

**The Bristol and Gloucestershire Automobile Club
&
The Somerset Automobile Club
HILLCLIMB at UPPER WESTON, BATH
29th June 1912**

Today Weston is an urban suburb on the western outskirts of Bath. In the early 1910s it was still a rural village of 1500 inhabitants, lying beneath the southern end of the Cotswold hills two miles outside the city. Lansdown Lane, the road north from Upper Weston climbing steeply up onto Lansdown Hill, provided a stiff test for the motor-cycles and cars of the day, and began to be used quite often for trials and hillclimbs. On 29th April 1911 the Bristol Bicycle & Motor Club¹ held an Open speed hillclimb, for motor-cycles only, using a mile and a third stretch of the road, with Arthur Moorhouse setting the fastest time of the day on a racing Indian. This was the first motorcycle event of its kind in the West of England, and attracted around 2000 spectators.

Both the Somerset Automobile Club and the Bristol & Gloucestershire Automobile Club had been successfully running speed hillclimbs for several years, the former at various locations in Somerset, and the latter at Birdlip, near Cheltenham. In 1911 they had planned to run a joint event in Longleat Park, but this had had to be cancelled. The following year they did however combine to organise a hillclimb, on Saturday 29th June, and the location chosen was Upper Weston, near Bath, conveniently situated for both clubs.

The course ran up the narrow Lansdown Lane² from Upper Weston, past Heather Farm to meet the main road at the top of the hill just south of Bath racecourse. The start was by a cottage about 50 yards from the Globe Inn³ on Upper Weston High Street, beginning with a fairly gentle gradient. As the road climbed it gradually became steeper, and towards the finish there was a tricky S-bend where the gradient was at its worst – around 1 in 5. The finish line was at a tree halfway between the top of the hill and the main road, and the distance to be covered was just over a mile (1777 or 1816 yards, depending on source).

To preclude any pre-event practicing the precise location of the course wasn't disclosed until the day of the event. Nor was there any practice on the day, and each car would only have one timed run, unless obstructed. No cars were allowed to return down the hill, except during the lunch interval, so there was a lengthy return route via Summerhill, and competitors were advised that arrangements had been made with the police to report any case of "*furiously driving*". Such an offence, if proved, would result in disqualification from any award.

Entries were divided into four classes according to the number of cylinders in the engine – one, two, four or six – and of the 33 entries received by far the most, 25, were of four-cylinder cars. Entries of any cars that had taken part in an open competition for racing cars 1909-1912 were banned. Carrying of passengers was optional, however cars had to be run as weighed-in, i.e. with or without passengers. Awards were to be given on both time and on a formula taking into account the cars' weight and horsepower as well as time.

At that time the British motor trade was highly interested in motorsport, and many manufacturers ran works cars in speed events, with marques such as Sunbeam, Crossley, Talbot and Vauxhall being among the most successful. Top sprint drivers in 1912 were Sunbeam's Edward Genna and Crossley designer Hubert Woods and both were entered at Upper Weston. Sunbeam arrived at Bath fresh from victory with their racing machines in the voiturette Coupe de l'Auto at the Grand Prix in Dieppe earlier in the week, bringing a four-cylinder 12-16hp model for works driver Genna. Backing up the factory car was another 3-litre 12-16 and a six-cylinder 6.1-litre 25-30hp model from the West of England Sunbeam agent, Bridges of Cirencester. Hubert Woods had a pair of cars, a 2.6-litre 15hp model and what was reckoned to be *the* fastest car around at the time, his renowned 4½-litre 20hp Crossley.

¹ Originally formed in 1876 as the Bristol Bicycle Club, the name later changed to the Bristol Bicycle and Tricycle Club, and then, with the formation of a motor section in 1904, the Bristol Bicycle and Motor Club.

² Weston Hill, and Weston Lane (the road leading from Bath to Weston village) were also used to describe the venue - to prevent any unofficial practicing the exact location of the course was not disclosed prior to the event.

³ 82 High Street, Weston

Straker-Squire, whose previous competition activities had been centred on racing and record breaking at Brooklands, were newcomers to speed events in 1912 and had three entries. Regular driver of the Bristol-built Straker-Squire 15, and head of the experimental department, Dick Witchell, was joined at Upper Weston by the car's designer Roy Fedden, and Bristol Straker director Philip Williams.

