

DEJA VU:
TERRY O'NEIL
ENJOYS A WEEK
OF SOCIAL
GATHERINGS AND
COMPETITION

photographs: Terry O'Neil
and Keith Bluemel

right: Beach front backdrop for the 375 MM
spyder of Andreas Mohringer.

below: Paul Griffin at speed
in his Cooper Monaco.

below right: Prior to the opening ceremony
the sports cars lined up at Arawak Cay.



Bahamas Speed Week revival meeting 2012



Photographer's dream! Cooper Monaco, Ferrari 375 MM spyder, Ferrari 500 TRC and OSCA FS372 line up together.

As the venerable Boeing 767 descended from a clear blue sky heading towards the Lynden Pindling International Airport near Nassau, a feeling of déjà vu swept over me. It was ten years previous to this late November visit when I set foot on the island of New Providence to carry out a programme of research on the Bahamas Speed Weeks.

A cursory glance from the aircraft as it taxied towards the main terminal confirmed that little or nothing had changed on the infield to the runways. The same bushes, tall grasses and scrub land was as I had seen it before and probably as the original race drivers had seen it in 1954 when the airfield was known as Windsor Field. The original Bahamas Speed Week idea can be credited to an American, Sherman "Red" Crise, albeit in 1954 the event was officially entitled the Nassau Trophy Road Races. It was not until 1955 that the Bahamas Speed Week label was registered. Crise's idea was based on what was then the current trend in America for SCCA races to be held on civil or military

airfields, they being deemed safer for all concerned than the road races for sports cars that had been traditionally used in the early 1950s.

Up until the 1957 event Windsor Field was used exclusively to hold the Speed Week races, but a change of venue was necessary in 1957 as the airport authority had the idea of expanding Windsor Field to cope with the increase in civil air traffic. The Speed Week event was moved to Oakes Field, the previous civil airport, which was used until the demise of the Speed Weeks in 1966. In 2011 a group of enthusiasts, including David McLaughlin, Jimmie Lowe and Brendan Foulkes, negotiated with the Bahamian Government to reinstate the Speed Weeks in the form of a Revival Meeting.

The 2011 Revival Meeting proved successful in so far as it created awareness of the event, so plans went ahead for 2012 with the Bahamas Government committed to giving as much assistance as possible. Oakes Field had long lost its open spaces, a sports ▶



Simon Arscott in his very quick Aston Martin DB5 won the sports car class.



The Bahamas Speed Week girls (pictured with Andreas Mohringer) were kept busy as the organisers took on the spirit of the original event.



At the Lyford Cay Concours Tony Best's Ferrari 330 America (above) won its class while the Jaguar C-Type (right) belonging to Jonathan Green won "Best of Show".



► centre had been set up and a drag strip laid down over the runways. In its place the Bahamas Government permitted the event organisers to use an area of land called Arawak Cay. It was here that the two main competitive races of the Revival Meeting took place, for sports and road cars. For this second running, the event was expanded to include a group of young kart drivers from the UK and the USA - quite fitting, as the first Karting World Championship was held in Nassau in 1959.

Alas, the late arrival of my flight from London precluded my attending the kart racing on a circuit set up in the parking area of the Queen Elizabeth Sports Centre, built on the Oakes Field site. It also meant missing the evening reception at Jacaranda House in the centre of Nassau, which has been in the ownership of the

Cars of particular note to the author were:

The Ferrari 375 MM spyder belonging to Andreas Mohringer. This car (#0382) is pretty much original and was successfully raced in the 1950s by Bill Spear and Duncan Black, and in the early 1960s by George Burke on the East Coast of America.

The Ferrari 500 TRC belonging to David Cottingham. This car (#0682) is the ex-Ecurie Francorchamps car that ran at Le Mans in 1957 and in the Targa Florio in 1958.

A scarce machine, a Ferrari 330 America, recently restored and belonging to Tony Best. There were originally 50 of this model produced but over the years that number has been diminished as the car proved popular as a donor car for more sporty models.

A Cooper-Monaco belonging to FOC member Paul Griffin. Paul had flown in from Hong Kong for the event. This car (#CM/4/59) was delivered to John Coombs in 1959 and driven successfully by Jack Brabham and Bruce McLaren in the UK.

The Jaguar C-Type belonging to Jonathan Turner. This car (#XKC 038) has a long race history in the UK and Europe, driven by Duncan Hamilton and Dan Marguiles on numerous occasions.

