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One thing you can be sure about at Historic Winton is that the weather will be unpredictable and this year was no exception with rain on the Friday which cleared up by midday Saturday although the track didn't completely dry out until well into Sunday which was a pleasant Winton winter's day.

While the circuit was quite wet on the Friday it offered quite good grip but this certainly wasn't the case for Group L qualifying on Saturday morning when a competitor in a previous session applied a liberal coating of oil across the width of the track ensuring that the 36 competitors vying for a good spot on the grid were having difficulty to even stay on the track and times were some 20 seconds slower than those achievable the previous day. Of course there are always some who rise above the conditions and current hot Group L runner, Bob Schapel with the blown TC Special emerged on top just half a second ahead of acknowledged wet runner Ian Tate in the skinny tyred Prefect Special who, it will be remembered was on pole in the wet at this meeting two years ago. So bad were the conditions that some elected to do only one lap but they would be penalised as the meeting went on with rearward starting positions for the first race at least, progressive grids being employed. I was certainly asking myself why I was out there but managed to salvage 15th in the Nota Major which wasn't a complete disaster. Oh well, Graham Hill used to say that you meet a better class of person at the rear of the grid although I don't know that that applies in Australia where we all, in JKL, share in the camaraderie. All this wet running had many pondering the most effective tyre pressures for the conditions, pump 'em up or let 'em down or leave them the same as for a dry track, one well known competitor arrived at this conclusion but I would be interested to know what others have found.

By the Saturday afternoon race the track was mostly dry and was won by Mal Reid in the PRAD, now with more suitable gear ratios, second was Bob Schapel and third John Medley going very well in the little Nota FJ. A seasoned Group L competitor who was spectating reckoned this was one of the best races he had seen for many a day with the amount of passing and repassing involved. A red flag and subsequent restart after just one lap caught out some competitors left with motors running awaiting the restart

and having to pull out with boiling radiators and Shane Bowden was out for the rest of the meeting with a broken axle in the PRAD Sports. The Nota Major too fouled its plugs awaiting the restart and wouldn't rev over 5000 thus inhibiting its performance and finishing a lowly 16th.

Sunday morning was handicap time on a track still cold from the night air and this time the starters from the front of the field held their positions from the rear starters with Chris Farrell in the red TC Special coming home first from James Elphick in the Gazelle and John Anderson in the Cooper Butler. A DNF went to Graeme Snape in the Zephyr Special with suspected transmission problems

By Sunday afternoon the sun was out and the track dry so conditions looked right for some good racing at last for the 8 lapper, the winner this time was Ken Bedggood in the Penrite Lola from Bob Schapel and Derek McLaughlan in the Mallock U2. Mal Reid retired from a good position when the tail panel on the PRAD came loose and Geoff McInnes retired the Riley Special with a broken gearbox remote control. The Nota Major worked its way up to 10th now going much better after a fitting a new set of spark plugs and I must say that the racing I experienced was most enjoyable with competitors trying very hard but not putting anyone else at risk. In the M and O races which preceded our Group L races many of the competitors would have been hard pressed to stay with our leading Group L cars so full credit to our guys for their competitiveness. The pre race suggestions that the few AASA log booked cars in our races would be a problem proved to me at least to be unfounded.

Meanwhile in the JK events a huge 26 car field lined up for qualifying later in the day than the Group L qualifying when conditions had improved somewhat with Graeme Raper in Monoskate taking pole comfortably ahead of Stumpy Russell in his shiny Ford V8 Special and surprisingly John Gillett in the K3 MG ahead of the SA CDD Specials. By the starting time of almost 4.30 pm the track was dry for the 5 lap scratch race which was won by Graeme Raper very comfortably from Stumpy Russell with Alistair Turnbull from SA with his Dodge Special third and some great dices right throughout the field. The Sunday morning race produced the same top three with the Monoskate getting down to 1.13.3245 and sounding very sharp indeed and not far shy of the Group K record set some years ago when the track seemed to be somewhat faster.

