

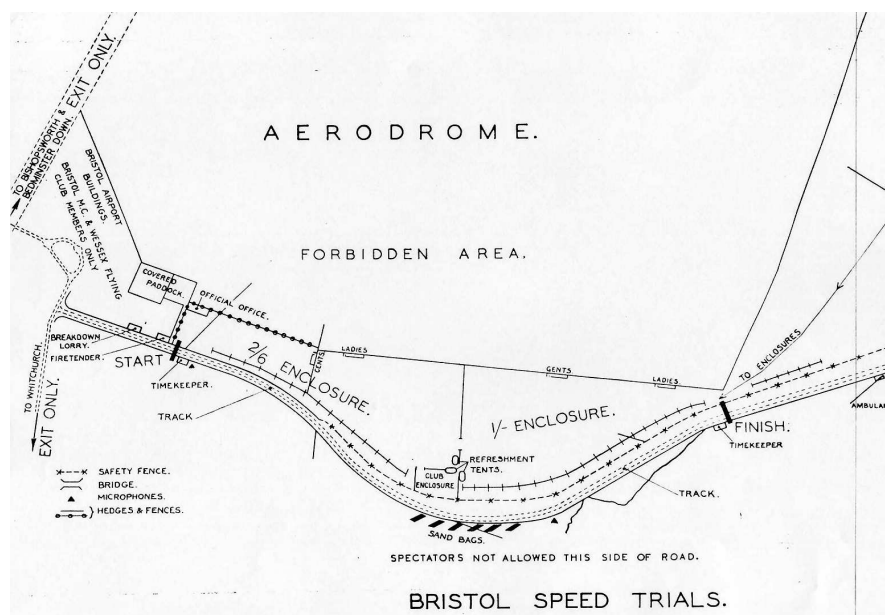
Bristol Motor Cycle & Light Car Club

BRISTOL SPEED TRIALSWhitchurch, Bristol, 22nd May 1937

Between 1930 and 1957 the area of South Bristol today known as Hengrove Park was the site of Bristol's city airport - Whitchurch. A few signs still remain - parts of the wartime runway, Airport Road and, at its junction with the A37, the Happy Landings pub, and in the south-eastern corner what used to be the original service hangar now forms part of the Whitchurch Sports Centre complex. However, there is nothing to show that nearly seventy years ago this was the venue for a motor sporting speed event. Or that if you turn off Whitchurch Lane and travel northwards along Bamfield towards Airport Road, you will be following the course of the Bristol Speed Trials of Saturday 22nd May 1937.

Before the last World War circuit racing in England was much less accessible than today, for both drivers and spectators, being limited to just three venues. Hillclimbs and speed trials (or sprints as we generally know them today) were also popular forms of motor sport, often attracting large crowds of around 10 to 20,000 spectators, but even those such events, for cars, were rare in the West Country. However, in the mid-1930s a rejuvenated Bristol Motor Cycle & Light Car Club became much more car oriented and brought about a great increase in motorsport activity in the Bristol area. In 1935 they introduced a popular hillclimb at Backwell on the Weston-super-Mare road. Club membership increased from 42 in 1935 to around 200 just two years later and, noting the popularity of speed trials at venues such as Brighton and Lewes in Sussex and at Poole in Dorset, it appeared that a similar event in Bristol could be a success. Since 1925 use of public roads for motor sport had been banned in mainland UK, so any speed event would need to use a private road or drive. Early in 1937 the Club convinced Bristol Corporation that it was unsatisfactory for the city to be without a major motor sporting event, and reached agreement to stage some Speed Trials at the City airport at Whitchurch.

The Whitchurch site had originally been acquired by the Bristol and Wessex Aeroplane Club for a new aerodrome for private flying. However, with the government of the day encouraging building of municipal airports, Bristol Corporation took over the site, in 1930 building aprons, hangar, clubhouse and showroom to the south-east of the grass landing strip. Initially access to the airport was only via the narrow lane from Whitchurch to Bishopsworth, but before long a new public road (Airport Road) was constructed from Happy Landings on the A37, with a narrower private road along the eastern boundary of the airport leading south to the terminal buildings. And it was along a 1,500 yard stretch of this private road that the speed trials were run.



