

Joel Park Hill Climb - 22nd June 1935

by David Evans

Introduction - by Simon Morgan

This article describes how motor racing made a very brief appearance in Northwood Hills during its development in the 1930s. This account of the event first appeared in *Bugantics* vol. 79 no. 2, the magazine of the Bugatti Owner's Club, following correspondence between its author and society members to help identify the precise location of the course. David Evans and the editor of *Bugantics* have kindly given permission for it to be reprinted here.

The Bugatti Owners Club was founded in 1929 initially to bring together enthusiasts for that marque, but within a few years it was welcoming owners of other cars who were interested in motoring generally, and more particularly in motor sport events, such as races, matches, competitions and time trials. It owns the Prescott Hill Climb in Gloucestershire, acquired two years after the events of this article, after being found for them by LTC Rolt, the celebrated pioneer and advocate of canal and railway preservation. So Winchester, Cranbourne and Highland Roads in Northwood Hills with their challenging gradients can claim to be the forerunner of this notable motor sport location.

Background to the Event

In the mid 1930s the Bugatti Owners' Club was searching for a new venue after the RAC had withdrawn the licence to use Chalfont Heights beyond the end of 1935. Club member D.B.H. Robinson found Joel Park and obtained permission to stage an event in June 1935 from a Mr Lane-Brown who was the owner of Modern Homes Ltd who no doubt saw it as an excellent marketing opportunity.

As Britain rapidly recovered from the Great Depression into the mid nineteen thirties, many new housing estates sprung up in the outer-London suburbs. In order to attract sales, developers had to offer something new to the aspiring middle-classes and the Joel Park Estate was at the forefront of many of these new initiatives.

The concrete roads and main services were installed ahead of the construction and this required significant additional capital. The selling prices of the houses were between £850 and £1,500, so very much at the top end of the market. Lane-Brown pioneered free railway season-tickets and other sales incentives. He built houses in small batches of never more than ten, each set with different architects and styles. The flat roofed houses at the entrance to the estate were seen to be very avant-garde with their roof level sun lounges. Every house had a cooker, fridge, washing machine plus seven fitted electric fires, all as standard. Lane-Brown recognised that houses were becoming the supreme indicator of social status, thus every house had some uniquely identifiable detail however innocuous. Most were given individual names and each sales pitch was aimed to be specifically individual and not generic. He must have been delighted when the event attracted so many competitors and such a massive crowd.

The Build-up to the Event

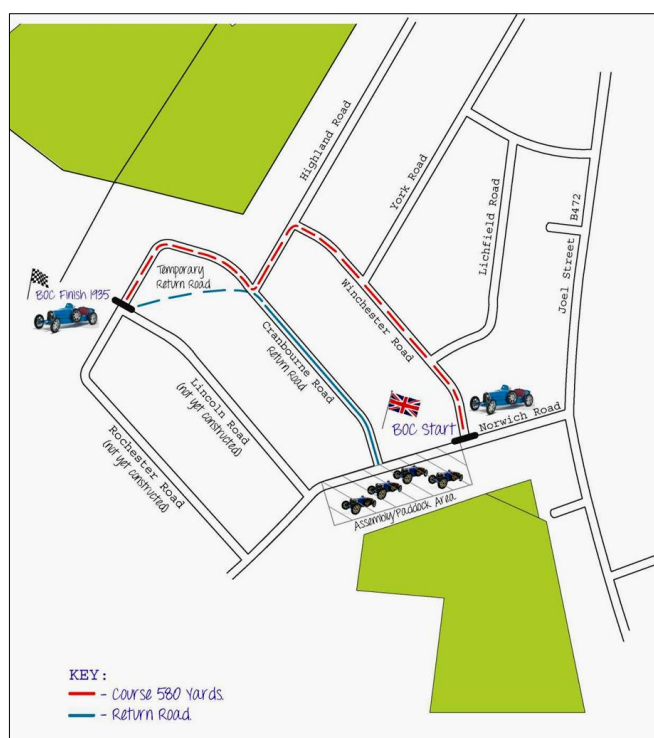
Colonel Giles was to be the Clerk of the Course and Secretary of the Meeting. He advertised the event as a Speed Hill Climb at Joel Park, Northwood Hills some fifteen miles from London. The course was to be half a mile long on a concrete road and incorporating three corners. The final Chalfont Heights hill climb had taken place just four weeks earlier on May 25th 1935 and unsurprisingly most of the 64 cars and drivers that had been entered there were also entered at Joel Park.

