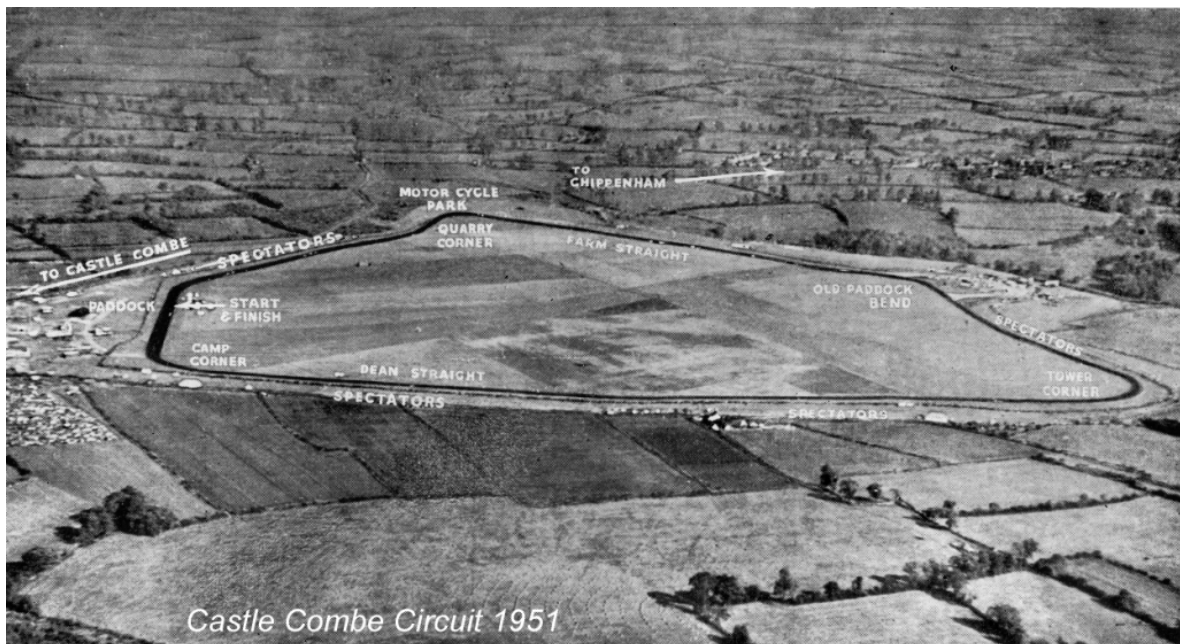


## **Castle Combe Circuit**

The Castle Combe circuit, 20 miles to the east of Bristol, and near to Chippenham in Wiltshire, was opened in 1950 using the perimeter track of the former RAF training airfield. It was created by the experienced Bristol Motor Cycle & Light Car Club with the enthusiastic support of the owner of the Castle Combe estate Mrs. Kay Maurice (later to be Kay Thomas). The first meeting over the 1.84 mile track, on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1950, was for club members only. David Wilkins won the first race, for Clubman's motorcycles, on his 500cc Triumph, and Jeff Sparrowe the second, in his Morgan; Clive Lones (Iota Tiger Kitten II) won the final race of the day for 500cc Formula 3 cars. Having been judged a success this was followed up with a national status meeting that October, which included many of the top British drivers of the day, including new star Stirling Moss who won three races, in 2-litre HWM, 500cc Cooper-Norton and Frazer Nash Le Mans Replica sports.



Car racing continued for several years until 1955 when, following the Le Mans disaster that year, the cost of necessary circuit safety updates was too great for the Bristol club to bear, and they gave up their lease in 1956. However, during this period many drivers who went on to greater fame had raced at Castle Combe. In 1951 Mike Hawthorn won four races in his Riley sports cars in his first season of racing, and in the same year Colin Chapman gave the Mk.3 Lotus, the first of his designs purely for circuit racing, a winning debut. In 1955 Graham Hill had one of his earliest races, in a C-type Jaguar. The BRM V16 starred in the Formula Libre races of 1953 to 1955 in the hands of Ken Wharton and Ron Flockhart, while local stars included Ivor Bueb from Cheltenham (Le Mans winner in 1955) and Bristol's Grand Prix driver Horace Gould, who won the Fry Trophy F1 race in 1954 in his Cooper-Bristol. On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1955 Harry Schell in a Vanwall won the International Formula One 'Avon Trophy' race, in what was to be the last car meeting for some years.

*Paddock assembly area in 1952  
(© Gerry Bath Archive)*

The first motorcycle race meeting had been held in 1951, and these continued through to 1971, including top riders such as John Surtees, Mike Hailwood, Phil Read, Derek Minter, Bill Ivy and Barry Sheene.



