

After so much hard work to plan, prepare and stage the fiftieth anniversary celebration, we hoped that those involved actually had time to kick back a little and enjoy the event themselves! Ernie Panks takes a few moments to look back on the big birthday party.

The big five-o

SITTING HERE, REFLECTING on the weekend we've just had, I really feel quite strange: the phone has stopped ringing, my email inbox is almost under control and my wife has started smiling again! Having done so much in such a short space of time, it's difficult to know where to begin describing the events. The programme for the weekend started for the organiser's at 7.30am on Thursday morning....

Driving into the empty showground, a huge expanse of grass greeted me with Paul Chisnall and Geof standing, what seemed like, miles away from the entrance gate. My immediate thoughts were along the lines of "we are never going to fill this!" How wrong I was...

As soon as the first of the ten marquees went up and the remaining spaces were marked out, I realised what a monster this event had become. The idea of building a 'village' of marquees and the atmosphere that created was something we all discussed in much detail on many occasions with consideration given to potential weather conditions, number of attendees and the logistics of feeding people. Thankfully, God dealt us a good hand and the weather was not going to be a problem!

Stacks of boxes storing goody bags, commemorative tankards and brochures took pride of place in the booking in area. Linda in her usual organised manner set many people to work on the goody bag production line. Although well organised, we were all in agreement that we didn't want to repeat that job in the near future! After a reasonably calm start to the proceedings, the pace picked up with a stream of deliveries: food and drink arrived by the pallet load, lighting for the marquees seemed never-ending, but eventually seven vanloads of lights, cabling and junction boxes arrived. By the end of Thursday, everything had taken root.

Friday was really busy with another seemingly-endless succession deliveries and a whole host of 'little' jobs to complete, from erecting signs, to setting up PA equipment, marking out the campsite, organising paper

work and setting out a number of smaller gazebos for specific activities. We also had the unenviable task of cleaning all of the 1000 patio chairs and assembling the patio tables. Some fool let Bob Ruddock loose with the line marking paint and the Norfolk Showground still has *Dave loves Linda* indelibly marked in three-foot high letters across the grass!

As 4 o'clock approached, we heard Sevens blatting close by as if to remind us of what lay ahead.

With other small tasks completed, we opened the gates and within no time at all the car park and camping area was buzzing with activity. After hours upon hours of organising, this was going to be the first test of our booking in procedure! Thankfully Linda and Dave were well in control of their crew and everyone was efficiently checked in receiving all the necessary vouchers & goodies for the weekend. With 250 sevens in the car park already and the camping area filling up, smiles were beginning to break onto faces of the organising team. The majority of the trade stands had arrived by then to set up and make sure they were ready for Saturday's shopping stampede.

Friday evening was always planned to be a relatively informal affair with food and drink available throughout the evening. The bar was opened somewhat later than planned due to head gasket failure on the brewery truck (a K-series perhaps?). As the sun went down, the

spectacular lighting within the village generated the atmosphere we had all wished for, aided at long last by many pints of *Chapman's Best*. The big-screen showing of seven related DVDs proved popular with some excellent background music. As Saturday was going to be an early start for the blatters, most people headed for bed at a sensible time in anticipation of some great driving.

A bright Saturday morning saw Steve and Christine Wright cheerfully waving off some 200-plus Sevens on their way to Southwold for breakfast on the pier. I strolled across to take a look at the proceedings. It was a heavenly moment: not only was I greeted by the sight of those hundreds of Sevens in the early morning sunlight, but the sound of nicely-balanced Webers and the smell of burnt Optimax awakened the rest of my senses! Big grins all round then—this could be better than we had ever dared to hope for.

With the blatters on their way, the team went about their duties to coordinate the day's events. The Scouts arrived to direct traffic. There were plenty of volunteers available from the Scout Group when a blat in a Seven was promised to each helper! What a great job the boys did; some future Seveners there I think.

By mid-morning the stream of Sevens entering the showground was an overwhelming sight. None of us realised what close to 600 Sevens looked like when parked together! They may be small, but they didn't half take up some room! The '50th' display of cars was a sight to behold too, filling the display marquee and spilling out along the grassy area outside. To see so many rare cars assembled in one place was incredible; John Watson was grinning like a Cheshire cat!