The final JK race was an 8 lap handicap, the Col Arthur Waite Trophy being presented for the first Austin Seven Special home, not only did Peter Matthews win this trophy but he won the race outright ! Second was Graeme Raper being awarded Driver of the Meeting for his efforts and third was Pat Ryan's MG Special finally being persuaded to run on all four. By this time the strain of racing was starting to take its effect with 6 DNF's in this race.

Regularity too was well represented with two fields of mostly post war cars and with some real gems amongst them making their annual pilgrimage to Winton. As is usual the car club displays in the car park were well worth a look.

Although entries were down in some categories the total of 62 JKL entries gives some reassurance that there is life in the categories yet but it is really frustrating that no other circuit can reproduce this entry level with many scratching to get into double figures. Unfortunately scrutineering at Winton is still in the dark ages, while the long queues in the rain might have been acceptable 30 years ago most circuits have moved on since then and lining up for a second scrutineering on the Sunday is well and truly over the top. If everywhere else can employ a more equitable solution surely it is time Winton did too as it really detracts from an outstanding event.

Considering that some AASA log booked cars were racing at Winton I thought I should give their system a try and I am now able to inform you that I have a AASA Historic Passport for the Dodge Special which I have been advertising for sale. In theory this should now enable me to race it at AASA sanctioned events, Winton, Lakeside, Qld Raceway and Wakefield perhaps. I will keep you informed as to the outcome !

A fortnight before Winton we were at Morgan Park for the HRCC Autumn Historic race meeting but this time, in contrast to the Winton entry levels, entries were at the bottom end of the scale with just 3 Group L sports cars flying the JKL flag. Peter Yeomans in the Lotus Eleven, David Bruce in the WRM and yours truly in the Gladiator were mixed in with a field of Formula Vees and a couple of Formula Juniors. I managed to win one race and was leading another when the exhaust system fell to bits putting an end to any further participation but I must thank the Vee competitors who very sportingly offered to get it repaired but it needed some serious rethinking to prevent a recurrence. With the HRCC's main Historic event for the year taking place on July 14/15 we are hopeful of gaining a more representative

field of JKL cars for that meeting

With my “new” Milano GT now up and running well it has been out on a couple of local car club events attracting much attention and giving its owner a bit of an adrenalin rush while driving it on the road, it is something of a thrill to drive a “racing” car on the road even if the Milano doesn’t take to our bumpy second rate roads too well. It was more at home at a recent Grafton hill climb where my previous Milano was an FTD contender some 47 years ago but time has moved on and cars have improved a lot since then and now it could only place 62nd outright in a field of 75 competitors. Meanwhile my original Milano has a new owner and is destined to join the two others racing so spectacularly in the UK and Europe. It will however be staying in Australia until the end of the year to race at our Tasman event.

I had been delaying sending out this post Winton newsletter awaiting the outcome of the level of JKL entries for the forthcoming Eastern Creek meeting and the good news is that the HSRCA have given us a series of races which also include a couple of invited M sports & Na and some Vees, I am very grateful that they have kept faith with our dedicated group of NSW JKL competitors, in addition we will NOT be using the new track additions.

Interest in our September 22/23 Wakefield Park meeting seems quite high at the moment in anticipation of the regular JKL races we traditionally have there plus the JK feature race we are staging this year, mark the date in your diaries now.

Not to forget the Tasman Revival meeting at Eastern Creek late in November which we anticipate will be on the newly extended circuit which will be a new experience for many competitors. Entry forms are now out for the VHRR Long Track meeting at Winton on 11/12 August and for the annual Queensland Historic meeting at Morgan Park on July 14/15, (closes June 15th) always a great event at a very pleasant venue.

Don't forget to check the CAMS website for the new rules on fire extinguishers and the forthcoming new rules on roll bar padding.

Good Racing,
Dick Willis

