

Tommy Clapham's GTA



The ex Tommy Clapham GTA, now restored to its racing prime and campaigned by Nick Smith, is caught on camera at Donington Park. (Photo: Ken Carrington.)

In 1966 Tommy Clapham, the proprietor of an Alfa Romeo dealership in Keighley, imported a Giulia 1600 GTA which he campaigned in the European Touring Car Championship the following year. He recalls those days with affection.

In the early 1960s I was running a small business preparing and tuning competition cars and doing some competitions with a Lotus Seven.

When Thompson & Taylor ceased to be the Alfa concessionaires and Alfa Romeo established a London office under Dr. Tassan with John Attenborough as the sales manager, I was approached to take on an Alfa dealership.

For the Earls Court Motor Show of 1965, where I had been railroaded into helping on the stand for a few days, Bob Francioni brought over from Milan, by road, a 1600 Autodelta GTA, complete with open exhaust system, which I tried on the Great West Road during the show. As a result of this test I decided that I would acquire one and we would race it from my workshops as a private venture. I think just three cars were imported at that time, mine, one for Rhoddy Harvey- Bailey and one for Richard Shardlow.

Whereas as far as I remember they raced theirs here in England I decided that we would do the European Touring Car Championship races with mine, which were usually 500km events and were for Group 2 cars as opposed to the more highly developed Group 5 for which races in England were being run at that time, Group 2 and long distance races being more suitable for the specification of the GTA. My car finally arrived through Les Bouts of Wolverhampton in July of 1966 and was Chassis No AR.752638 Engine No. AR 00502-18977 and registered LWY39D. The car is still in existence and still racing today.

During a visit to the Alfa factory at Arese I was taken across Milan to the Autodelta workshops to collect some special parts for the GTA, where I also was shown the first of the Autodelta Tipo 33s being built in great secrecy.

The GTA was owned by me and entered and run

by my business, T.R.Clapham Engineers Ltd. It was prepared at my works with my own staff one of whom, Wyn Lear, is still specialising in Alfas to this day from my old workshops in Rectory Row, Keighley. The preparation included the fitting of the sliding trunnion rear axle location in place of the standard "A" bracket, all "Rose" jointed suspension parts, the fitting of special Auto Delta engine and transmission parts plus the GTA side exhaust system. We tested it on the open roads!

We started competition with the car here in England through the remainder of the 1966 season to start with to get a feel for the car, with Geoff Breakell driving. We did long distance races at Snetterton, Silverstone, Brands and the Tourist Trophy at Oulton Park before venturing onto the continent.

Off to Zandvoort

On our first venture to the continent we travelled Harwich to the Hook of Holland en route to Zandvoort. In those days there were no drive-on ferries at Harwich or the Hook. Cars were all loaded by crane on to the ship and travelled in the hold. The day we travelled was very hot and on the way to Harwich I had hung my rally jacket in the cab of the transporter, in the pocket of which was my passport. On disembarking at the Hook, Dutch immigration wanted my passport. Problem. I could not produce it as it was in the transporter in the hold and was not going to be unloaded until all the passengers had disembarked, and I couldn't reach the transporter in the hold anyway. The very polite Dutch Police said, please accompany us. Down the gang plank I was escorted and into a little wooden hut on the quayside where I was kept in splendid isolation until the transporter was unloaded, my passport recovered, and then I was finally released.



GTA and very new looking Ford Transit transporter being lowered into the hold of the Harwich to the Hook of Holland ferry in August 1967. (Photo: Tommy Clapham Collection.)



In the pits at the Nurburgring before the start of the 1967 500km race on September 3rd 1967. No 9 is the Lotus 47 of Trevor Taylor which held a commanding lead in the race before a loose battery cable shortened the electrics. (Photo: Geoff Breakell/Nick Smith Collection.)



