

This year's London to Brighton Run honours motoring milestones

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This year's magical RM Sotheby's Veteran Car Run pays special tribute to Fiat and the Ladies' Automobile Club...

RM Sotheby's tells us:

(All words and images from RM Sotheby's).

London was still shrouded in pre-dawn darkness as more than 350 pioneering veteran cars, their intrepid drivers, plucky passengers plus crowds of early-rising well-wishers gathered in Hyde Park this morning (Sunday, 3 November). They were all eagerly awaiting daybreak



to signal the start of the annual 2024 RM Sotheby's London to Brighton Veteran Car Run – **the world's longest-running and most significant motoring event.**

It is now 128 years since the original Emancipation Run, which was held in 1896 to celebrate the recently passed Locomotives on Highways Act. This raised the speed limit for 'light locomotives' from 4 to 14 mph, and abolished the need for a man to walk ahead waving a red flag.

Evoking that new-found freedom, today's much-loved homage always commences with the symbolic tearing-up of the red flag – a pre-dawn ritual which this year also marked the 120th anniversary of the Ladies' Automobile Club.

Celebrating that milestone, the red flag was ripped by Joy Tacon and Queenie Louwman, both members of the Veteran Car Run Steering Group which supported many of the 50 or so female drivers on this year's special celebration.

As daylight arrived on an unseasonably warm morning – and as a curtain-raiser – a pack of 25 pre-1905 motor- and pedal cycles left the start line also headed for Brighton. The brave-hearted 'penny-farthing' riders attracted much admiration as they embarked for Brighton's Madeira Drive on the south coast.

Another notable entrant among the pedallers was Louise Kennedy, dressed in period bloomers, paying tribute to remarkable 19th century English cyclist Tessie Reynolds.

In 1893, Tessie set a record for cycling the 120 miles from Brighton to Hyde Park in London and back in just eight hours and 30 minutes. As she was wearing practical pantaloons rather than a more seemly long dress, her efforts were frowned-upon; however, in later years, her record-breaking ride has come to be regarded as a milestone for women's rights in sport.

Once pedal power had departed, at precisely 7:00am sunrise, the first batch of the pre-1905 horseless carriages was flagged away by Duncan Wiltshire, Chairman of the Royal Automobile Club which has lovingly curated the Run ever since 1930. He was joined by



Councilor Robert Rigby, the Lord Mayor of Westminster.

The most venerable of the Victorian 'light locomotive' vehicles led the cavalcade as they phutted and hissed their way through Wellington Arch. Then it was down Constitution Hill, past Buckingham Palace, Admiralty Arch and Whitehall, into Parliament Square and over Westminster Bridge - under the gaze of Big Ben. Here, the dry, 60-mile route split into two in order to avoid traffic congestion in south London.

Half of the plucky participants followed the traditional A23 route via Kennington, Brixton and Streatham Common; the other half journeyed across Lambeth Bridge and then through Vauxhall, Clapham Common and Tooting. The two routes then merged on the A236 just north of Croydon, with the entire magical cavalcade reunited as it headed towards the challenges of the South Downs, and eventually the Madeira Drive seafront.

As ever, vehicles then followed in age order, with the earliest starting first, giving them the most time to reach Brighton. Leading the way this year was a single-cylinder 1894 Benz entered by Hermann Layher with a Velo body and propulsion from a single-cylinder, 1.5hp engine.

The early starters included the ever-popular Salvesen Steam Car, basically a steam locomotive running on the road, complete with stoker shovelling eCoal made from a combination of olives, coffee and molasses into the boiler's fiery furnace. It was accompanied by several primitive motorised tricycles, complete with many riders and passengers sporting period costumes.

Another of the first away was the legendary c1904 Fiat 130HP. One of three team 'Corsa' race cars, the Italian icon was making its first ever appearance in the UK following a meticulous three-year restoration at the Museo Nazionale dell'Automobile in Turin. With a monstrous 16.4-litre engine, the mighty, chain-driven early Grand Prix winner is the most powerful beast to have participated in the event and was honouring Fiat's 125th birthday in 2024.



Thereafter followed a staggering variety of antique machinery, dating back to the era of pioneer vehicles. Some were fitted with steering wheels, others with naval-inspired tillers and helms; some were powered by petrol engines, others propelled by steam (hence the hissing!) and even electric batteries.

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The diversity of their powertrains illustrated the embryonic industry's innovative spirit, as different sources of propulsion vied to dominate the next century of the car's development. A similar dilemma now faces the global car industry more than a century later. **Emphasising the changes that motoring is currently going through, a number of the veteran cars taking part were running on sustainable e-fuels provided by SUSTAIN.**

The unique 2024 Veteran Car Run recalled a bygone age, when motoring technology was in its infancy, and well before many cars had protective roofs or windscreens, let alone mod-cons such as on-board heaters, radios and sat-nav.

Blessed with such eccentric charm and incredible history, the evergreen Run always attracts huge wayside crowds along its entire route, and this year was no exception.