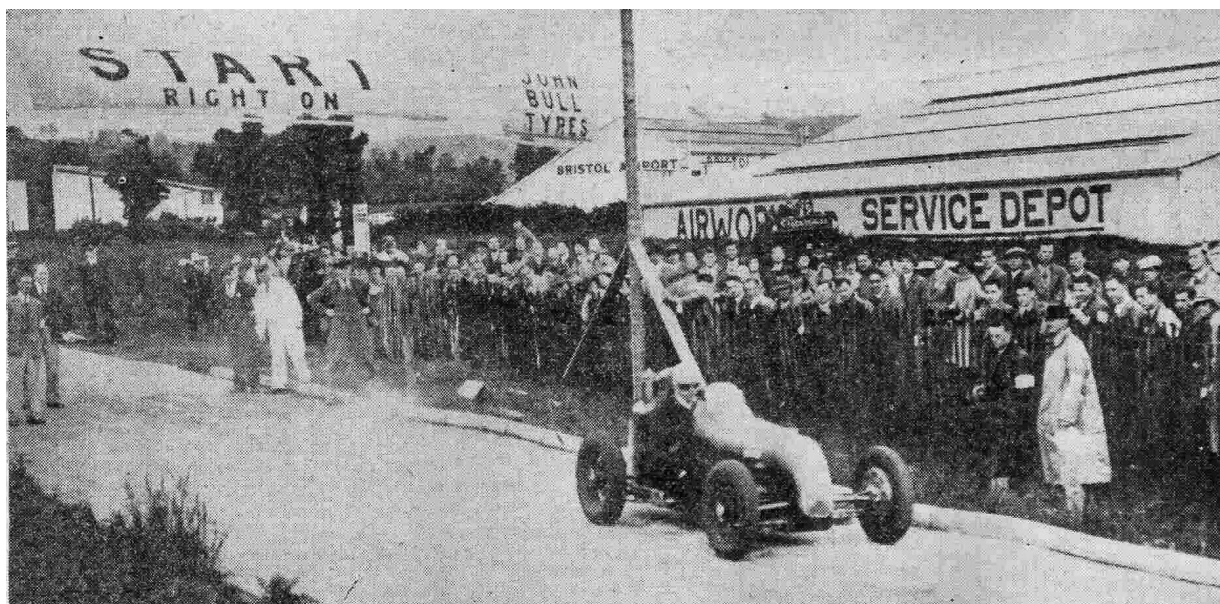
Starting near to the service hangar, the timed portion was just 750 yards long, leaving plenty of room for pulling up, and began with a slight right-hand bend and then curved slightly left. The road, just over 17 feet wide, had a concrete surface and very slight camber, and, while not including any severe bends, was lined with four to six inch high kerbs, so at speed precision driving was still required.

The event comprised classes for both sports and racing cars, and in addition to members of the local organising club was also open to members of the Sutton Coldfield and North Birmingham Automobile Club (SUNBAC), MG Car Club, Cambridge University Automobile Club, Junior Car Club, and the Bugatti Owners Club. Competitors were allowed to enter the same car in more than one class. Entry fees, including third party insurance, were 15

Shillings (75p) for the first class entered and 10 shillings (50p) per class for subsequent entries, these fees being reduced for Bristol club members. Somewhat bizarrely any driver would only get two runs regardless of number of classes entered, but could still win multiple awards, as will be seen from the final results.

Well known entrants in the racing-car classes were Austin works driver Bert Hadley with one of the little twin-ohc supercharged Austin single-seaters and Robert Waddy in his rapid twin-engined four-wheel-drive special, Fuzzi. George Hartwell and Denis Evans had stripped racing MGs; Jack Lemon Burton and Home Kidston (younger brother of "Bentley Boy" Glen Kidston) brought Bugattis, and David Fry was in the yet-to-be-famous rear-engined Freikaiserwagen. The sports-car classes featured numerous MGs, with well-known drivers such as Dennis Poore, Austen May, RA Macdermid, and the only lady driver taking part, Yvonne Morel. Assorted Alfa Romeos, Bugattis, Frazer-Nashs, Bentleys, and various specials made up the field. Unlike most such events where the paddock area was in the open air, competitors could work on their cars in the relative luxury of the Airwork service hangar, alongside a few light aircraft, and also had the use of the airport cafe and clubhouse.