Lining up for the Le Mans type start at the 'ring. Number 5 is Teddy Pilette's T22 which finished 4th overall behind the winning Alpine-Renault A210 and a pair of Abarth 1300 OTs. Number 77 is Herbert Schultze's GTA (6th overall and winner of the 1600 Touring Class) while backing into position is the Auto Fox GTA of Siegfried Dau. (Photo: Tommy Clapham Collection)



They're off. Schultze and Dau are away well. No 75 is the Humoristica GTA of the Swiss driver, Alex Aebersold and No 43 is Erich Bitter's Abarth 1300 OT which finished 5th. (Photo: Tommy Clapham Collection.)

We travelled on to Zandvoort that evening arriving somewhat late due to the passport hold up. On arrival we went into town in the hope of finding somewhere for a cup of coffee. In an almost deserted café we sat down close to a lone individual in an old leather jacket. On hearing English voices said individual, without looking up said, "do you want to see an English paper?" It turned out to be Charlie Lucas who was competing in the Formula 3 race at the same meeting, and whom I encountered again later when he and Roy Thomas ran Charles Lucas Engineering in Huntingdon, when they did our rebuilds on the Cosworth FVA engines that we were running at the time.

Our own Autodelta mechanic

When we started racing on the continent in 1967 we came up against some very hot competition from a considerable number of continental based GTAs. We also came upon Autodelta team boss Carlo Chiti, a truly lovely man, and the Autodelta GTA team. As we were the only GTA from England competing on the continent Chiti rather took us under his wing so to speak and gave us a vast amount of assistance both technical and with the supply of special Autodelta parts to the extent that we eventually became a sort of unofficial works supported outfit.

During the Tourist Trophy of 1967 at Oulton Park, which was a qualifier for the European Championship, and Autodelta was therefore present with Andrea de Adamich, Enrico Pinto and Rhoddy Harvey-Bailey driving, the race being won by de Adamich with Karl von Wendt second in a 911 Porsche, we had problems with our carburation so Chiti left one of their mechanics with us for a week to get it sorted while the rest of the team returned to Milan, and I had to send him back to Milan when we were finished with him. He could speak very little English so we recruited an Italian restaurateur to help interpret. At the end of which week I had an astronomical telephone bill for calls to Milan to his wife and to Autodelta.

We installed him in a hotel in Ilkley where there were some Italian waiters, thinking at least he would have some kindred spirits to talk to, a hotel incidentally at which at a later date Dargastino stayed while over on a visit from the factory in Milan. However, our mechanic friend had a monumental Italian fallout with them with much arm waving because they would not do his breakfast early enough for his liking, proceedings at which I was present and found highly amusing to say the least. In due course we loaded "our" mechanic onto the London train and off he went. Who actually paid the hotel bill after all this I have no idea.

My workshops were only very small at that time and as they were kept full of Alfa Romeo work earning a crust to go racing on, there was no room for our Autodelta man and myself to work on the car. However, at that time we had a private garage at my mother's home converted from an old pre-war tennis pavilion where we installed the GTA and mechanic for the week's work on the car. My sister kept us supplied with copious cups of coffee and my mother presided over the whole proceedings like some old matriarch. She really took to the Italian asking him every time he telephoned home about his bambino, none of which I suppose he understood.

This same garage was used at a later date by John Sismey and myself when he was involved with Vegantune's development of a special Twin Cam Ford racing engine. We installed the engine there into the back of one of my Group 6 prototype cars for testing at the TT at Oulton Park, the engine having been brought up from Spalding in the boot of his car over night and returned by the same method.

Italian generosity and German scrutineering

Earlier in the season Chiti had written to me giving me all the correct carburettor settings which they were using on the Autodelta cars. The problem was that the letter was all in Italian. We spent the week with the Autodelta mechanic fitting a totally new fuel supply system and re-jetting the carburettors. The engine was rebuilt with slipper pistons, the top end rebuilt with the new Autodelta cams and all re-timed to suit. The front suspension was stripped, modified and re-built as well.

