

Speed Trials at CHEDWORTH AERODROME

Over the winter of 1941-42 a new military airfield was constructed on the top of the Cotswold hills in Gloucestershire, about two miles from the village of Chedworth, seven from Cirencester, and ten from Cheltenham. Two runways were laid, with a connecting taxiway running around the perimeter, and as the minor road from Chedworth village to Withington ran through the middle of the site and across the longer runway it was closed to the public. During the war the airfield was used by the RAF mostly for training, and afterwards the grass areas were soon returned to farming use.

In September 1949 the Cheltenham Tigers MC&LCC were given permission by the landowner to run some Speed Trials for motorcycles over a ¼ mile straight line course. The event, on Saturday 3rd September was said to have been *"the first event of its kind held in the Western section of the ACU since 1932"*, and RJA (Ray) Petty recorded the best time of the day. The event was repeated the following year, this time the winner was George Brown (998cc Vincent-HRD).

May 1951 – Cheltenham Motor Club

In 1951 the Cheltenham Motor Club devised a ¾ mile horseshoe-shaped track with two corners - probably using the perimeter taxiway around the end of one of the runways - for a Speed Trial for cars. The event, on Saturday 12th May, attracted a 36-strong entry of sports cars, and racing cars ranging from four 500cc Formula 3 cars to the 21-litre Rolls-Royce Kestrel-engined 'Flying Saucer' Special of Ted Lloyd-Jones.

Before a crowd of *"several thousand spectators"* Lloyd-Jones' aero-engined 'Flying Saucer' was quickest after the first runs, but on the final run of the day Peter Stubberfield recorded 45.0 sec in his blue Type 35B Bugatti to clinch the £15 prize for best time of the day.

Slowest vehicle to take to the track was Jack Readings' 1908 Clement Bayard *"chugging round with its conservative 9 horsepower"*, although as it wasn't listed in the programme it presumably wasn't competing.

BTD: Peter Stubberfield (Bugatti T35B 2261cc) 45.0s

Class winners:

Sports cars

CS Neame (MG 847cc) 61.0s
 JM (Jim) Readings (MG 1250cc) 53.0s
 HC Mitchelmore (Singer 1506cc) 64.2s
 LS Richards (Alvis 2511cc) 54.6s, 2nd Jack Readings (Lancia 2570cc)
 C Brough (Jaguar XK120) 49.0s

Racing Cars

Claude Tipper (Monaco 500) 47.8s, 2nd Austen May (Cooper), 3rd John Ebdon (Iota)
 JM (Jim) Readings (MG 1250cc) 52.8s
 EJ Garnsey (Maserati 6CM 1500cc)
 E (Ted) Lloyd Jones (Flying Saucer 21,000cc) 45.2 s
 PJ (Peter) Stubberfield (Bugatti T35B 2261cc) 45.0s

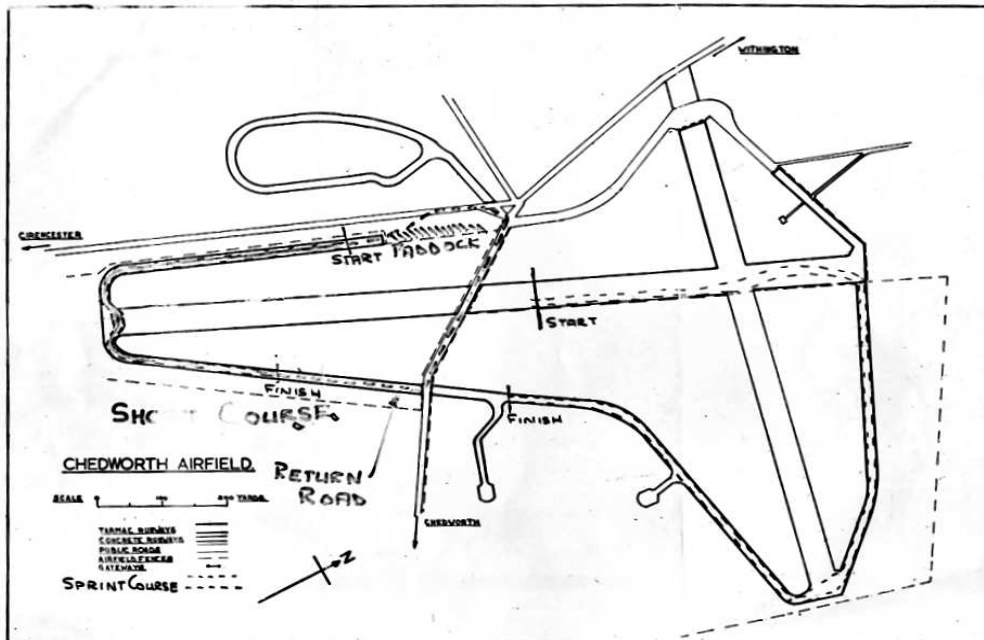
With the public road across the runway then being re-instated, and possible alternative uses for the site also being considered, both motorcycle and car sprints at Chedworth came to an end, and in 1952 the Cheltenham MC began using Staverton airfield, near Gloucester, instead.