Then came the phone call we were waiting for: the *Battle of Britain Memorial Flight* rang to confirm they were about to take off. They had a last-minute change of schedule and >

had to scramble early to fit all of the displays into their tight programme for Saturday. Absolutely smack on time, the glorious roar of that Merlin engine was heard approaching, then out of the clouds that familiar Spitfire shape emerged—the clipped-wing Mk9 in its D-Day markings.

What a display! From that initial dive, he banked around the showground giving us the full orchestra from each of those twelve exhausts, climbed and then ‘attacked’ us several more times before climbing into the wonderfully blue sky, tipping his wings left and right to wave goodbye. He had brought the whole showground to a standstill. It was a very emotional experience indeed; I still get goose bumps thinking about it!

Following that, I strolled around the showground to take in as much as possible before I was needed again. The trade stands were busy: merchandise, car parts, engines, tyres and a host of other services were being sold at quite an alarming rate.

Classic Team Lotus displayed three cars from their stunning collection—the Jim Clark 32B Tasman Formula car (Clark winning that series in 1965), a type 49 (the late 60s Grand Prix machine) in Gold Leaf livery and a JPS-liveried Senna Renault-engined Formula 1 car from the mid-80s turbo era.

The children’s tent was proving popular with the younger visitors. This was an area of our event we wanted to get right and our thanks go to the Cambridgeshire bunch; a lot of youngsters had a cracking time building Sevens out of cardboard boxes as well as colouring and painting. The F1 simulator was popular too, with a queue of people wanting to show everyone how it’s done—quite possibly after a warm-up on the Scalextric track to get their eye in.

The village was open for food all day and a constant stream of people kept the caterers on their toes. Following a couple of late changes to the programme of events, we were treated with a talk by John Watson on the history of the Seven; a illustrated and flowing discourse delivered without resort to a script and dotted with anecdotes and gentle humour. John’s audience filled the marquee and a warm round of applause at the end showed how much this was appreciated.

We were honoured to see Hazel Chapman arrive with her son Clive and granddaughter Sophie. Whilst reading some of the perform-

ance figures displayed on the historic cars she commented, rather comically, that you shouldn’t believe every sales brochure you read! It was also a very emotional event for the Chapman family to see a design of Colin’s still going strong with a worldwide following after fifty years.

As day moved to evening, the village was temporarily closed in order to prepare for the evening’s festivities. A number of people headed to their tents or hotel rooms to change into their best frocks for the party.

But soon the village was open again and we were off! A queue rapidly built up at the bar (now there’s a surprise) and the hog roast queue stretched through the village... One visitor from mainland Europe decided that queuing was not for him and expected to be served instantly. Graham Torbitt was quick to point out that queuing was a national sport and whilst visiting our country, he was expected to participate! How can you argue with that!

and I were presented with a really nice commemorative plate each by Roger Savaré from Switzerland. They are now taking pride of place on our respective mantelpieces.

Just to add that extra something, we had a fireworks display; and what a fantastic show it was! Some wonderful displays with an amazing finale and we have since found out we really rattled the windows of the hotel adjacent to the showground and woke most of their guests!

Returning to the village, the caterers had managed to cut the birthday cake and offered it to anyone who wasn’t too stuffed with hog roast and dessert.

The band played on, all the draught *Chapman’s Best* was consumed and we partied ‘til midnight. By the time we had cleared up, the showground had fallen silent and the wee small hours had rolled by. I’ve never been so tired!

Sunday morning and another grand blat send off—this one must have been the record



As the perfect contrast to all the Sevens, Hazel Chapman, her son Clive (of Classic Team Lotus fame) and granddaughter Sophie arrived in the huge Ford Galaxie formerly owned by Lotus founder Colin. Picture by Andrew Walker.

With the party in full swing and several pigs later, the music started with the warm-up group *The Words of Lennon & McCartney*. A small technical hitch resulted in a revised play list; however they cracked out a great collection of Beatles classics which had the desired effect and got everyone in the party mood.