The competition was open to members of the Bugatti Owners Club, The Midland Automobile Club, and the Derby and District Motor Club.

The Course

Period press and *Bugantics* reports add up to a very full description of the course as follows:

- Begins with a very slightly curving and rising stretch of 380 yards.
- First corner is a right angle to the left.
- A further 85 yards brings you to the second corner that besides being about 85 degrees is cambered all the wrong way.
- The road curves slightly over the brow of the hill to the third corner which has some similarity to the first.
- Continues a further 75 yards to the finish.
- A return road running parallel to the first stretch joins the course at the second bend.
- The whole thing looks like a small letter 'b' with the top bent back.
- The total length of the course is 580 yards.
- With the added attraction of a 25 foot wide concrete surface and an average gradient of 1 in 10 this hill proves to be a real find.



Identifying the exact course today has been an interesting challenge. The most important piece of direct evidence are the two photographs taken on the start line - Aubrey Esson-Scott in his black Type 51 (Fig. 1) and Kenneth Evans in his MG Midget (Fig. 2). Fortunately it is easy to identify the partially constructed house behind them as no. 2 Winchester Road. If one then follows the above course description and by using a surveyors measuring wheel it is possible to confirm both the course layout and the length. This indicated that the finish line was in Cranbourne Road very close to the junction with Lincoln Road.

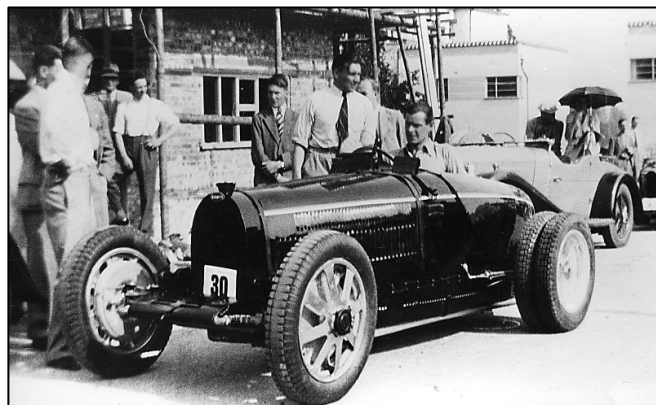


Fig. 1 (The Bugatti Trust)

This is further confirmed by the photograph below which shows the gable end of number 43 Winchester Road that is remarkably unchanged to this day. It is somewhat disappointing that so far no photographs taken at the finishing line have been discovered.



The 1100cc supercharged Alta shared by Peter Whitehead and Peter Walker takes the gentle left hander in Cranbourne Road with 43 Winchester Road in the background, its balcony serving as a grandstand

(Bugatti Owners Club)

The Event Held on 22nd June 1935

The Saturday dawned clear and sunny and it turned out to be very hot indeed and this must have encouraged thousands of spectators to turn out and certainly far more than anyone had expected. This caused serious logistical problems with a stream of spectator cars arriving and mixing with the competitors in the paddock and assembly area on Norwich Road. The consequential delays were so serious that in order to prevent the event over-running the competitors had to be set off up the hill out of sequence.



Fig. 2 – Kenneth Evans on the start line with the single seater Q Type MG Midget, QA0234
The partly built house is 2 Winchester Road
 (The Brooklands Society)

The event was opened in some style by Captain Foster's Bugatti Royale parading serenely up the course. A significant number of well known cars and drivers were entered among the total entry of 63. These were split into 11 classes of which 8 were by capacity, 1 was a handicap, 1 was for novices and the day was concluded by a team event consisting of 6 teams of 3 cars.