In all, the program listed a total of 69 entries from 41 cars (31 sports and 10 racing). Although it's not clear how many non-starters there may have been, at least 33 cars definitely took part, so there was plenty for the paying spectator to see. Admission was 1 shilling or 2/6d for the general public, although club members received two free tickets to the special members enclosure. 10,000 paying spectators were deemed desirable by the organisers, chief among whom was Eric Densham who had the dual roles of Secretary of the Meeting and Clerk of the Course.



Event winner Bert Hadley leaves the start line in his Austin racer

The action was due to start at 3pm, beginning with the timed runs for sports cars. These had to have complete two (or more) seater bodywork and wings, and be equipped with head- and sidelamps, although windscreen, hoods and spare wheels could be removed. First to line up under the "John Bull Tyres" START banner was Hadley in a sports Austin 7, but it was Poore's little 750cc MG that was by far the quickest, his best time of 26.4 seconds, an average speed of 58 mph, allowing him to win all three of the sports car classes (and £15 prize money). The "Cream Cracker" MGs of Austen May and John Haesendonck were second and third in the 1100cc class, and, despite a spot of gear change trouble, MacDermid's 1292cc MG took second place in the 2-litre class ahead of Haesendonck's 939cc supercharged car and Leon's Frazer-Nash BMW. Even DM Campbell's 2.3 litre Alfa Romeo wasn't quick enough (by just 0.3 sec) to better Poore's time in the over 2-litre class, where the bigger and much heavier Bentley and Railton sports/touring models of the local drivers were even further adrift. While some of the drivers who competed more frequently were attired in racing overalls and linen helmets, and a few even with hard-hats, others were more casually dressed in sports jackets and went bare-headed, although Cyril Butler departed the start line in a natty trilby, ducking low behind his Triumph's windscreen to keep it out of the airstream.

Announcers Bill Cooper and Geoffrey Ehlers kept the spectators informed of the proceedings, broadcasting times after each run. Timing was electrical - cars would get away at the signal of starters

C Glover and MW Vowles and activate the timing equipment by breaking a tape one yard from the start line. Breaking a second tape at the finish line stopped the clock, and the time to one-tenth of a second was recorded by Chief Timekeeper Eddie Gill. Although it was late May, the weather was not kind to the event, with a slight drizzle setting in as the afternoon wore on. A bigger disruption came however when *"danger flags heralded the arrival of the Airport bus, which would not allow even speed trials to interfere with its schedule"* according to a local reporter.

It was Bert Hadley again who led away the four racing-car classes, now in his dark green Austin racer, looking just like a miniature Grand Prix car, and his first run time of 24.6 sec (62.4 mph) was the time to beat. As well as the racing Bugattis and MGs these classes included a number of rapid specials. The racing cars could have any type of engine or body and some specials had, in the interest of lightness, little or no bodywork at all. Rossiter's 2-litre AC device was devoid of any cockpit sides or rear body, while Tony Barnwell's ungainly looking Jabberwock II featured grey papier-mache bodywork on a wooden chassis. David Fry made his debut in the rear-engined Freikaiserwagen, rebuilt over the winter after its debut in the hands of Hugh Dunsterville at Backwell the previous year. Fry set a time of 25 sec, good enough for 2nd fastest, but he only completed one run, the Freikaiserwagen's GN transmission getting into two gears at once, to the detriment of the back axle - a well-known GN trick - and he had to be towed back from the holding paddock at the finish behind Dunsterville's sports MG.

A much greater mishap was to befall Robert Waddy in his fast and well known Fuzzi special on his first timed run. Waddy's ingenious four-wheel-drive car had two 500cc engines and *"the little car, wheels spinning very slightly, went off the mark like a bullet"*, although according to one report this was actually *"before he got the official signal from the starter"*.