Next up was *Red Hot and Blue*, a seven-piece band who covered a host of cracking party hits. Having played their first set, they took a break and we presented the prizes, followed by speeches from Steve Winterberg, Graham Nearn, Clive Chapman and Ansar Ali. Geof

breaker, with nearly 300 cars setting off to Sandringham for breakfast. Steve Wright was looking tired, but as always still had that huge grin of satisfaction about him! (*Tell us more...*) Having organised and test-driven the blat route many times, he took Christine to see the fruits of his labours and to hopefully catch a glimpse of the ‘secret event’ that he had schemed with one of our visitors. Both Steve and Christine were amazed at the enormity of the blat, being the last car to arrive at Sandringham and seeing the final train of cars parking-up in the vast sea of Sevens. >

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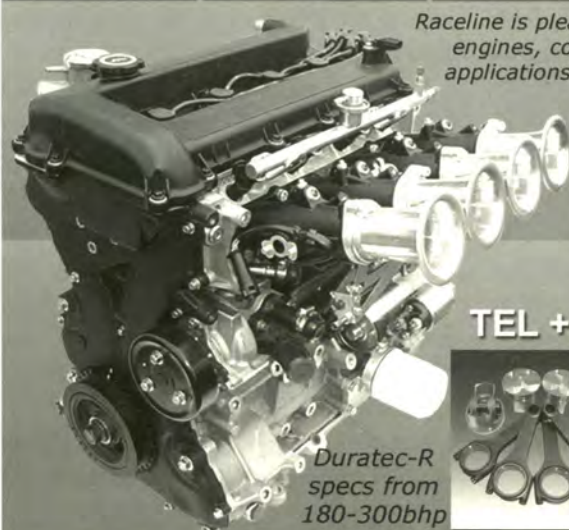
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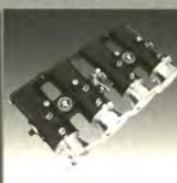


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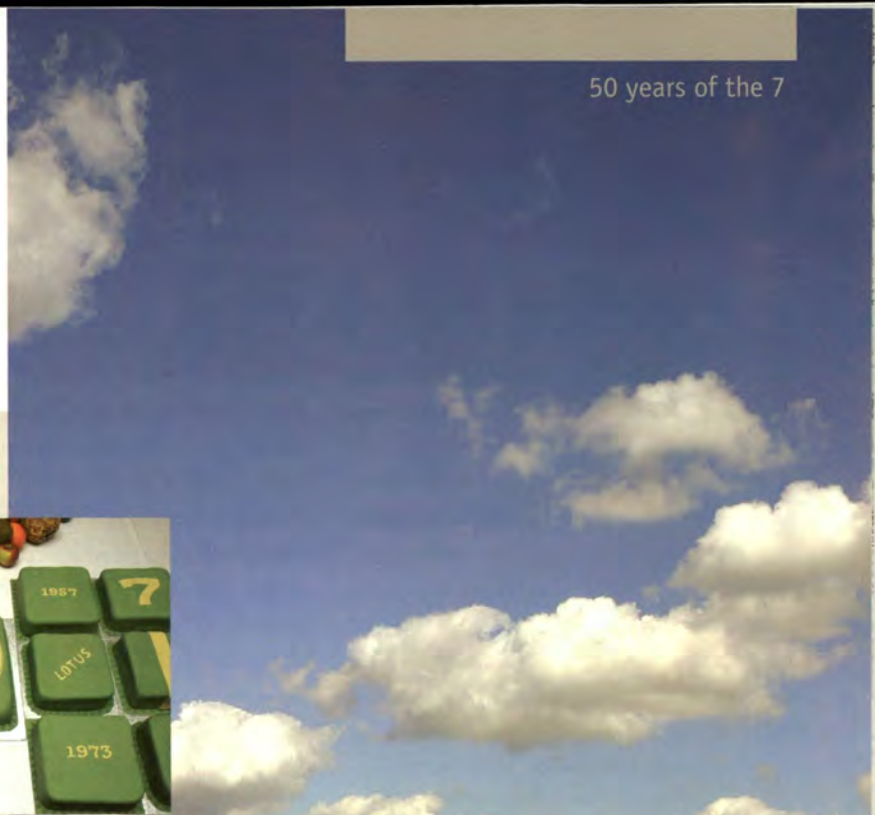
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The big surprise Steve was keeping up his sleeve was revealed after breakfast. Kristoffer Lawson got down on one knee and asked his girlfriend, Mari-Pilvi if she would be his wife. Well, how could she refuse? Congratulations to them both! The 'icing on the cake', so to speak, was a nice engagement gift from the Royal Estate, which I'm sure, will be a great memento for them.