At this meeting Chiti also noticed that we only had the one set of light alloy wheels that were on the car. This caused considerable Italian disapproval so he got two of his mechanics, who were fighting at the time on the top of their transporter, to take a set of their wheels from the transporter and give them to me for our spare set, after which their fighting continued. Italian generosity tinged with madness! We also acquired a set of cams which he said were superior to the standard ones we were racing on and more suitable for the carburettor setting mentioned above. He also produced a long range fuel tank to enable us to go through non-stop in the long distance races the same as the works cars were doing instead of our having to refuel, all of which came free of charge.

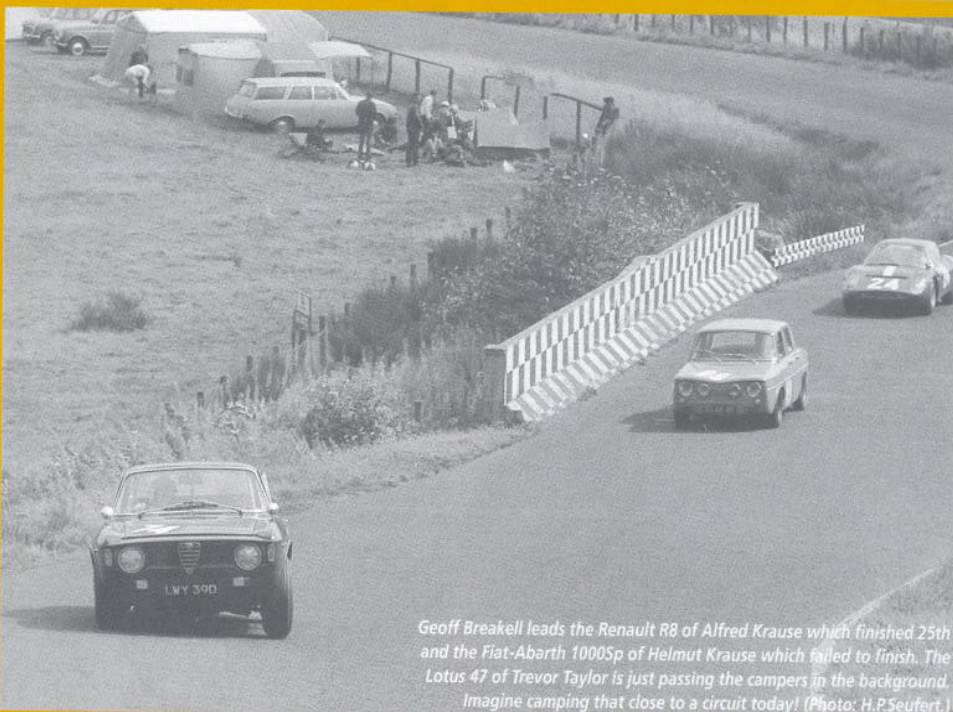
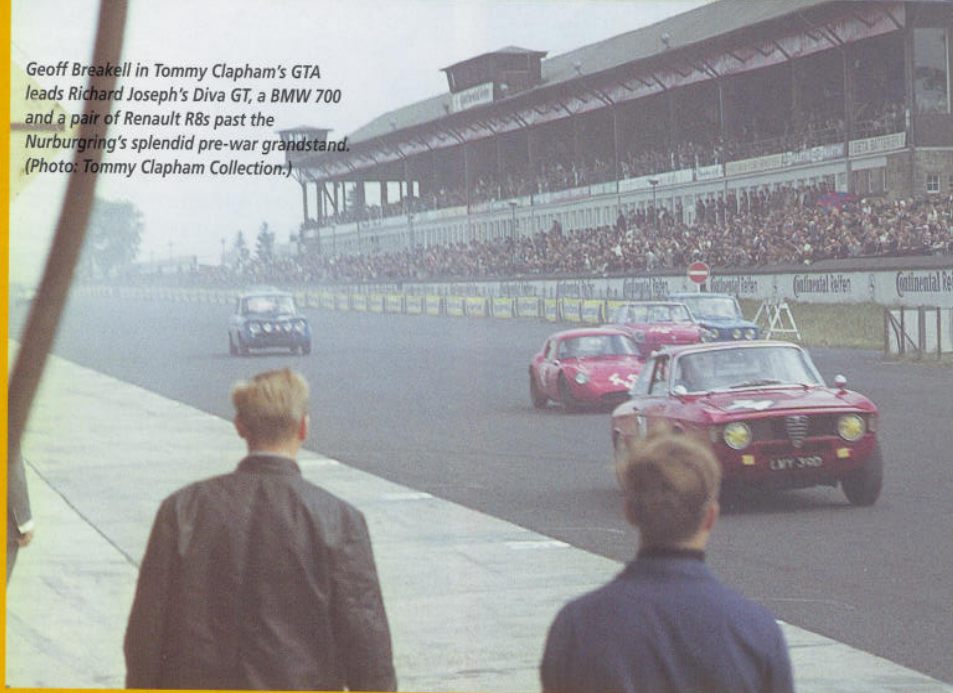
We had a successful race at Zandvoort where the cars were all garaged in the town after practice and driven in convoy back through the town the following morning for the race; this included the F3 cars. We stayed at the Bowes hotel in town where the commissioner took great exception to our parking the transporter at the front of the hotel, and made us hide it away in one corner. However he relented when a huge Italian Fiat transporter drove up with six Fiat Abarths on board and insisted on joining us. With the bunch of Italian Fiat Abarth personnel present there was a certain amount of frivolity at the Bowes afterwards.