Car racing recommenced on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1962 after the BRSCC stepped in to fund the necessary circuit improvements. The following year AFN (Castle Combe) Ltd. took on the lease and fully resurfaced the track in time for the 1964 season. In October 1965 Chris Summers recorded the first 100 mph lap (101.59 mph) in his Formula Libre Lotus 24-Chevrolet 5.4, while Bristolian Vince Woodman had his first outright race win in his Lotus Cortina. In July 1967 Dan Hawkes won the first race at Castle Combe for the new Formula Ford (and the second Formula Ford race anywhere) in a Lotus 51. Numerous club race meetings during this period included more stars of the future such as Piers Courage (Lotus 7), Vic Elford (Lotus Cortina) and Derek Bell (Formula 3 Brabham), while other local stars included Bath's Ron Fry with his Ferrari GT's and later Ford GT40s, Terry Sanger ('Fraud' Cortina V8 and Ford Falcon), Jem Marsh in his Marcos GTs, and Geoff Mabbs who gave the new Mini-Marcos a race win on its debut in 1965.

In 1969 AFN (Castle Combe) Ltd. granted a license to John Webb's Motor Circuit Developments to manage racing at Castle Combe, and the next two years saw the appearance of some major series. In May 1970 Peter Gethin won the European Formula 5000 Championship round in his McLaren M10B-Chevrolet, recording the circuit's first sub 1 minute lap (56.6s - 117.03mph) to make Castle Combe the second fastest circuit in UK after Silverstone. Gethin's time was equalled by Howden Ganley's M10B later in the day, and their record was to stand for another 14 years. The following year's race was won by Frank Gardner (LolaT192-Chevrolet) in pouring rain ahead of Gethin and Ganley, both in McLaren M18s. In 1971 Alan Jones (Brabham BT28) scored his first ever Formula 3 win in the Lombank F3 championship race in August, ahead of Colin Vandervell (Brabham BT35) and Jody Scheckter (Merlyn Mk21). Then in October Jochen Mass (Brabham BT35) won the Shell British Formula 3 Championship round, from Scheckter's Merlyn with Roger Williamson's March 713M third. Other future Grand Prix stars to appear in the early 1970s were Tom Pryce (Formula Ford and Formula Vee), Derek Warwick (Formula Ford 2000) and Jonathan Palmer (modsports Marcos GT).



*Avon Rise 1976 © Bill Riley*

In 1976, with the support of Kay Thomas, the circuit was bought by a consortium led by Howard Strawford and the long process of obtaining permanent planning permission and improving the venue began. In September 1976 the first meeting under Castle Combe Circuit Ltd. saw Nigel Mansell (Hawke DL11), in only his eighth outing, win the Formula Ford race.

As the circuit developed through the 1980s and 1990s future Grand Prix stars appeared, such as Martin Brundle (Formula Ford 2000 Reynard SF80), and in July 1982 Ayrton Senna (Van Diemen RF82) dominated the British Formula Ford 2000 championship race, beating the previous class record on every flying lap. The British FF1600 championship race in September 1985 featured Damon Hill (Van Diemen RF85), Johnny Herbert (Quest FF85/86), and Eddie Irvine (Quest FF85) – all beaten by Paulo Carcasci (Van Diemen RF85) though. In 1989 David Coulthard (Van Diemen RF89) won the Star of Tomorrow Formula Ford 1600 championship races in May and August.

In October 1983 the circuit hosted a Lombard RAC Rally Special Stage; Hannu Mikkola (Audi Quattro) set fastest time, ahead of eventual rally winner Stig Blomqvist's Quattro. In July 1984 Tony Trimmer (Formula Libre Lola T330 - Chevrolet) broke the longstanding Gethin/Ganley lap record to set a new mark at exactly 120 mph (55.2 sec). The following year Alo Lawler (ex-Alain Prost McLaren M30 - Cosworth DFV) reduced this to 54.2 sec (122.21 mph). This record stood until August 1997 when Nigel Greensall (F1 Tyrrell 022 Judd) set the first 130 mph lap while winning the European Boss Formula race. Greensall's 50.59 sec (130.93 mph) record will stand for all time as in 1999 the circuit was revised to include two new chicanes, increasing the length to 1.85 miles.

After a 10 year break motorcycle racing restarted in 1981 and in 1989 Carl Fogarty recorded the first 100mph motorcycle lap (102.22mph) on the original circuit. In 2004 a new motorcycle chicane was added on the approach to Camp Corner for the Superbike Grand National, and in 2006 the circuit hosted its first ever World Championship event, for Superside FIM sidecars, won by Tim and Tristran Reeves (Suzuki 1000).