Bugatti had the largest number of entries with a total of 21 cars. It was very appropriate that Richard Shuttleworth achieved FTD in his Type 51 when winning Class I for Racing Cars over 1500cc in a time of 30.16 seconds. John Bolster entered in what was described as the Bolster Special 1 was second with a time of 31.14 seconds. The capacity of this car was given as 1962cc so it would have been 'Bloody Mary' as he used the car exclusively in this guise between 1933 and 1937. G. Harvey-Noble was third in his Bugatti Type 51 with a time of 31.14 seconds.

There were also some good class wins for Bugatti with Malcolmson in his Type 55 winning Class I for sports cars between 1500cc and 2500cc. Bear in his Type 49 winning Class J for Sports cars over 2500cc, he also won Class L for Racing cars over 1500cc.

The Team Event results were truly fascinating, the Bugatti Owners Club Team 2 consisting of Baron, Bainton and Harvey-Noble came out as winners, with the Bellevue Garage team of Evans D, Evans K and Miss Evans D in MG Midgets in second place and Bugatti Owners Club Team 2 consisting of Malcolmson, Hampton, and Griffiths in third.

Perhaps as a consequence of the recently laid concrete road plus the very hot ambient temperature, surface grip was very poor and the event had several incidents. The most spectacular must have been Dick Nash in Terror II who started with his wheels spinning spectacularly for about 100 yards but he was going so fast that he braked far too late and overturned at the first bend throwing him clean out of the car, fortunately without serious injury. Even with the benefit of twin rear wheels Esson-Scott spun at the first bend. It was reported that G. Mervyn-White in his Tracta motored in what were described as, unexpected directions. Bellamy in his Ford V8 got very sideways in the final bend on his first run but did even better on his final run where on the same bend he hit the banking and ended up sitting on his passengers lap!

There were many other well known and successful competitors. Peter Whitehead won classes G and H for Sports cars between 850cc and 1500cc in his Alta and Peter Walker also drove the same car to win Class N for novices. Peter Whitehead and Peter Walker, of course, went on together to win the 1951 Le Mans 24 hours in a Jaguar. Leslie Ballamy competed in three of the LMB cars that he had constructed. The 748cc LMB in Class F for Sports cars up to 850cc, the 1172cc LMB Ford in classes C and D for touring cars up to 2500cc, and the 3622cc LMB Ford in class E for Touring Cars over 2500cc, all three were entered by Bill Body. Captain C.H. Davis entered his 1480cc Delage in Class K, this being the car that he subsequently sold to Prince Chula and raced by Prince Bira.



A.S. Whiddington's Blackburne engined Frazer Nash TT Replica in the 'dip'
 (Matt Vincent Collection)

A.S. Whiddington entered his rare Frazer Nash in Class I (see above), and N.S. Embericos in his Type 50 Bugatti deserves a mention.

It had been a remarkably successful day and even into the early 1980s both Kenneth Evans and Wilkie Wilkinson spoke of it fondly.

Conclusion

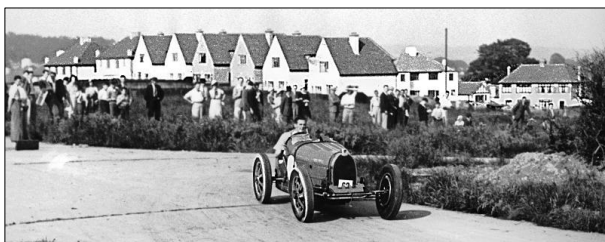
This was to be the one and only motoring event at Joel Park. Mr Lane-Brown had achieved his aim of widespread publicity for his housing estate and it is probable that the turnout of spectators had far exceeded his expectations. The rate of house building on the estate had accelerated during 1935 and the first of the roads were soon to be adopted by the Local Authority. Even if the club could have been granted an RAC licence for the following year the transfer of private to public roads would have precluded any competitive event.

Acknowledgements

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**This 1934 photograph shows development around Northwood Hills. Winchester Road, used as part of the course is the lower of the two parallel roads top centre of the picture.
The roads that would comprise the upper reaches have not yet been laid**



R. Shuttleworth in his Bugatti Type 51 turning into Highland Road from Winchester Road
(The Bugatti Trust)



J.K.W. Baines sweeps into Highland Road in his Bugatti Type 43
(The Bugatti Trust)