Oakes family for the past 60 years. The official opening of the Speed Week Revival took place at Arawak Cay on Wednesday morning. The Governor General, Sir Arthur Foulkes and Lady Foulkes, along with Sir Stirling and Lady Moss, were honoured guests, along with a number of dignitaries from various government departments involved with the organisation of the meeting. All of the participating cars were lined up along the street fronting the fish restaurants at Arawak Cay as the Royal Bahamian Police Force Band provided music for the opening ceremony.

It was good to see that the organisers had truly taken on the spirit of the original Speed Week, with a selection of receptions to attend. On Wednesday evening there was a reception at Government House, by kind invitation of the Governor General and his wife, followed the next evening by a reception in the gardens of the exclusive Graycliff Hotel in the centre of Nassau.

Prior to that event there had been a high-speed tour of the island headed by Sir Stirling and Lady Susie Moss in an OSCA, stopping at the ultra-exclusive Lyford Cay for lunch. While drivers enjoyed a sumptuous lunch, experienced concours judges decided which cars would take the honours in the Lyford Cay Concours d'Elegance. The overall winner turned out to be the Jaguar C-Type of Jonathan Turner from the UK. Class awards went to the Ferrari 500 TRC of David Cottingham, the Ferrari 330 America of Tony Best, the Dodge Viper of August Schnabel and the Bocar XP-5 of Mike Fisher.

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Being part of the media team, I travelled to Lyford Cay with four other journalists, one of whom I had been in contact with in the UK by email to supply some original Speed Week photographs. Seeing my media badge 'Terry O'Neil, photographer' the person, who shall remain nameless, exclaimed: "Oh, you are the famous Terry O'Neil I've been dealing with."

Taken aback, I replied that I had indeed been dealing with this person, but famous? No. It took some time to convince the other journalist that I was not Terry O'Neill the famous photographer, irrespective of what it might say on my badge. Very embarrassed, the other journalist said: "I've been telling everyone that I'm dealing with Terry O'Neil the famous photographer - they were all very impressed!" Needless to say, the conversation was the cause of much mirth between the other journalists.

Friday was a day of relaxation with a beach party and in the evening a Bay Street Roadshow, where the local populace could see the cars and speak with the drivers. I missed the beach party as I had the opportunity to return to Graycliff and try my hand at making chocolates in their chocolate factory. Great fun, maybe my badge should have read "Terry O'Neil, Chocolatier" ►

Saturday dawned warm and sunny for the first day of competition, in the form of the Fort Charlotte hillclimb. The course started from Arawak Cay, utilising part of the street circuit, ►

David Cottingham's Ferrari 500 TRC and Mike Fisher's Bocar XP-5 on the start line.





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► before turning right and climbing through a series of twists and turns to the fort at the summit, sited at one of the highest points on the island of New Providence. The cars were divided into Classes for competitive and “fun runs” (I was fortunate to have Derek Bell take me up the hill in Peter Vlasov’s Ferrari 550 Barchetta). Quickest time of the day went to Ed Hugo who took his Dodge Viper up the hill in the rapid time of 40 seconds. David Cottingham was not far behind, recording a time of 42 seconds in the Ferrari 500 TRC to win his class. The social highlight for many of the participants took place on Saturday evening with a gala dinner and charity auction held at the Sheraton Beach Resort Hotel at Cable Bay.

Derek Bell takes Peter Vlasov’s Ferrari 550 Barchetta up to Fort Charlotte - with the author in the passegger seat.

Sunday was the final day of the Revival Meeting and the second day of competition, which saw the drivers take to the street circuit. Time constraints had limited the development of the circuit in 2011 but this time the circuit had been extended and resurfaced to take in an area of the container port to the rear of Arawak Cay. All was going well with the development of the extended circuit until Hurricane Sandy deposited an enormous amount of debris and sand across the whole area. As a result a last minute clear-up operation was necessary, but thanks to the commitment of the Bahamian Government the circuit was made useable in time for the races.

As with the hillclimb, the cars were divided into classes, with groups of six cars going off at a time. Ed Hugo’s Dodge Viper set the benchmark with a time of 1 minute 29.1 seconds, a time that stood for the remainder of the day. In fairness, a strong breeze did not help the other competitors as a fine coating of sand covered the track as the day progressed, despite the efforts of the marshals

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to keep it clear. In the sports car class, Simon Arscott recorded a time of 1.35.25 to win the class in his Aston Martin DB5, Ron Gammons’ Devin SS was second and David Cottingham came third with a time of 1.39.81.

The gathering came to a close in the early evening when the prize-giving was conducted in the Paddock Club, the awards being presented by Sir Stirling Moss.

The week of social gatherings and competition had flown by and it was time for many of the participants to hurry to the airport for a Sunday evening departure. I stayed on for two more days with a few of the entrants to catch the Tuesday evening flight back to London, or so we thought ... but that’s another story.

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