From there we went on over the Arnheim Bridge and on down to the old Nurburgring, passing convoys of huge American Mac Trucks all driven by equally large black gentlemen smoking huge cigars, hauling supplies to the American forces who at that time were still stationed in Germany.

On arrival at the Ring things were not quite as simple as in Holland. At scrutineering the German scrutineers took exception to the fact that when preparing the car at base we had removed the splash plates from the front brakes to help cooling and save a bit of weight. The picture on the homologation form showed the front brakes with splash plates fitted so they said no plates, no pass. You must refit them. Big Joke! There were GTAs there from Germany, Belgium, France and Italy all with no splash plates fitted. They all set off like the clappers for home to fetch them - for us no chance.

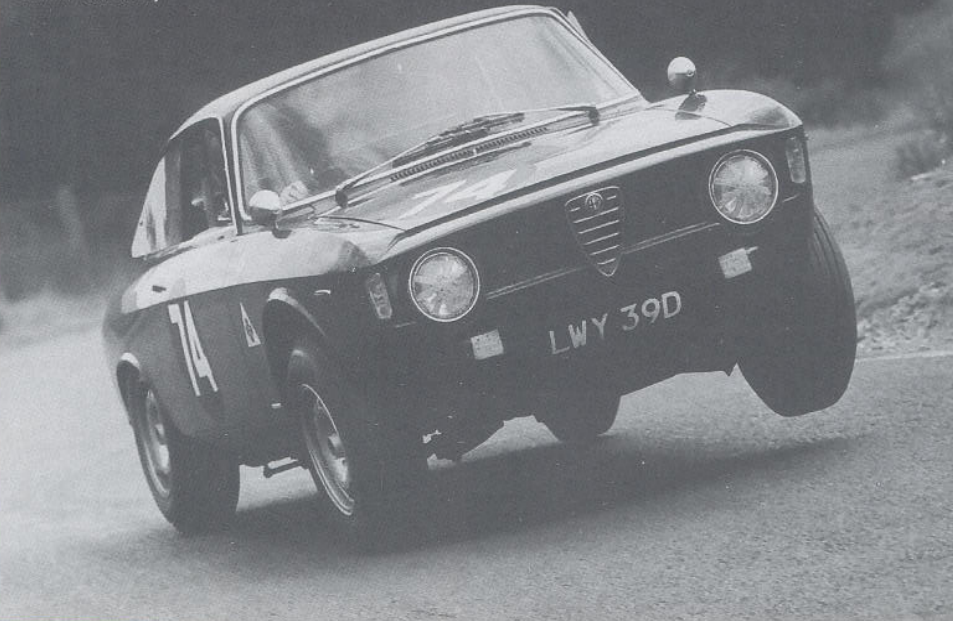
Along with the transporter we had also taken