The hillclimb generated a great deal of local interest: *"The competitions proved a source of attraction for the neighbourhood, and interested spectators gathered at various points on the course, especially at the start and finishing point"* explained the Somerset Guardian's reporter, continuing: *"Many were the expressions of admiration at the spick and span appearance of the cars and the power they exhibited in performing the test, and the meeting proved something of a red letter day for the village, more particularly among the juvenile element, who were, needless to say, much in evidence."*

The event got underway promptly at 11.30 am, with cars running singly on the hill – a telephone link from finish to start line being used to advise the starter when the course was clear. Those who ran during the first hour, and after three o'clock in the afternoon, had the best of the weather. A deluge of rain at 12.30 made the macadamised surface extremely greasy, handicapping the middle order runners, especially those without studded tyres. The S-bends near the top were in any case a severe test as, with no opportunity to practice, they were approached unseen, competitors commenting afterwards that they *"were very deceptive, as they concealed the real steepness of the road near the end"*. When asked what he thought of them one driver simply replied *"Horrible"*. While the course and the weather caused problems for some, mechanical difficulties such as *"slipping of gears"* or *"choking of jets"* were reported by others.

Following on from their recent successes in France it was another prize-winning day for the Louis Coatalen designed Sunbeams. Fastest time of the day was recorded by Wilfred Bridges' six-cylinder 25-30hp model, which was also best overall on formula. Next quickest in the six-cylinder class was Bristol Darracq agent George Gwyer, while WH Butler (45hp Napier) was second in class on formula.

Sunbeams also came out on top on formula in the popular four-cylinder class, Edward Genna just edging Bridges' car for the gold medal by a tiny 0.0019 point margin. They were however both beaten on time by Hubert Woods' rapid 20hp Crossley who was quicker up the hill. Of the Straker-Squire entries, Roy Fedden was faster than Dick Witchell, but it was Witchell who had a better score on formula, and took fourth place behind the two Sunbeams and the Crossley. Behind the works cars best of the locally entered machines on formula were the Arrol-Johnston of Bristol agent Walter Welch and Ralph Price's Vauxhall, while S Williams' 20hp Ford and George Young (Austro Daimler) were among the top ten quickest cars.

With only three one- and two-cylinder cars entered classes A and B were combined, and honours were evenly shared between the two organising clubs, the Sizaire of Somerset's Reginald Graves-Knyfton being quickest up the hill, but Bristol & Gloucestershire club secretary Edward Atchley's Rover won the formula award. (See Appendix for entries and results.)

While the event had been a success, and the general opinion of competitors was that it was a *'regular teaser of a hill'*, it wasn't immediately repeated and the next speed event on Lansdown Lane was organised by the Bristol Bicycle & Motor Club on 27th June 1914. This was an open event, mainly for motor-cycles, using a $\frac{7}{8}$ mile course. Two classes for cycle cars under 1100cc were also included, and had just four entries - three Morgans and Willie Douglas in the Douglas light car. GH Fry's Morgan was the quickest, recording 1min 28 $\frac{3}{5}$ sec, and F Stone won the non-expert class on time in his three-wheeler, however Douglas' light car won both classes on formula. Bristol Morgan agent Freddy Cox had engine problems and failed to take the start. The fastest solo motor-cycle was AB Wade from Cardiff on a 6hp Zenith with a 55 $\frac{2}{5}$ sec. run.

Although the Somerset and Bristol & Gloucestershire clubs hadn't run a joint event in 1913, they did plan to return to Upper Weston the following year, with a hillclimb arranged for Saturday 14th July. This was however called off at the beginning of the month owing to a lack of entries. Although initially just postponed until 5th September, the intervention of the Great War resulted in the event never taking place. After the war Lansdown Lane was used once more for a speed hillclimb, when the newly formed Bath & West of England Motor Club ran a motorcycle only event on 11th September 1919. However, so far as is currently known, there have been no further hillclimbs involving cars at Upper Weston.

JUNE 25th and 26th, 1912.

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FOR THE
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SUNBEAM MOTOR CARS
(ALL BRITISH BUILT).

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3rd. 12 16 h.p. SUNBEAM Car, driven by Medinger.

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Also THREE SILVER CUPS at the Midland Hill Climb at Shobley Wood, by 2000 Standard Sunbeam.

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STANDARD 12 16 H.P. SUNBEAM CARS First and Second.
Awarded Gold and Silver Medals, Special R.A.C. Medal, Special Silver Prize.

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DEMONSTRATION CARS will be used to young men. Regulations for applications, prices of all cars and fittings can be obtained on application to the nearest agent. Write for Illustrated Catalogue.
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APPENDIX - RESULTS**29 June 1912 Bristol & Gloucestershire AC (Southern Division) & Somerset AC hillclimb**

Lansdown Lane, Upper Weston, Bath.

Course length: 1777 yards or 1816 yards, depending on source.

Car eligibility: No car which had taken part in an open competition for racing cars in the years 1909-1912 was eligible to compete.