Between 2001 and 2005 the circuit again hosted International car races with the British Formula 3 and GT championships, the F3 series including future Grand Prix drivers such as Anthony Davidson, Takuma Sato (also twice to win the Indianapolis 500), Nelson Piquet junior, Bruno Senna and Heikki Kovalainen. At the final F3 meeting in 2005 Dan Clarke (Dallara F305) set a new outright circuit record of 59.387 sec. (112.14 mph).

For many years the backbone of the circuit's race programme has been the long-standing local championships for Formula Ford 1600 (which began in 1969), Sports & GT cars (1982) and Saloon cars (1995); with local stars such as Kevin Mills, Bob Higgins, Steve Roberts, George Douglas, Charles Atherton and Luke and Jason Cooper being just a few on the long list of champions.



*Castle Combe Saloon Cars 2015 ©Pete Stowe*

In 2012 the circuit held its first meeting dedicated solely to classic and historic cars, the 'Autumn Classic', which has quickly become established as the track's best attended meeting.

*2014 Autumn Classic ©Pete Stowe*

Today, despite the addition of two chicanes, the circuit still follows its basic 1950 layout on the original RAF perimeter track. Several original RAF buildings, including the control tower, are still in use in the paddock, while the pedestrian 'Avon Bridge' near Camp Corner has been a major circuit landmark since 1952.



*Pete Stowe 2020*

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Information and additional images provided from the Castle Combe Circuit Archive.

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Westcountry Motorsport History

Website <https://bpmc.org.uk/petestowe/wmh.htm>

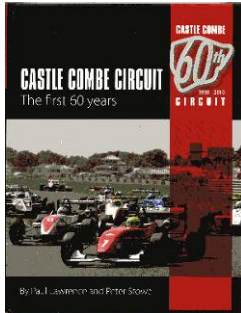
petestowe @ talktalk.net

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The comprehensive story of Castle Combe is available in a book published for the Circuit's Diamond Jubilee in 2010

## Castle Combe Circuit – The First 60 Years

by Paul Lawrence and Peter Stowe



From the days of the Castle Combe estate and RAF airfield, the book charts the first 60 years of the circuit's history. 154 pages with colour and black & white photos, many never previously published.

ISBN 978 1 903378 74 8, Published by TFM Publishing Ltd.

Copies are available from the Castle Combe Circuit online shop:  
[www.castlecombecircuit.co.uk/offers/60th-anniversary-book](http://www.castlecombecircuit.co.uk/offers/60th-anniversary-book)  
 or from the Circuit Shop at major events.

For further information on Castle Combe Circuit see [www.castlecombecircuit.co.uk](http://www.castlecombecircuit.co.uk)  
 For further information on RAF Castle Combe see the Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust website:

[www.abct.org.uk/airfields/airfield-finder/castle-combe](http://www.abct.org.uk/airfields/airfield-finder/castle-combe)

## Castle Combe Circuit Archive

*Since the Circuit Archive was established in 1997 we have assembled a collection which includes programmes, results sheets, and press reports covering every meeting from the circuit's beginning in 1950, and also a small collection of photographs and memorabilia.*

### **STILL WANTED FOR THE ARCHIVE**

*Although the archive includes much information, with many people having generously donated items, there are still a number of gaps to fill. Particular wants are:*

- *An original programme for the AFN/Porsche Club(GB) car race meeting on 15 May 1965*
- *results or race reports for the New Era MCC motorcycle race meeting on 21 May 1994*
- *reports, programmes or results sheets for the following sprints:*
  - 17 September 1960 Dursley MC&LCC 1<sup>st</sup> Dursley Sprint*
  - 10 June 1961 Bristol MC&LCC, Burnham-on-Sea MC & MG CC(SW) 3 Clubs Sprint*
  - 13 June 1964 White Horse MC, Weston-super-Mare MC & Austin-Healey Club*
  - 11 July 1964 BARC (Bristol & Bath Centre)*
  - 12 September 1964 Austin-Healey Club (SW Centre)*
  - 19 June 1965 White Horse MC, Weston-super-Mare MC & Austin-Healey Club*
  - 7 August 1965 CSMA*
  - 21 October 1967 BARC (Bristol & Bath Centre) Hippocrates Trophy Sprint*
  - 28 September 1968 750MC*
  - 31 October 1981 Welsh Counties CC*

*We are also interested in obtaining:*

*Pre-1979 race results sheets, and sprint programmes & results sheets.*

*Bristol Motor Cycle & Light Car Club magazines 1950-56.*

*Photographs or film from 1950s-1980s, especially photographs from the Formula 5000 meetings of 1970 and 1971.*

*Any other memorabilia.*

***If you can help please contact [petestowe @ talktalk.net](mailto:petestowe@talktalk.net)***

***or***

***call the Castle Combe Circuit Office on 01249 782417***