It also attracts participants from around the world, and this year's entry included cars from Austria, Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Holland, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland; some 19 came from the United States alone.

In total, more than 100 different marques were represented, ranging from Adler, Albion and Argyll to Waverley, Winton and Wolseley. A few, like Cadillac, Ford, Renault, Vauxhall and Mercedes-Benz, are still in business today, but most are long-defunct. One of the latter, De Dion Bouton, nonetheless boasted the biggest posse, with more than 50 entrants.

Maximising the dry weather, most of the starters completed the hallowed journey to Brighton well before the 4.30pm deadline, and so claimed a coveted finishers' medal. Of the



369 starters, 325 made it to Madeira Drive in good time.

The first car to reach the Sussex seafront was the 1899 Panhard et Levassor of Shane Houilhan, the former factory team racing car completing the journey in just over three hours.

Having flagged away the early starters, Duncan Wiltshire was one of the many to savour the annual event – and a welcome hot toddy courtesy of Aberfeldy single malt whisky – after his untroubled journey aboard a 1901 Mors owned by the Royal Automobile Club.

“What a fantastic RM Sotheby’s London to Brighton Veteran Car Run it has been today,” enthused a delighted Wiltshire. “The turn-out from spectators was mighty impressive, with huge crowds lining the route all the way. You also have to marvel at the organisation. This is an incredibly complicated event which is seamlessly overseen by more than 300 wonderful volunteer marshals. It is these people who ensure the smooth and safe progress of all these extraordinary vehicles.

“This has been a fabulous way to celebrate 120 years of the Ladies’ Automobile Club, `as well as 125 years of Fiat,” continued Wiltshire. “It was terrific to see the ladies tearing up the ceremonial red flag at the start, and then to see so many of them driving on the Run itself.

“Neither will anyone forget the amazing sight and sound of the Fiat 130HP, as it thundered its way to the Brighton seafront.”

The RM Sotheby’s Veteran Car Run provided a fitting climax to the Royal Automobile Club’s busy London Motor Week, during which the Club presented a large array of functions and events. The penultimate one was the new free-to-view St James’s Motoring Spectacle staged on Pall Mall, making the perfect curtain-raiser to today’s grand finale.

Full details of the 2024 RM Sotheby’s London to Brighton Veteran Car Run are available on the event website at www.veterancarrun.com.



About RM Sotheby's London to Brighton Veteran Car Run

With its unique atmosphere and camaraderie, the RM Sotheby's Veteran Car Run from London to Brighton (staged specifically as a non-profit making event) commemorates the Emancipation Run of 14 November 1896, which celebrated the Locomotives on the Highway Act. The Act raised the speed limit for 'light locomotives' from 4 to 14 mph and abolished the need for these vehicles to be preceded by a man on foot waving a red flag.

The first commemoration of the Emancipation Run was held in 1897 with a drive to Sheen House in Richmond Park. Then, in 1927, the inaugural re-enactment followed the original Brighton route and has taken place every November since, apart from the war years and 1947 when petrol was rationed and 2020 during the global Covid-19 pandemic. The Royal Automobile Club has managed the Run, which celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2021, with the support of the Veteran Car Club of Great Britain since 1930.

For more information visit: www.veterancarrun.com

About the Royal Automobile Club

The Royal Automobile Club was founded in 1897 and its distinguished history mirrors that of motoring itself. In 1907, the Club was awarded its Royal title by King Edward VII, sealing the Club's status as Britain's oldest and most influential motoring organisation.

The Club's early years were focused on promoting the motor car and its place in society, which developed into motoring events such as the 1000 Mile Trial, first held in 1900. In 1905, the Club held the first Tourist Trophy, which remains the oldest continuously competed for motor sports event. The Club promoted the first pre-war and post-war Grands Prix at Brooklands in 1926 and Silverstone in 1948 respectively, whilst continuing to campaign for the rights of the motorist, including introducing the first driving licences.

Today, the Club continues to develop and support automobilism through representation on



the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) and the RAC Foundation while promoting its own motoring events including London Motor Week, the new St James's Motoring Spectacle and the RM Sotheby's London to Brighton Veteran Car Run.

The Club also awards a series of internationally recognised trophies and medals celebrating motoring achievements. These include the Segrave Trophy, the Torrens Trophy, the Simms Medal, the Dewar Trophy and the oldest trophy in motorsport still being competed for today, the Tourist Trophy.

About RM Sotheby's

RM Sotheby's is the world's leading collector car auction house. With over 40 years of proven results in the collector car industry, RM's vertically integrated range of services, from auctions (live and online) and private sales to estate planning and financial services, coupled with an expert team of Car Specialists and an international footprint, provide an unsurpassed level of service to the global collector car market. RM Sotheby's is currently responsible for the most valuable car ever sold at auction. In 2022 the RM Sotheby's annual London sale moved to Marlborough House in St James's and in 2024 onto a brand new venue within the five star Peninsula London. This year's London sale was held on the eve of the RM Sotheby's Veteran Car Run on Saturday 2 November with a preview on the previous day.

For more information visit: rmsothebys.com