1967 - Chedworth Aerodrome Trust

Fifteen years would pass, until late 1966 when the Chedworth Aerodrome Trust decided to establish the site as a motorsport venue. No maintenance had been done on the surface since the war, and there were many places where it was unusable, but still several sections which were serviceable. The Trust's aim, as a non-profit making body, was to keep the airfield in good condition, and had decided to preserve these sections and make up a sprint course for cars.

There were two possible sprint tracks, one on either side of the public road dividing the airfield. The 'short' circuit, of about ½ mile, was a bit bumpy by then current standards, but deemed readily useable by anything other than single-seaters or low-slung sports-racers – and had actually been used by a non-RAC club even before the RAC had carried out a track inspection. The 'long' circuit (just over a mile, with four interesting bends) appeared to be a more promising sprint course, but needed resurfacing, and following RAC inspection, would not be ready for the start of the 1967 season, so the 'short' course would have to be used.

The 'short' course was about 850 yards long and ran anti-clockwise around the Southern end of the airfield, with the return road via the public road across the middle of the airfield.



Sunday 19th March 1967, Hagley & District LCC Speed Trials

The first meeting on the 'short' course was run by Hagley & District Light Car Club on Sunday 19th March 1967, with Trust Secretary E.H. Elwes apparently allowing its use free of charge for this 'exploratory' event.

Thirty starters were attracted to this closed to club event at the new venue, and after three timed runs, the Hagley Cup for BTD was awarded to Don Woodhall in his U2 Mk.VI. John Handley's MGB GT, lacking first gear, could only place third in class behind Frank and Peggy Livingstone's Daimler SP250, while Nick Grazebrook's new Honda S800 soft-top headed a bunch of Spridgets in the small sportscar class

BTB (Hagley Cup): Don Woodhall (U2 Mk.VI) 28.12s

Ladies award: Miss Marilyn Smith (Mini Cooper 998cc Broadspeed) 33.66s

Class winners:

JW Moody (Mini Cooper 998cc) 32.07s

JF (Frank) Livingstone (Triumph 2000) 34.17s

Nick Grazebrook (Honda S800) 32.49s

JF (Frank) Livingstone (Daimler SP250) 30.99s

W Horton (Jaguar 3.8) 29.48s

Further events found to have been listed for 1967 are:

7th May - BRSCC (SW) - cancelled

27th May - Morgan 4/4 Club

9th July – BARC

but no further information on these meetings has yet been discovered, although the BARC (Bristol & Bath Centre) event on the 'short' course in October was not their first to be held at Chedworth.

Sunday 1st October, BARC (Bristol & Bath) Sprint

40 entries.

BTD: Tom Elton (Lotus 22)

Presumably Elton's Lotus 22 had no difficulties with the 'bumpy' surface, or returning to the paddock on the public road.

Class winners: B Eyles, J Francis, DS Stephens, J Burbidge, R Powell, Paul Wiese, Waldo Edwards, Ron Harris, David Harris, Spencer Elton.

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In November 1967 EH Elwes of the Chedworth Aerodrome Company (as the 'Trust' had been rebranded) confirmed that the course would be available for the 1968 season, and that they were "*hoping to provide more amenities and improvements as money becomes available*".

It appears that sprints continued to be run at Chedworth for the next few years. Dates have been discovered for the following proposed sprints:

16th March 1968, MG CC (Midlands)

21st April 1968, BARC

28th April 1968, TVR CC

19th May 1968, BARC

23rd June 1968, MG CC

7th April 1969, Hagley & DLCC

22nd June 1969, MG CC (SW)

15th March 1970, MG CC (Mid)

23rd June 1971, MG CC

however, no further information of these, or any other events, has yet been found.

By 1975 Chedworth was no longer listed by the RAC as a Sprint venue.

Pete Stowe 2021

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Chedworth Aerodrome Location:
Coordinates: 51°48'58"N 001°56'24"W

Sources:

Gloucestershire Echo, Motoring News, Autosport, BARC News, Birmingham Post, Bristol Pegasus MC Archives.

Westcountry Motorsport History

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

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