Results – positions on time and formula obtained from The Autocar and the Somerset Guardian; formula scores obtained from the Somerset Guardian.

Class A (Single-cylinder cars) & Class B (Two-cylinder cars) combined					
Formula		Entrant	Car	Pos. time	
Pos.	points				
1	.8482	EH Atchley	Rover 12	2	
2	.4852	HB Porteous	Rover 12	3	
3	.368	RB Graves-Knyfton	Sizaire 12	1	
Class C (4-cylinder cars)					
Formula		Entrant	Car	Pos. time	
Pos.	points				
1	1.8361	E Genna	Sunbeam 12-16	3	Gold medal
2	1.8342	WG Bridges	Sunbeam 12-16	2	Silver medal
3	1.7790	GH Woods	Crossley 15	6	
4	1.643	RS Witchell	Straker-Squire 15	5	
5	1.3828	GH Woods	Crossley 20	1	Special prize for class ftd
6	1.3515	WH Welch	Arrol-Johnston	8/18	Somerset Guardian states 8 th , Autocar 18 th
7	1.2910	AHR Fedden	Straker-Squire 15	4	
8	1.1823	LR Price	Vauxhall 20	9	
9	1.1752	PFC Williams	Straker-Squire 15	10	
10	1.606	Capt. Vaughan-Jenkins	Arrol-Johnston 15.9	19	
11	1.160	W Paddon	Benz 12-20	20=	
12	1.1413	E Sidney Pink	Talbot 12	14	
13	1.1231	EC Skurray	Arrol-Johnston	20=	
14	1.0873	RB Graves-Knyfton	Singer 15	16	
15	1.0637	W Paddon	Benz 20-30	11	
16	1.0074	EG Cleverley	Adams 16	15	
17	0.953	EA Tasker	Argyll 12	21	
18	0.893	GAW Young	Austro-Daimler 35	8	
19	0.7889	A Hartnell	Overland 20-25	13	
20	0.7471	AE Johnson	Bedford 15-18	12	
21	0.7248	FW Bartelt	Hupmobile 15	18	
22	0.7233	S Williams	Ford 20	7	
23		GD Farwell	Benz 12-20	22	No formula score listed.
24	1.2434*	A Lovell	Ford 20	17	*Formula score as listed in the Somerset Guardian.
Class D (6-cylinder cars)					
Formula		Entrant	Car	Pos. time	
Pos.	points				
1	0.1148**	WG Bridges	Sunbeam 25-30	1	FTD. **Formula score as listed in the Somerset Guardian – perhaps a misprint?
2	0.8856	WH Butler	Napier 45	3	
3	0.7985	W Bentley	Standard 20	4	
4	0.6166***	GW Gwyer	Darracq 40-50	2	***Formula score as listed in the Somerset Guardian – perhaps a misprint?
5	0.7651	EH Atchley	Daimler 57	5	
Overall 1st on Formula and FTD: WG Bridges (Sunbeam 25-30) – gold medal and silver cup					

Notes:

Names listed in results are of the cars' entrants; drivers may have been different.

Formula – total weight of the car and load in lbs., divided by the product of HP and time in seconds.
 Rated HP = $D^2 \div \sqrt[3]{S \times 5}$ (D and S = cylinder diameter & stroke)

Awards:

A gold medal and a silver medal were awarded in each class for first and second on formula.

A special Royal Automobile Club medal was awarded to the amateur gaining the highest marks on the formula on any one car in the competition provided that this car was driven by, and was the exclusive property of the entrant, who had also to be a member of the Bristol & Gloucestershire AC or the Somerset AC.

A prize to the competitor in each class who made the ascent in the fastest actual time and a silver prize to the competitor who made the actual fastest time in the whole competition by the formula.

Officials.

Secretaries: JW Aspinall, EH Atchley and TE Rickerby. Clerks of the course: Capt. Vaughan Jenkins, RB Graves-Knyfton, TK Rickerby, Dr. Macartney, G Easonsmith, AE Johnson, MB Fowler, CH Dawe and W Taylor. Timekeepers: Z Wheatley and A Deacon. Starter: the official telephone operator, WC Owen, manager of the post Office telephone service. Judge: T Butler. Marshals: Messrs Dawe, Collins, P Young, AE Johnson, G Easonsmith, JW Bolton, and the club committees. Clerk of the scales: SW Hibbard.

Sources

Autocar, Motor Cycle, Somerset Guardian, Bath Chronicle, Western Daily Press, Clifton Society, Wiltshire & Gloucestershire Standard.

Hill Location

Lansdown Lane hill:	Coordinates: 51.399 N 2.396 W
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*Pete Stowe
March 2021*

Westcountry Motorsport History

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

petestowe @ talktalk.net