Then, as the Western Daily Press reporter graphically related: *"Waddy was travelling at more than 60 mph and had just rounded the second bend, a left hand one, when he seemed completely to lose control. The car hit the concrete edge, somersaulted three times, hurling its driver high into the air, then ploughed deep into the muddy grass verge and came to rest, right way up, within three or four yards of the spectators. Waddy was unconscious when Dr. Fitzgibbon, with officials and City and Marine ambulance men reached him, and he was taken to the General Hospital in a serious condition with a fractured shoulder, concussion, and facial and multiple injuries. The car was completely smashed, and splintered fence-posts, chunks of earth and a 'Danger' notice were tossed into the air by the terrific impact."*

Initially it had been feared that Waddy had sustained a fractured skull; by Monday his condition in hospital was described as being *"more comfortable"*. He did in due course make a full recovery and his car was not so badly damaged that it couldn't be rebuilt, but it was fortunate that it came to rest just short of the spectators, 'protected' as they were by just a flimsy paling fence.

With his nearest competitor thus sidelined, Hadley's time of 24.6 sec was easily quick enough for fastest time of the day; with the drizzle later turning to heavy rain, many of the second runs were much slower. So Hadley won all four racing-car classes, pocketing 45 pounds in prize money (for just a 4 pounds 5 shillings outlay in entry fees). Denis Evans' MG was 2nd to Hadley in the 850cc class, while Fry's single run was good enough for 2nd place in the three other classes, although tied with Hartwell in his MG. Of the Bugattis, Lemon Burton beat Kidston but they were separated by the AC Special of Rossiter.

While the event was agreed to have been a great success in the sporting sense, commercially it was a different matter. With organisation costs being far greater than expected and, not helped by the dismal weather on the day, only around 3,700 spectators appearing rather than the hoped for 10,000, there was a significant shortfall in the takings. For the organising Bristol MC&LCC it was financially a complete failure, and the event was not to be repeated.

Results and Awards**Best time of Day (£25) - HL Hadley (Austin 744s)**

Best unsupercharged car over 1500cc - J Lemon Burton (Bugatti)

Best unsupercharged car under 1500cc - D Fry (Freikaiserwagen)*

Best time of the day by a BMC& LCC member (Imperial Motors Cup) - D Fry (Freikaiserwagen)*

(* award winners deduced from available results)

Sports car classes (1st - £5 cash; 2nd - Club tankard)Upto 1100cc – 1st RD Poore (746 MG) 26.4 sec, 58.2 mph;
2nd CAN May (939 MG) 27.6 sec, 55.7 mphUpto 2000cc – 1st RD Poore (746 MG) 26.4 sec, 58.2 mph;
2nd RA Macdermid (1292 MG) 27.0sec, 56.9 mphUpto 5000cc – 1st RD Poore (746 MG) 26.4 sec, 58.2 mph;
2nd DM Campbell (2300 Alfa Romeo) 26.7 sec, 57.6 mph**Racing car classes (1st - £5 cash; 2nd - Club tankard)**Upto 850cc – 1st HL Hadley (744s Austin) 24.6 sec, 62.4 mph;
2nd DG Evans (746 MG) 25.9 sec, 59.3 mphUpto 1100cc – 1st HL Hadley (744s Austin) 24.6 sec, 62.4 mph;
2nd D Fry (1097 Freikaiserwagen) 25.0 sec, 61.4 mphUpto 1500cc – 1st HL Hadley (744s Austin) 24.6 sec, 62.4 mph;
=2nd D Fry (1097 Freikaiserwagen) & G Hartwell (1287 MG) 25.0 sec, 61.4 mphUpto 5000cc – 1st HL Hadley (744s Austin) 24.6 sec, 62.4 mph;
=2nd D Fry (1097 Freikaiserwagen) & G Hartwell (1287 MG) 25.0 sec, 61.4 mph**Entry List and Times**

