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motorsport

Shelsley Walsh was an amazing day for our club and any fan of Fane. It was extremely special to have the remaining families of the man and his wife Evelyn at the same event along with his most poignant cars. Sitting on the start line in his single seater for the first since 1938 is something I'll remember for a very long time. Clearly the plan was to try and beat Fanes 1937 record of 38.77 but when I let the clutch up at 5000 rpm and not a lot happened, I realised we had made a wrong call with fixing the slipping clutch which Andrew had experienced at Monaco. Problem with single seaters is needing a race track to test them and at this hugely busy time of year we were unable to test our repairs. Though I was disappointed, I was delighted that Geraint won the class with the Ex Aitken Single seater, which Fane would have undoubtedly driven at some point so I feel the moment was not missed. In a funny way, though frustrated I was also quite pleased that his record in that car still stood for another year. On the up side, the car felt very good and nicely balanced going up the hill. It has a huge amount of grunt once the revs are up and beating his record is entirely possible, the exciting thing is how quickly can it eventually climb this iconic hill? I'm guessing at a 36 or even a 35.....

So, I would love to know more about Bob Ashley. I've got involved with the remains of the ex-Baines saloon which appeared on the internet. This is the car that Bob Ashley raced in the 50 & 60's in early 'hot-rod' form and then went to the States with Jumbo Chivers. I don't know when the saloon body was lost but like The Owllet probably in the 50's. I had a long chat with Dick Smith at the Silverstone Classic about Bob and he regaled stories of his driving prowess and how he was very much the man to beat. He also told me that he took a serious knock to the head after a road accident in Towcester in a Fiat 500 which ended up spinning down the high street on its roof at extremely



Bob Ashley drifting his very fast Nash in the early 60's, probably at Oulton.

high speed and this meant that he could never race again and as he lived for racing, he lost his spark and died not long after. He sounds like another Nash Legend who's story should be collated and recorded in the gazette and archives. If anyone has any anecdotal stories, photos or history about Bob, I know we would all be really interested. Dick tells me that in the early 60's John Grice took him to the exit of Copse to 'see how a Nash should be driven and when Bob came thru on full chat in a controlled drift with the rear wheels kissing the grass on exit, I then knew how a Nash was supposed to be driven.' As Vaughan Skirrow said in his obituary, everyone hated having Bob behind them in a race as they knew he'd always get through, even if it meant pushing the limits of gentlemanly driving. Dick also remembers 'Sideways Ashley' getting a drive with HWM in an Alta engined single seater which Bob proceeded to drive like a Nash. The Alta took exception to this and Bob ended up going straight on at Copse and the car launched straight through the Castrol hording! This did considerable damage to the car and indeed Bob. Clearly we need to know more about this man....

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