



A Little History

Ohio's north coast beckons sports car enthusiasts to enjoy the "Island Life" on South Bass Island and Put-in-Bay each summer at the Road Race Reunion. The first road races were conducted in 1952 on a 3.1 mile course around the Island that ran through the village of Put-in-Bay. The road races lasted through 1963 with a hiatus from 1960-1962 when the State of Ohio passed laws to prevent "street racing."

During the 1950s Cincy area racers would venture north along Route 68 and Route 53 to Port Clinton, board the Miller Ferry to South Bass Island, find a spot to paddock and camp for a day or two. The Niemeyer brothers, Bill & Bob took a brand new Bugeye Sprite in 1958 to race, for 1959 Tom Cones drove that Bugeye and was joined by Roger Many in his MGA. In 1963 both Niemeyer brothers had Alfa Romeo Giulietta Spyders to race on the Island in the last race before the Reunion revived the competition in 2009.

In the years between 1963 and 2009 the Island saw a variety of automotive events, mostly Autocrosses, but nothing specifically celebrated the original public road races. The Reunion grew onto the Airport with the first Vintage Car Races in 2012 and has grown significantly from its shaky beginnings into a fabulous celebration of the vintage sports car.



The Reunion

The 2017 edition was the largest Put-in-Bay Sports Car race ever according to author and historian Carl Goodwin; Carl knows, he wrote the book "The History of the Put-in-Bay Road Races" which I recommend to everyone that might like old sports cars. The races started with MGs dominating the entry list, only 5 cars were not MGs in the second running of the race in 1953. Throughout the fifties as more manufacturers accessed the American market through small sports cars the Put-in-Bay races benefitted with Morgan, Triumph, Lotus, Austin Healey Sprite, Berkeley, Elva, Fairthorpe, Singer, AC, Bristol and others making the grid. Some non British cars of interest that entered were BMW Isetta, Goggomobil, Simca, Bandini, Stangullini, Crosley and VW Beetle.



The variety of cars was matched with the variety of drivers that frequented the races at Put-in-Bay; some rose to prominence on the international racing scene like Chuck Dietrich, Ed Hugus and Chuck Stoddard while others became champions in the USA including Tom Payne and Al Beasley. The racing was spirited and competitive as the stories in Carl Goodwin's book relates so well. "Night Practice" was one of the adventures these sports car racing pioneers created and propagated. History is a key element of the Reunions with a marvelous "Recollections Roundtable" that features racers from the past relating their experiences speeding around the Island in the original races, no body can tell stories like old racecar drivers!

Organized by MG TD racer Manley Ford, MG-A driver Chris Kintner and usually including insight from Carl Goodwin (MG, Lotus, Alexis-the list is long) this highlight is one of my favorite parts of the festival. Island residence that attended the first races stop you on the street to ask about your car; I offer the

ladies a ride around the old public road course, nothing goes better than cars and girls! In exchange I get to hear some fabulous stories about the early races and meet some very nice people. The whole Reunion is a celebration of classic sports cars whether they are race cars or road cars.

- Put-in-Bay Road Race Reunion #9

- Kurt Niemeyer, October 2017, Photos - Dan Mainzer & Ray Rawlinson

E-type

MGB

elise

TR6

Midget

Healey 3000

Spiffire



Roadcars get their due at the Put-in-Bay Sports Car Races too, plenty of driving opportunities are offered with track touring sessions each raceday and the "Around The Houses Public Road Course Parade Laps." This is one of very few Vintage Racing events where roadcars can enter and drive in the events; period correct cars under 3 liters displacement are welcomed to join the reunion. For 2017, first timers Joe Gerst, Jim Steputis, Ray Rawlinson, John Olman, David Ernst and Dan Deutsch joined long time event sponsor Rick Benhase, along with other BCCGC members John Coutant, Tom Cole, Skip Jackson, Tim Silver, Kurt Niemeyer and another long term event sponsor Lee Scovanner (European Auto Specialists Ltd.) for the grand adventure to Lake Erie.

Speaking of sponsors the "Presenting Sponsor" of the entire event is American Modern Insurance based in Amelia, working through Diehl Insurance they insure many of the collector vehicles that travel from the Cincy area to participate in the festival. European Auto Specialists Ltd, Benhase Restorations, Metalkraft

Coachwerkes, Sports Car Preservation LTD, jlofoto.net, John Parrott and MG Services are valued and the most ultra-supportive sponsors ever imagined. Many, Many Thanks to them for their continued support.

BCCGC Participation

The Cincy Gang drives up the route the racers drove in the 1950s and 60s, meeting at Young's Jersey Dairy on RT 68 in Yellow Springs allows drivers from around the tri-state a spot to queue up for the drive north. The rolling car show through America's heartland is breathtaking as the vintage sports cars stretch their legs on roads that fit their performance level to a T! The cars zip past the farms of western Ohio over the gently rolling glacial moraines and onto the coastal plain of the world's largest fresh water seas, the Great Lakes arriving at Port Clinton to catch the ferry to South Bass Island. Not only is this a fabulous sports car adventure, but you get to go boating and take your car along! The Miller Ferry took the racecars to the original races in the 1950s and takes us to the island today, 20 minutes each way, drive-on, drive-off. Leaving the ferry your fun ramps up, the "Island Atmosphere" is noticeable and infectious.