No.	Driver	Club	Car	Reg. No.	cc	1 st Run	2 nd Run	Best	Speed	Class
Class A - Sports Cars upto 1100cc										
4	RD Poore	CUAC	MG J4	JB 3185	746	26.4		26.4	58	1
10	CAN May	Bristol	MG PB	JB 7521	939s	27.5	27.8	27.5	55.9	2
7	EJ Haesendonck	MG CC	MG PB	JB 7524	939s	28.3	27.8	27.8		3
6	Miss Y Morel	JCC	MGG	MG 5000	847s	28.1	29.3	28.1		4
1	HL Hadley	SUNBAC	Austin	BOA 60	744	29.1	28.3	28.3		5
8	RM Andrews	MG CC	MG PA	JB 6156	939s	29	28.67	28.67		6
5	HG Dunsterville	Bristol	MG	ADD 284	847s	33	31.6	31.6		7
3	WWE Walker	Bristol	Austin		747	32	32.3	32		8
2	PT Gifford Nash	JCC	MG J4	AGP 291	746s					
Class B - Sports Cars upto 2000cc										
4	RD Poore	CUAC	MG J4	JB 3185	746	26.4		26.4	58	1
10	RA Macdermid	Bristol	MG TA	ABL 961	1292s	28.8	27	27	56.9	2
7	EJ Haesendonck	MG CC	MG PB	JB 7524	939s	28.3	27.8	27.8		3
21	DN Leon	MG CC	Frazer-Nash BMW		1911	29	28.2	28.2		4
18	E Lloyd-Jones	SUNBAC	Lea Francis		1497	28.8	28.3	28.3		5
20	G Fitt	JCC	Frazer-Nash BMW		1911	28.9	28.8	28.8		6
11	JES Jones	Bristol	MG TA	ABL 964	1292	34.8	29.3	29.3		7
15	CD Weatherhead	JCC	Frazer-Nash		1495	30.9	30.5	30.5		8=
17	A Needell	JCC	Alvis or Alfa Romeo		1496 1750s	30.5	33.9	30.5		8=
12	SO Roch	Bristol	MG N-type	APX 679	1287	30.7	31.1	30.7		10
24	TCG Butler	Bristol	Triumph	AWK 845	1991	31.2	31	31		11

No.	Driver	Club	Car	Reg. No.	cc	1 st Run	2 nd Run	Best	Speed	Class
Class B - Sports Cars upto 2000cc (contd.)										
25	JS Taylor	Bristol	Ballot	VV 2066 (?)	2000	36.4	37	36.4		12
2	PT Gifford Nash	JCC	MG J4	AGP 291	746s					
14	Manning Whiley		Ford		1172s					
16	Buster Baring	JCC	Bugatti		1495					
19	TH Dowler	SUNBAC	Triumph		1767					
22	NV Terry	SUNBAC	Frazer-Nash BMW		1911					
23	JE Breyer	Bristol	OM		1991					
Class C - Sports Cars upto 5000cc										
4	RD Poore	CUAC	MG J4	JB 3185	746	26.4		26.4	58	1
28	DM Campbell	JCC	Alfa Romeo		2300	27.2	26.7	26.7	57.5	2
10	RA Macdermid	Bristol	MG TA	ABL 961	1292s	28.8	27	27		3
26	RFT Marston	JCC	Bugatti	UJ 9511	2261	27.1	29.1	27.1		4
7	EJ Haesendonck	MG CC	MG PB	JB 7524	939s	28.3	27.8	27.8		5
29	WG Frogley	Bristol	Railton	AL ????	4010	28.1	29	28.1		6
32	J Taylor	Bristol	Railton		4168	29.4	28.5	28.5		7
27	Lt. Home Kidston, RN	BOC	Alfa Romeo		2405	28.7	30.3	28.7		8
20	G Fitt	JCC	Frazer-Nash BMW		1911	28.9	28.8	28.8		9
30	EW Butler	Bristol	Bentley	CXM 103	4250	29.2	30.3	29.2		10
2	PT Gifford Nash	JCC	MG J4	AGP 291	746s					
19	TH Dowler	SUNBAC	Triumph		1767					
31	JG Fry	Bristol	Bentley		4400					
Class D - Racing Cars upto 850cc										
33	HL Hadley	SUNBAC	Austin		744s	24.6	27.6	24.6	62.4	1
34	DG Evans	MG CC	MG *		746s	25.9	27.9	25.9	59.5	2
4	RD Poore	CUAC	MG J4	JB 3185	746	26.4		26.4		3
5	HG Dunsterville	Bristol	MG	ADD 284	847s	33	31.6	31.6		4
2	PT Gifford Nash	JCC	MG J4	AGP 291	746s					
Class E - Racing Cars upto 1100cc										
33	HL Hadley	SUNBAC	Austin		744s	24.6	27.6	24.6	62.4	1
37	JG Fry (Driver: D Fry)	Bristol	Freikaiserwagen		1097	25	x	25	61.4	2
34	DG Evans	MG CC	MG *		746s	25.9	27.9	25.9		3
35	RA Barnwell	Bristol	Jabberwock II		933	37.3		37.3		4
38	RA Waddy	Bristol	Fuzzi		1000	no time				
36	RJW Appleton	BOC	Appleton Special		1089					
Class F - Racing Cars upto 1500cc										
33	HL Hadley	SUNBAC	Austin		744s	24.6	27.6	24.6	62.4	1
37	JG Fry (Driver: D Fry)	Bristol	Freikaiserwagen		1097	25	x	25	61.4	2=
39	G Hartwell	Bristol	MG **		1287s	25		25	61.4	2=
34	DG Evans	MG CC	MG *		746s	25.9	27.9	25.9		4
18	E Lloyd-Jones	SUNBAC	Lea Francis		1497	28.8	28.3	28.3		5
38	RA Waddy	Bristol	Fuzzi		1000	no time				
36	RJW Appleton	BOC	Appleton Special		1089					
Class G - Racing Cars upto 5000cc										
33	HL Hadley	SUNBAC	Austin		744s	24.6	27.6	24.6	62.4	1
37	JG Fry (Driver: D Fry)	Bristol	Freikaiserwagen		1097	25	x	25	61.4	2=
39	G Hartwell	Bristol	MG **		1287s	25		25	61.4	2=
34	DG Evans	MG CC	MG *		746s	25.9	27.9	25.9		4
42	J Lemon Burton	BOC	Bugatti		2300	26	31	26		5
40	FC Rossiter	SUNBAC	AC Special		1998	26.4	30	26.4		6

