffered an engine failure. Quester managed to collide with an errant Alfa Romeo and Lauda swept through to win that heat and the all-Austrian shoot-out, simultaneously boosting the value of our hero Capri massively.

Inactive Service

The tale of XWC 713L takes on a more remote feel from 1975-2018, because it was sold outside Ford, to British saloon car competitor Stuart Rolt, heir to the Ferguson transmission business. Stuart Rolt sold it on late in 1976, having achieved points scoring results. At the prestigious 1976 Tourist Trophy [TT] the classic Capri appeared in corporate blue and white, minus all but Shellsport trade decals. Now modified to comply with liberalised aerodynamic and mechanical regulations, the V6 rated at 240 bhp, it scored a Top Ten TT finish.

There were subsequently two private owners [1976-2014], one remained in touch with me when he'd stored it in the British Midlands. A more active and better funded customer—Graham Taylor — bought it in 2010, although it was 2014 before he could extract it from the primitive garaging that had grown up to surround 713L's 38- year storage quarters.

Back to active sporting service...



How this historic Capri emerged from storage, before action in 2018 and restoration in the 2020s.

XWC 713L blinked back into public life on July 19 2018, when Silverstone Classic Race & Competition Car Sale successfully offered the ex-works machine for sale at an estimated £35,000-£45,000. It did not sell, but a successful trade bidder paid around £22,000. He did not want it and owner at press time, Mark Martin, “offered him another two grand for it within 24 hours and it was mine. I’d always liked Capris, remember riding in my Dad’s, so it was that rather than it’s history that attracted me.”

Back to December 2018 and this pedigree Capri resided with Mark Martin’s Foscombe classic race team in Gloucestershire, an outfit overseen by the calm and occasionally caustic tones of Dave Lampitt. Dave had over five decades of dealing with the detail preparation and action-packed dramas of

motor racing. I visited Foscombe during June 2020, discovering an immaculate modern unit within a traditional Cotswold stone-built estate that housed Mark Martin's then 10-strong race car collection. All, except the Capri, were sold by 2024, but the pedigree Ford was slated for sale. It served Mark until autumn 2022 when it finished second overall and a class winner at the Estoril 250 km race for Martin and Steve Soper.



Some of the wall display prompts Foscombe Racing had for the Capri's total racing restoration.

The reborn historic Capri wore gleaming corporate white and blue with ShellSport stripes, faithfully bearing period trade support decals.



[Painstaking restoration work covered exact copies of the original sponsorship decals.](#)

The bare matt black metal flooring and interior acknowledged the Time Warp element with Ford's interpretation of Formica wood for the dash panel. Aldridge Trimming supplied authentic interior touches, highlighted by chrome window winder handles, full trim appearance for the door cards, Aeroflow ball orbs and a brace of period push buttons for 2-speed wipers, lights and heater ventilation panel.



Interior in mid restoration 2020, the fascia holds most clues to this Capri's originality.

The dashboard retained showroom 6-dial orifices. The dials within remained analogue, but not as we knew it in 1973! Instead of production instrumentation vagueness, there were proper black backgrounds and white needles. Additionally, large Ford red needle period 140 mph speedometer and an 8000-rpm mechanical tachometer. That period Smiths rev-counter in pure competition format with a red tell-tale secondary needle enforcing a 7000-rpm test limit.



Interior from the passenger side is radically altered to meet the regulations of a later racing century, but there are some period pieces to appreciate.

Naturally safety standards were considerably uprated over the years. The Custom Cages supplied roll cage kit came with substantial door braces on both sides. The carbon fibre Tillet race seat sat alongside a more traditional Momo leather rim steering wheel. Foot pedals held a reminder of yesterday with rubber inserts for the accelerator, bare metal for the brake and clutch foot pedals.

The hardware to give the 1002 kg race weight Capri energy came from the late Neil Brown in Lincolnshire, leading supplier of Capri V6 motors under UK



regulations. Power was first quoted at 225 bhp by 7000 rpm in May 2021, but inlet manifold and running experience tweaks subsequently released a reported 250 horsepower in August, rather more refined and precisely managed than in period.

To transmit the power today and in 1974: a Salisbury multi-plate limited slip differential, plus hand-built and hardened version of the Ford 4-speed gearbox, carrying closer ratios. Back in the 1974 day Walkinshaw-and other Capri racers into the 1980s-had these 4-speed units assembled by a moonlighting Ford Halewood employee to deliver amazing durability under race duress. Production rear axle casings, differential gears and half shafts proved very tough. A senior Ford engineering executive cynically reported: "If our cost accountants had found out how good they were, they would have said they were over-engineered and made us use something cheaper!"

The suspension featured Bilstein front struts, Koni rears with the single leaf layout: spring rates were the same as back in the day for the last race 3-litre Capris. Although treaded race tyres remained, compound advances and the camber and toe angles that Foscombe worked with are a major factor in making a more balanced, grippier, drive than in period. Brake friction materials needed more development for 2020 racing, but the disc-drum system remained.



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Still simple, but reworked constantly in pursuit of racing retardation, disc front brakes and drums at the single leaf live axle rear (shown below).



Externally, the 2020 paint and panel restoration by Normandale of Daventry had left 713L in fine fettle, supported by carefully researched, photographed and scale-replicated decals, plus 3000 V6 side badges for this chameleon in 1974 Walkinshaw 3000 GT livery. A unique wiring loom was the work of John Mawby, totally revamped to meet the demands of racing in the Millennium.

The main monocoque steel hull remained original, along with all front and rear three-quarter panels. "Only the boot floor needed welding, that was in a

right mess,” reported Dave Lampitt. The originality of primary panels in such an historic racing saloon remains a testament to those who steered it. Any external panels that did need replacing were sourced with selected supplies from John Hill at the established Capri Club.