Put-in-Bay is the only place I have experienced "Beach Front" paddock, this year I was under the car bleeding brakes when I realized I could hear the waves washing ashore 40 feet to my right. I have come off the course, stripped out of my driver's suit into a swimsuit and right into the Lake Erie for a cool and refreshing dip! Several other drivers do the same, you can always tell the rookies, they are in their underwear. The Put-in-Bay Sports Car Races replicate the attitude, ambiance and atmosphere of racing in the 1960s better than any other event I attend. The racing is fun, fast and gracious, not the harum-scarum crash and bash for the \$5 trophy that has infected much of amateur racing. The cars are limited to three liters and 1973 or older to enter the event as a racecar or heritage street car. Information on entering the event can be found at ww.pibroadrace.com

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The Island

.Lodging and services are plentiful; we race after the "High Season" for this resort island. Plenty of restaurants, B&B accommodations, Cabins, Condos, and hotels are available, as are other attractions. South Bass Island must have the highest ratio of vineyards per square mile of any populated Island, wineries, shopping, cave tours, Perry's Monument, kayaking, bicycling, fishing, boating and much more is available. Karen Diehl of Diehl Insurance is planning a "Ladies Lunch" to add to the enjoyment for the ladies that may not be as adamant about their motor racing as others. The Put-in-Bay Sports Cars offer even the less than enthusiastic enthusiast a wide variety of activities to enjoy while on the Island, you are never far from the racing, one can traverse the length of the Island in about 15 minutes via golf cart adding to the charm.

The Race

I apologize I have not heard how David Ernst did in the Sprite, we were in the same race but I had a rough start to the event with a leaking brake line that demanded attention and set me back quite a bit. I had a lot of fun racing Brad Balles in and MG TF that had Carrera Panamerica history and has not been overly updated since, much like my Alfa Romeo. The MG bested me in race 1; I had worked my way around him when the lead pack of MG TD Specials came streaming past, the TF hopped in amongst the TDs and slipped back past me, with only a lap or two left I could not get back around the TF so I finished fifth. Race 2 the rain was a more steady mist, my Dunlop radials were working very well as rain tyres, but I still shoes to start in the back with my lack of confidence in the brakes.



A short battle with a Fiat 850 was fun but I had my eye on a pair of Morgan 4/4s running ahead of me. I remember seeing several Sprites pulled off the side of the runway so some attrition was occurring as the Morgans came closer and closer. Suddenly the first of the Morgans was slow on the straight away, I came up on him a lot faster than expected as we approached the left right chicane off the runway. Braking early and harder than I wanted to let the Morgan enter the turns ahead and take his normal line, coming out of the right I out accelerated him, passing to his right I looked over and saw that the Morgan was pushing a hay bale with the front bumper-well that will kill your straight-line speed for certain!

The other Morgan kept getting closer until he was only about 3 car lengths ahead and I was confident I could pass him when those stinking super-fast TD Specials came screaming by again and shuffled me back about ten car lengths from the Morgan. I thought I had enough time to catch the Morgan and probably pass it, in any case there was fun to be had racing in the rain!

I caught up to the Morgan again and was thinking about how and where to pass when he went too deep into a right left combination and sailed off the drivers left as he understeered through the right hander blasting some hay bales out of the way and landing on top of a couple of the bales. Pass Completed! The next lap was the last, as I passed the stricken Morgan and accelerated down the short straightaway I could see the poor 4/4 perched atop a couple of hay bales.

Back at the paddock my Scuderia BYOB (we bring our own because we are slow and nobody gives us Champaign) teammate Barry Prosser greeted me with Champaign on our makeshift hay bale podium. We have a good time no matter where we finish. I finished because my buddies Tom Cole, Tim Matune and Jim Clark helped immensely and I got to race!



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Mark the Date

Join the fun with us next September 24-27, we will be having ice cream for breakfast at Young's Jersey Dairy and driving up with a group of nifty sports cars and niftier people. Contact me at kurt@sportscarpreservationltd.com for more information.

The Historian

Shameless plug here for my buddy Carl Goodwin. Carl wrote the Books

- *The Put-In-Bay Road Races 1952-1963* and

- *They Started in MGs* Profiles of Sports Car Racers of the 1950s.

Both are by McFarland and Company Publishers and are available online.

Or even better get one from the author directly by calling 719-229-7245 or email at atlast@frontier.net. Talk to Carl he is a fascinating individual; he will personalize your book if you ask him.

See you on the road in a British Car!

- Kurt

Editor's Note

As a newbie to the Put-In-Bay reunion I didn't know what to expect. I can say that all expectations were exceeded and I had a blast! Being able to drive my MG at speed on both the closed Airport Course and around the Street course were absolutely memorable.

I also have to give a plug for Carl. I wandered up to a tent and table and started chatting with this "old dude" and obviously I had no idea who he was. He was fascinating to talk to and has a very fulfilled life. He and I got to chatting about sailboat racing, ocean racing and all kinds of stuff – I think I missed most of the racing!

- Dan Deutsch

I asked him if he had a basic philosophy for a life well lived and after he thought about it here is what he inscribed in the book I bought.

"Keep driving that Primrose MGB-GT. Glad you came to Put-In-Bay. Nice talking with you.

*All the best,
Carl Goodwin
Aug, 29, 2017*

*PS – Make your life interesting
because if you don't, nobody
else will..."*