Geoff Breakell in Tommy Clapham's GTA leads Richard Joseph's Diva GT, a BMW 700 and a pair of Renault R8s past the Nurburgring's splendid pre-war grandstand. (Photo: Tommy Clapham Collection.)



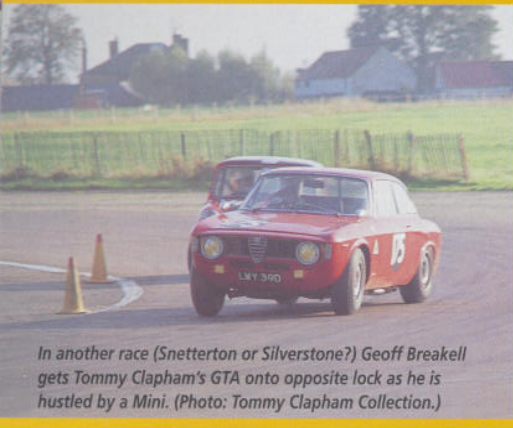
Geoff Breakell leads the Renault R8 of Alfred Krause which finished 25th and the Fiat-Abarth 1000Sp of Helmut Krause which failed to finish. The Lotus 47 of Trevor Taylor is just passing the campers in the background. Imagine camping that close to a circuit today! (Photo: H.P.Seufert.)

Geoff Breakell lifts an inside wheel at the Nurburgring. (Photo: Geoff Breakell Collection.)





Carlo Chiti, who was so helpful with the development of the Tommy Clapham GTA, seen here managing the Autodelta 33/2s at the Brands Hatch 6 hour race in April 1968. (Photo: AROC archive.)



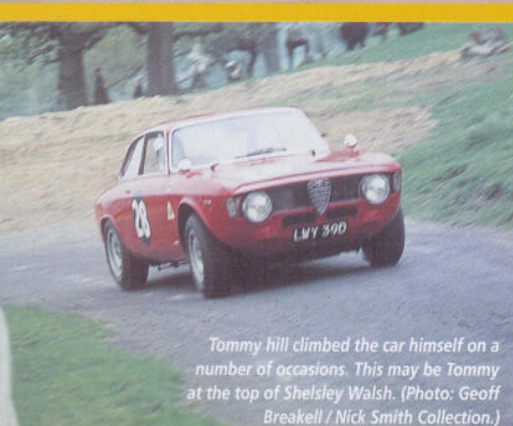
In another race (Snetterton or Silverstone?) Geoff Breakell gets Tommy Clapham's GTA onto opposite lock as he is hustled by a Mini. (Photo: Tommy Clapham Collection.)



Same corner, same race and Geoff Breakell calmly exhibits some traditional GTA understeer while the Mini opts for the untidy line. (Photo: Tommy Clapham Collection.)



Same race again but this time a fine side-on shot at speed. (Photo: Geoff Breakell / Nick Smith Collection.)



Tommy hill climbed the car himself on a number of occasions. This may be Tommy at the top of Shelsley Walsh. (Photo: Geoff Breakell / Nick Smith Collection.)



Geoff is not certain as to where this superb picture was taken. Cascades at Oulton Park is a possibility. (Photo: Geoff Breakell Collection.)

out a Giulia Super as a hack car and to use to learn the circuit, so off came its splash plates, which were not the same as the GTA, but with the kind loan of some welding tackle and bits of steel by a very helpful little German garage man with a workshop under the Sport Hotel I fabricated up some plates that passed the scrutineers after a little arguing.