No.	Driver	Club	Car	Reg. No.	cc	1 st Run	2 nd Run	Best	Speed	Class
Class G - Racing Cars upto 5000cc (contd.)										
41	Lt. Home Kidston, RN	BOC	Bugatti		2263			26.9		7
32	J Taylor	Bristol	Railton		4168	29.4	28.5	28.5		8
30	EW Butler	Bristol	Bentley	CXM 103	4250	29.2	30.3	29.2		9
38	RA Waddy	Bristol	Fuzzi		1000	no time				
36	RJW Appleton	BOC	Appleton Special		1089					

Notes:

Competitors had only two timed runs each, which counted for every class in which they had entered.

Times in *italics* are from a spectator's program annotations.

Additional MG information supplied by Colin Butchers.

*DG Evans. Reg number PJ140. Although usually entered as a Q Type, this car is in fact a C Type, chassis number C0277. Much lightened and fitted with a blown R Type engine.

**G Hartwell. ex E R Hall Sprint N Type

BOC - Bugatti Owners Club, Bristol - Bristol Motor Cycle & Light Car Club, CUAC - Cambridge University Automobile Club, JCC - Junior Car Club, MG CC - MG Car Club, SUNBAC - Sutton Coldfield & North Birmingham Automobile Club

Event officials.

Secretary of the Meeting and Clerk of the Course: EW Densham. Scrutineer: ARB Round. Chief Timekeeper: E Gill. Chief Track Marshal: J Waller. Assistant Chief Track Marshall: SO Roch. Starters: C Glover, MW Vowles. Paddock Marshals: S Hodges, RF Gould. Finish Parking Marshals: FC England, E Storey. Announcers: WHN Cooper, GC Ehlers. Telephone Operator: SE Webb. Treasurer: JA Hemmens. Publicity Secretary: C Glover. Doctor in Attendance: Dr. PN Eskell, MRCS, LRCP. RAC Steward: RA Prescott. BMC&LCC Stewards: J Grout, KB Steadman.

Sources:

Entry details are from the official event programme, results and other event details obtained from national and local press reports and Bristol MC&LCC Journals.

Information about Whitchurch Airport has been obtained from "Whitchurch Airport - An Account of the Early Days of Flying in the Bristol Area", Gerald S Hart, ISBN 09516074113.

Other references: Light Car, Motor and Motor Sport magazines; Western Daily Press, Bristol Evening World, and Bristol Evening Post newspapers.

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Whitchurch Airport location:	Coordinates: 51.409 N 2.578 W
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Pete Stowe
2020

Westcountry Motorsport History

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

petestowe @ talktalk.net