

Merlins at the Donington Kit Car Show

September 2012

It's a long time since there was a new kit car show launched. The market for kit cars has shrunk and changed since the Merlin kits were being made and sold more than a decade ago. I suppose this reflects the faster pace of life and the advance of technology; these days build-time is much shorter, kits are relatively more expensive and better engineered. With this background it was a bold move for Complete Kit Car magazine to try a new show at Donington Park on the 1st weekend in September. So, feeling that we as a club ought to support it, I emailed the membership the show details and hoped for a reasonable turn-out.

At Stoneleigh we had 21 Merlins and loads of members turn up without their cars to join us in the club's 30th birthday celebrations. At Newark, in the rain, we had 5 cars turn up. Hence I estimated 12 cars when I booked the club stand at Donington. In the end 10 Merlins turned up but only 9 came through the gate!



Douglas and Alison Towle from Arnold in Notts got to within 50 yards of the gate and broke down, had the car relayed back home and set out again to join us in their “normal” car....that's persistence for you! Stuart and Wendy Pratt from North Allerton, Yorkshire, came along in their motorhome because the engine in their Merlin is being re-built; on the Sunday we used the motorhome as a base on the club stand with Wendy dispensing tea and coffee all day which was much appreciated.



Those who arrived with Merlins were myself&Nita from Suffolk, Andy&Helen Bell of no fixed abode, John&Jane Chisnall who hosted the Newark show (John's throttle cable broke as he came through the gate!), Dave&Sue Daniels all the way from South Wales, Clive Pinker&Margaret Pearson, John&Lorraine Wynne, Dave&Sharon Cox, Raymond (Sam)&Lynne John and Alan Brown (a member of 17 years standing), all from nearby locations.





(Clearly the last picture was not at Donington! Just checking if you are still awake..... 2 Merlins covered in snow at home last winter)

The show itself was like a mini-version of Stoneleigh. There was one main show hall with kit manufacturers, parts suppliers, wheels and seat suppliers, trim suppliers, etc, plus a wheel-changing challenge; outside there was a rolling road (which disappeared after the first day), kit car taxis, the Westerfield display team burning rubber, a trials challenge and racing to watch on the Donington track. Finally there were club display areas such as ours.

Nita&I stayed at the nearby Thistle hotel on the East Midlands airport but there seemed to be a fair number of people camping/caravanning on site. There was a promise of music and bbq-ing on the Friday and Saturday evenings but when the show finished we were away into Castle Donington finding a pub with decent food.

As usual the Merlin club area was the place to sit around and socialise during the day, catch up with old friends and nose around each other's Merlins. I took some pictures of the individual features of some of our cars and they can be seen below; see, for example, the radically different approaches to the look of the running boards.



The show must be judged a success. If you were a “newbie” looking at kit cars for the first time there were interesting kits to see in component form and ready-built as well as “experts” and owners to talk to. If you were building there was a sufficiency of suppliers to satisfy your needs.



Club members had the facilities to get together during the day and socialise even more in the evening; there was enough peripheral entertainment to happily occupy a few hours. Access to the showground was very easy and all forms of accommodation were readily available nearby. So, well done Complete Kit Car....you even managed to order good weather.

Barry Jones
Secretary, Merlin Owners Club.