One evening we were all gathered in the foyer of the Sport Hotel, also being present were several elderly typically Germanic looking officials of the A.D.A.C, when some "bright spark" knowing that I was a bit senior to the others called out "Tommy, what did you do in the war?" To say the atmosphere became hostile would be over stating the case but one certainly detected a certain cooling. At that time the older natives, while not hostile, did view us "Englanders" with a certain reserve.

This was a 500km Championship Race in which for a very small team we were doing quite well when with about another couple of laps to go a rear wheel bearing collapsed. So that was that!

At Brands Hatch we also had trouble with scrutineers who did not think the bodywork sufficiently covered the rear wheels. This involved a certain amount of heaving on the wheel arches and then piling all the tools, jacks etc into the back of car, unseen by them, to load it down enough on the suspension to fool them. From that day to this I have always treated scrutineers at certain venues with a great deal of suspicion.

Vibrating beds!

On the way back from the Ring we had an overnight



—GEOFF BREAKELL IN HIS ALFA ROMEO

BRITONS MAKE CHALLENGE FOR THE TOURIST TROPHY

Roses car bids to beat Italians

By JAMES SCOTT DOUGLAS

YORKSHIRE and Lancashire join forces at Oulton Park today in a bid to beat a four-car Alfa Romeo works team in the R.A.C. Tourist Trophy.

And Lancastrian Geoff Breakell and Tommy Clapham, of Keighley, Yorkshire, will challenge the Italians with one of their own cars. Geoff will drive an Alfa Romeo GTA entered by Tommy.

Last night R.A.C. competitions manager Mr. Dean Delamont confirmed that a fourth Alfa Romeo would be competing despite earlier doubts.

Alfa, winners of last year's European touring car championship, are determined to win again this year.

But Geoff is really determined that today the British-entered Alfa will give the Italians a fight. He said:

It was a pity the Italian cars weren't at the earlier practice session so that we could see their form, but I reckon I've got one big advantage over them. I know this circuit backwards having raced here many times in the last few years.

Self-service

Lorenese collected their own supplies of freight and beer yesterday from the Warrington railway. General, Winbury and Co. delivered a price in heavy straw. Deliveries will "back to normal" tomorrow.

Two injured

Two people were hurt last night when an 80-ton van hit a brick wall at the junction of the road and the railway.

AND WHAT'S THIS?



The answer is on Page 7 with all the other details of today's big Oulton Park meeting

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Tommy and Geoff made the front page of the Daily Express on May 29th 1967.

stop at Dusseldorf as one member of our party had to fly back early the following morning. The airline found us a very pleasant hotel where we all fell into bed totally shattered, that is all except one member who having made a discovery came round to each



Another day, another race but where and when? It looks as if it may be Silverstone. (Photo: Geoff Breakell Collection.)

room in turn and put a coin in a little box on the wall. They were vibrating beds! Not popular.

Coming back via the Hook of Holland we were late for the ferry but as they knew we were coming they delayed its sailing for us - how times have changed. As car and transporter had to be lifted on separately by the crane it took quite some time, so they were quite late by the time we finally cast off.

In 1968, for reasons lost in the mists of time, GTA racing was confined to racing in this country at Silverstone, Snetterton, Brands and Oulton Park. Also the odd appearance was made at the Shelsley

Walsh hill climbs that season, at the end of which I was becoming involved with the design and building of the Taydec Group 6 Sports Prototype cars and the GTA was disposed of, possibly to Allan Eccles whom I have found it impossible after a great deal of research to trace, since when its history becomes a little vague.

It is known to have been in the hands of David Prophet in 1974/5 though whether or not he raced it is impossible now to determine as he was tragically killed in a helicopter accident.