With activities winding down at the showground, the rest of the organising crew headed for Hethel for the final day's fun. Having been let down by the MSA timekeeper, the sprint could not take place, so plan B swung into action and thanks to a huge effort by Geof and some swift action by Lotus, an alternative roster of events took place. Lotus made their track available for 'parade laps' for anyone driving a Seven and were able to show a limited number of people how fast an Elise can be hustled around the track in the hands of their factory drivers. The parade laps were limited to 70mph; but, thankfully, we found the Elise's speedo to be grossly inaccurate...

What a great day's fun for everybody. We had Lotus Sevens Series 1 to 4 mixing it with the latest Caterham CSR and everything in between. Wonderful! Alongside this, Lotus opened up their factory for tours and we managed to squeeze as many people in as possible.

With the day coming to an end, the tired team gradually felt the pressure subside. While sitting outside the Lotus Clubhouse chatting away, we noticed that one person was finding it difficult to leave. It was, rather fittingly, the first person to own a Seven: Edward Lewis.

Both Edward and his wife Marjorie came from Menorca especially for the event. To say they had a great weekend is an understatement. Now 85 years old, Edward spent all day Saturday at the showground, looking at as many cars as was possible, chatting to loads of Seveners and came back for more on Sunday. He jumped at the chance to have some high speed laps in an Elise, returning to the paddock with that all-too-familiar grin and bucket loads of enthusiasm that would put most of us to shame. Not content with just one go, he jumped into a CSR and enjoyed passenger laps in that. After hopping out, he wanted to see under the bonnet and asked plenty of questions.

Such boundless enthusiasm really goes to show that even the very first Sevens are still nuts about the car fifty years on...

Having worked on this project for two whole years, all of the organising team were really pleased to see the fruits of their labours enjoyed by so many people from all over the world.

During the course of preparing for the weekend, we heard so many incredible stories from people of all ages, particularly of how people got involved in Sevens and what they've done in their cars.

We also heard some really nice stories from youngsters, some of which really bring a lump to the throat. It's really great to see such enthusiasm from the very people who will no doubt carry the Seven legend forward for many more years to come.

We'd like to thank the people who helped us make this event possible...

Firstly the organising team: a skilled team of volunteers who sacrificed thousands of hours of their spare time and put their heart and soul into the event.

And thanks to everyone else who helped us; I wouldn't like to start naming people individually as I'd be sure to miss someone out. You all know who you are, so give yourselves a big pat on the back!

Then, thanks to the Club management team for placing their faith in us; the team supported us fully and never brought any undue pressure to bear.

Finally, thank you to everyone who came to the event: to see nearly 600 Sevens and over 1200 people attend the event was very satisfying indeed. Here's to the next fifty years. Cheers!

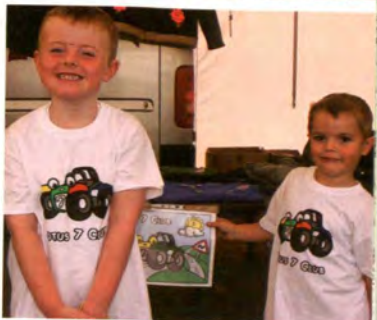
Ernie and Geof

I feel sure that the Members as a whole would join me in thanking all of you for putting on such a great event. You did us proud!

We have more pictures and memories of the fiftieth anniversary to come.

Tony





Lotus Grand Prix cars; Sevens old and new; the first Sevens; a great party atmosphere... and lots of fun the next generation to carry forward the torch for the Seven!
Photographs by 'Dr. John' Laycock.