By 2021 the Capri gleamed in 1974 Ford Corporate colours, but the engine was not installed at this stage, nor was the more advanced wiring loom that Millennium racing demanded.



Ready for a 2021 noise test at Goodwood test day.

Castle Combe reunion

I drove the Old Warrior again in Autumn 2021. Now at Castle Combe, the gleaming Capri was unloaded from Foscombe's truck by Dave Lampitt and



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Mark Martin, attracting a lot of attention at a Pandemic-postponed *Guild of Motoring Writers* Track Day.



Capri ready to meet the challenges of Castle Combe in 2021.



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[Looks even better from the top!](#)

The 1.85-mile west of England track is familiar to me, right back to pre-chicane days when I held the 1991 lap record in a road tyre-equipped Sierra RS500. No records now, we needed to treat 50 other track occupants from Wheels-Alive proprietor Kim Henson's Austin A35 to ferocious Porsches with respect. Oh, and pass Castle Combe's strict noise tests.

It had been just over 47 years and two months since I last drove this Capri in Belgium. An emotional experience, but educational, teaching us how motorsport specialists redevelop the same vehicle specification over a change in century.

The cold start procedure required skilled carburettor mixture and manipulation, but thereafter the fully warmed up V6 stayed happy to run 75 to 80 degrees on that cool September day.



The hearty V6 is well controlled in terms of reliably idle and consistent power, but tricky to initially start from cold.

The 3-litre Essex V6 is more amenable to delivering prompt pulling power than many classic motors, but the race clutch snapped into action. As we waddled out toward the track, track marshals obviously relished the sight of this resurrected machine snorting onward.

The Momo 3-spoke wheel and leather rim relayed truck-heavy feedback at these first gear speeds. A short run across a holding area and first is



exchanged for second with 4000 rpm synchronised simplicity, but it is a longer row across the gate to third.

We emerged onto the fastest sector of the circuit, so a look over the shoulder for faster traffic was worthwhile. At these lower rpm, fourth and top gear on this 1973 machine is barely swapped into place 5000 revs before the blind crest that hides the tighter right of Quarry corner, a trap for the unwary, destroyer of many a pristine racer. The first lap concerned adjusting to other occupants of a mixed track day and ensuring over 70 lb. /sq. in. oil pressure, also that water temperature did not stray above 90 degrees.

I had only used 5200 of the available 7000 rpm initially. We enjoyed two 15-minute sessions to reacquaint this driver with a well-bred competition Capri, so let's encapsulate that experience with a flying lap.

You expect a start line to be basically straight, but at Castle Combe we crossed the line in top gear already aiming the Capri at the open right-hander encouragingly titled Folly. The V6 sounds pretty good within the bare cabin and appreciative onlookers remarked on the V6's emotive bass soundtrack.

Folly's tarmac ripples make the live axle Ford with no aerodynamic assists raise its snout. Now skittering modestly over the gentle downhill slope, the big brake and turn test at Quarry waits. As we approach the now uphill contours to Quarry, 6200 rpm is reported on the flicking mechanical tachometer and we are in the 125 mph zone.

Charged with somebody else's increasingly valuable property, I started



braking before the crest. Surmounted and with speed dropping rapidly, I reach for third gear and aim at an Apex that remains hidden, lurking somewhere in the vicinity of the South Coast.

A short sprint to the Esses, fierce kerbing amounts to what is effectively the first chicane, inserted to slow the original perimeter track's top gear approach to the fast right of Tower. Entry to the Esses demanded careful selection of second gear, for you could get lost across the spacious gear change gate, perilously close to the alley leading to Reverse. Safely in second gear and we get the first hint that this is a traditional rear drive Ford, the steering lightens under full power as we arc to the left: what would have been slithery oversteer in 1973 is restrained these days with enhanced grip. All that is required is to ease off steering lock and enjoy a swift exit and prompt gear change across to third at little more than 5000 rpm.

That brief excitement was followed by a swift change in direction into a gentle right at Old Paddock, the Capri sprinted through 6000 rpm in third and I briefly held top gear. Heavy braking is needed again into the sharper Tower right, and I found the pedal travel long in the old-fashioned way, but it stayed consistent because current pads and linings do not fade away. The penalty is more vibration than I wanted, or the owner liked.

Another abbreviated third gear sprint to the second chicane [aka. *Bobbies*] and I hauled it back into second, my size seven feet struggling to bridge the gap between brake and accelerator. Safer to forget heel and toe fanciness, and execute a conventional downshift and allow time for a hearty blip on the

throttle which allows second gear to slip into place a lot more readily.

Exiting Bobbies the eager V6 hits almost 7000 rpm vociferously and the Capri's elongated nostrils mark your path with dips as third then fourth slip home. The exit road flicks by on your left, and you are faced with the exhilarating surge to the daunting haul right dubbed Camp. That challenge can be a fourth gear turn to the low kerb, but whatever ratio is employed you are looking to ease the Ford in a natural power versus grip arc as far down the exit kerbing as possible, before booming back across the start/finish line.



Chicane...



It can be thrilling to rewind half a century! JW

- This feature was adapted from Jeremy Walton's book, ***Fast Fords***, *Up Close & Personal with Ford's Finest*. Published by Evro Publishing in February 2024, the title is sold from that company's website: www.evropublishing.com or speciality booksellers and Amazon.
- Kim adds: We reviewed Jeremy's *Fast Fords* book on Wheels-Alive in July 2024; the direct link to the feature is here: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/for-your-bookshelf-fast-fords-50-years-up-close-and-personal-with-fords-finest/>
- If you are a Ford fan this book is a 'must'; comprehensive, honest and full of fascinating information from more than five decades or personal experience driving and racing models from the Ford Motor Company.