Sometime, probably in the 1980s, it found its

way to London to Chris Robinson. From there it went to Canvey Island and the ownership of a Peter Neilson. By this time it had become an extremely "tatty heap" having been painted in an odd colour scheme and cannibalised at some time, Neilson re-importing parts of it from Belgium. From here it was rescued by Nick Smith who after several sessions with me on the phone to prove its originality has now carried out a thorough restoration of the car which from the pictures I have seen looks as good or better than new, and is now once again being raced.

Tommy Clapham



A recent picture of Nick Smith and Geoff Breakell at Donington. (Photo: Geoff Breakell/Nick Smith Collection.)

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Tommy Clapham for writing this feature, to John Sismey for encouraging Tommy to put pen to paper, and to Tommy, Geoff Breakell, Nick Smith and his business partner Roy Martin, and Ken Carrington for photographs lent to illustrate the article.

While it has not been possible to identify some of the photographs with certainty, the detailed information included in the captions for the Nurburgring come from that excellent twin volume Time and Two Seats by Janos Wimpffen.

We are also pleased that the Clapham / Breakell / Smith GTA will be featured on the club stand at Classic Cars Live 2005 at the Alexandra Place from March 18th-20th.

SNETTERTON SUCCESS

As mentioned by Tommy Clapham in his article, his GTA was also raced by Geoff Breakell at Snetterton. It was at Snetterton on Sunday, July 9th 1967 that the car possibly scored its most notable success when Geoff Breakell took outright victory in the two hour endurance race for special saloon cars.

This was the main race in the BRSCC's festival of saloon car races and the field had a familiar sixties look to it with swarms of 848cc Minis in the 850cc class, of Cooper 'S's in the classes up to 1000cc and 1300cc and Lotus Cortinas and bored out Ford Anglias in the class for cars over 1300cc. Geoff Breakell was entered in Tommy's GTA in this class as was another GTA to be driven by a certain G.H.P. Thomas but this entry failed to start.

In Autosport's report on the event Albert Betts's Mk 1 3.8 Jaguar, Mike Campbell-Cole driving a Don Moore prepared Cooper 'S' and Willy Kay in a Lotus Cortina were seen as likely winners along with Geoff Breakell in the GTA



Briefly ahead - Betts's M1 Jaguar holds a short lived lead from Geoff Breakell's GTA in the two hour endurance race at Snetterton; Geoff went on to a well earned win. (Photo: Autosport.)

and this was the way it turned out. Geoff put the GTA on pole with a time of 1:56.0 sharing the front row with Betts (1:56.2) and Campbell-Cole (1:56.4).

Betts took the lead at the start closely pursued by Breakell, until Breakell took the lead on lap four, a lead that he held for the rest of the two hour race. Behind him at quarter distance Kay's Cortina and an Anglia driven by Paul Tomlin had passed a slowing Albert Betts who had to make more than one stop for oil and fuel. Betts was to force his way back up to second place but Geoff Breakell didn't make his pit stop until 90 minutes into the race and he was able to rejoin without losing his lead. Betts was a lap in arrears in second place and the race ran out with Geoff Breakell taking victory from Betts's Jaguar, and the Lotus Cortinas of Kay and Hotham.

Well back in the field was the familiar name of Willie Green, driving a BMW 1800 TI which was plagued by fuel starvation, while second in the class up to 850cc was a Mini driven by Charles Aveling and entered by Vegantune Engineering, the very well known engine development and preparation company founded by current club committee member, John Sismey. Chris Savill

Editor's note: Talking to Geoff about this event it appeared that even allowing for natural modesty his detailed recall had got rather lost in the mists of time. Well, it is nearly 38 years ago. Fortuitously I was able to find a copy of the appropriate issue of Autosport at Autosport International at the NEC which contained the bones of the above as well as the black and

white picture included in this short report.

I also found a copy of the programme for the event in which the original programme owner had meticulously filled in the grid positions. Looking through the programme I came across the name of another well known club member John Myerscough who was entered in a 1650cc Ford Anglia in a round of the Redex Gold Cross Championship. Thanks to our meticulous programme owner I can report that he started from sixth place on the grid and finished the race in fourth place!



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