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# NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

## Issue 7 – June 2017

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*We've had a couple of false starts in getting out our first newsletter of the 2017 racing season. Since publishing our last pre-season issue in February, there's been a lot of work going on behind the scenes, but everything's been running pleasingly smoothly as racing's got under way, so we haven't had too much for you to read!*

*Inevitably there were a lot of cancelled events early in the year – 19 meetings were cancelled in the first two months' racing, although some of those have been rescheduled. Overall we're quite pleased at the level of support for the early season meetings, but we'll be keeping an eye on the turnouts for club meetings as we enter the post-National qualifying phase of the season.*

*One of our biggest worries at the moment is driving standards, with concerning reports reaching us in respect of the quality of driving, focusing on certain classes and areas. This isn't the place for us to start singling anybody out, but the chief marshals of clubs who have been subject to such reports will have been invited to discuss the issue with individual directors. Although the reports only concern a small minority of competitors, we're not prepared to tolerate tactics that might jeopardise our constant quest to keep the sport safe, so we'll be supporting marshals who get tough on drivers they consider to be racing with insufficient respect for others.*

*We're now entering the busiest part of the season, with all the major championships under way and two day meetings coming thick and fast, so keep safe and help everyone to enjoy their racing!*

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### **LICENCING – A SLOW START**

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... but now catching up! We were a little concerned earlier in the year about the slow uptake of 2017 licences. Now that the season's under way we're seeing a rapid catch-up of licence applications, and up to 19 May we'd issued a total of 3,765 licences, which is just 76 down on the figure at the same date in 2016. Licences continue to be in demand throughout the year and by the end of last year that total had grown to 4,265.



# **NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER**

## **Issue 7 – June 2017**

---

We're still concerned by a general downward trend over the past few seasons. One or two suggestions have been made to get the licence applications flowing in early; maybe clubs could be encouraged to offer a discount on early applications (or charge a premium on late ones!). As ever, feedback from clubs and leagues will be welcomed!

### **NATIONAL ALLOCATIONS**

The National Allocations have been released now for 2017 (a day ahead of schedule, so thanks to Barbara and Elaine for all their work in processing the masses of data involved) and most of you will have seen the allocations and qualifying results posted up by some individual leagues on their Facebook pages.

NASA at this stage don't release the allocations publicly because some leagues, who haven't completed their qualifying at the time the allocations are made, prefer to keep them secret – they find that, if the allocations are known in advance, it can affect the turnout at their final qualifying meetings. Therefore this year the allocations were only issued in marked envelopes to league secretaries, giving leagues the option whether to open them or to wait until their qualifying was complete.

There has been the usual discussion of how the allocations are calculated. We think most longer-serving members understand the principles but some people always think they're cloaked in mystery! We can now reveal the big secret – which is that there is no secret!

For many years the Board has entrusted the detailed calculations to Barbara Harper, but the rest of the board all understand how the system works. In the past more than one league representative has taken it upon themselves to recreate the NASA calculation, and come to the conclusion that the NASA figures are invariably totally accurate.

So here's a ten point guide to how it works:

- 1 There are 40 places available in every class. Each of the 20 leagues has a guaranteed place (if they have at least one car racing in the class) and the defending Champion has a guaranteed place (if they fulfil certain conditions – mainly proving that they're still actively racing in that class). So it's likely that there will be 19 further places to allocate.



# NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

## Issue 7 – June 2017

---

- 2 Places are then allocated pro-rata to the number of cars registered with each league that have actually raced up to the cut-off date in mid-May. This is done by analysing the signing on sheets for every meeting held, except for BAS and UKAC rounds. If one of your league cars has only raced at "away" meetings it will still be picked up for allocation purposes (which has to be the case as at least one league actually does all its qualifying at "away" meetings). Car numbers and drivers' licence numbers are cross referenced to identify any inconsistencies, which is why NASA don't allow swapping of numbers between cars.
- 3 The 19 places (sometimes more) available in every class are divided by the total number of cars that have raced in the class. The resulting fraction is then multiplied by each league's total to give a number of allocated places to that league (obviously rounded down to whole numbers).
- 4 After the "whole numbers" of cars have been allocated, there'll be "fractions" of cars left over in each league's calculation. These fractions are ranked in order and used to fill any remaining places and the reserve lists.
- 5 It often happens that some leagues have identical "fractions" in the allocation – this will usually be when leagues have identical actual numbers of cars. If this is the case they'll be ranked as "joint reserves". You might get leagues with identical fractions when there's only one remaining place to fill. In that case they'll all be listed as joint reserves and there'll only be 39 qualifiers shown at that stage.
- 6 One thing that does sometimes confuse drivers is that, if there are say five joint reserves, they'll be listed as "joint fifth" rather than as "joint first". This is just the historical way NASA have set out the lists, so the message is, don't stay away from the Nationals just because you think you're too far down the reserve list to get in.
- 7 The number of places allocated is then advised to league secretaries – which is the stage that we're now at. Some leagues have completed their qualifying meetings and can immediately start putting names to these places, but other leagues still have qualifying races to run in June. By the deadline of 19 June, all leagues must return their qualifying car/driver details to NASA. We make no effort to influence leagues in how they actually determine their qualifying drivers – we prefer to leave that entirely up to leagues so that their systems can be designed to suit their own members' preferences.



# NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

## Issue 7 – June 2017

---

- 8 Some leagues might not be able to fill all the places allocated to them – if this happens everybody on the reserve list moves up and some reserves might become confirmed qualifiers.
- 9 A second allocation sheet is then sent out. This then becomes the basis of the published list of qualifiers for each class. Usually at this point we also publish a table showing the number of cars racing from each league that the allocations are based on.
- 10 If any qualified driver subsequently has to drop out, their league has the right to enter a substitute, which can be done up to the point that a car enters the scrutineering lanes. If anyone drops out and isn't substituted, or fails scrutineering, then the drivers on the reserve list get their chance.

Hopefully that will give you an understanding of how the system works. It's stood the test of time so, at the moment we're completely happy that we have the best system to give us the result that we want.

We can also reveal why we disagree with those members who advocate "regional qualifying" or other different methods to determine who we see at the Nationals. Unlike other big meetings, the Nationals is NASA's own event and one of our main objectives is to keep it fully inclusive of all our members, which means ensuring that all leagues have a fair chance of being represented.

Very many club members who don't tend to travel to other big events will still make the effort to attend the Nationals, whether or not they qualify, and they'll sit in league groups and cheer on their own league members. So we guarantee every league a place in every class (if they want to claim it). If you're a member of a small but enthusiastic league, we think you should be able to support your members in every class, even if they may not be quite on the pace of some of the cars from bigger leagues.

The Nationals is the showpiece of our sport, but it doesn't have to be about the "fastest 400 cars in the country" – that's an impossibility anyway, with the number of drivers who now have virtually equal equipment. The Nationals retains its unique flavour by being a gathering of the clubs and leagues which presents a public display of the strength and depth of Autograss. Those who qualify to race are proud to represent their clubs and leagues. Some are obviously gunning for the ultimate title, but for many others, just having qualified to be there is the highlight of their year. There are plenty of other big events during the year when the emphasis is purely on individual competition.



# **NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER**

## **Issue 7 – June 2017**

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### **LADIES' & JUNIORS' DEADLINE**

With the Ladies' and Juniors' Nationals this year taking place just two weeks after the men's event, the entry deadline is coming up fast. If you're eligible to race in this event please don't risk missing out – your entry must be received by Friday 14 July. If you think you should be entered but haven't received a confirmation of your entry, please check before the closing date that the entry's been received as afterwards it will be too late – no exceptions are allowed.

### **TRACK INSPECTIONS**

This year we're moving away from the established system of NASA directors being responsible for annual independent safety inspections of all tracks. A new track inspection team has been formed, headed by Warren Beatty and Martyn Tinker, and the team members will be aiming to inspect tracks on a three yearly cycle, although obviously there'll be exceptions where there have been significant alterations or incidents that have caused concern. This doesn't affect the main procedure for track inspections and risk assessments which are the responsibility of the club safety officer. Clubs are still required to file their safety forms with Pat Patrick immediately after every event.

We've made the decision that the workload required of our safety and risk management "department" is too much to be loaded onto a single director, so Warren and Martyn have now become jointly in charge of these areas, with specific responsibilities divided between them.

### **SCRUTINEERING REPORTS**

From now on NASA will be asking the Chief Scrutineer at every meeting to send a post meeting report to Vernon Mackenzie, the director in charge of scrutineering. There's no fixed format for this – it can be done by email, text or just a phone call, but it will help the scrutineering team to follow up any issues that arise around the country and we hope the feedback given will help scrutineers to achieve more consistent standards in the future.

A further change to scrutineering, with immediate effect, is that when two or more separate days' racing are run across one weekend, it's no longer necessary for a car that remains on site in the pits to be scrutineered again each day – this is subject to clubs applying adequate controls to make sure that no car can race without having been scrutineered.



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# NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

## Issue 7 – June 2017

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### NEW BREATHALYSERS ARE HERE

NASA's bulk order of "high tech" breathalysers (Dräger 5820) has now been delivered and has been distributed to league officials. The intention is that one of these professional standard machines, which have a much greater accuracy than the "personal" machines we've used in the past, will be held by each league, although some clubs have ordered additional units.



We've clarified that clubs and leagues are responsible for carrying out appropriate tests at all events. The NASA safety team will be in charge of testing at the Nationals, but at other championship meetings (BAS, UKAC, AIAS etc) the responsibility belongs to the host club/league, not the series organisers.

The more accurate machines are needed to help us implement the lower testing threshold which you should all by now be aware of. Rather than applying the English road traffic limit, (0.8 grammes per litre, or 35 microgrammes per 100 millilitres of breath) which some other

counties, including Scotland and Ireland, have already deemed too high for road users, we're now adopting the limit which applies to professional/commercial drivers in many European countries, including Ireland, of 0.2 grammes per litre or 9 microgrammes per 100 millilitres of breath.

Those of you responsible for operating the new units will find them very simple to use: a reading of up to 9 is a pass, 10 or over is a fail.

The new limits are effectively a zero tolerance (for various reasons a true zero reading is impossible to enforce) and, although we're already aware of one driver being excluded from a day's racing after failing a voluntary test, we hope the risks are now generally understood.



# NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

## Issue 7 – June 2017

---

### **NEW BREATHALYSERS** *(continued)*

We've been asked to consider applying the lower limit to drivers only and continuing to apply the English road limit of 35 to officials and mechanics, as there were fears that the new limit would discourage officials by limiting their socialising. Since then we've carried out some real-life testing on the machines and, based on our guinea pigs' experience, we consider that modest social, rather than excessive, drinking in the evening should not result in a failure the next morning. At present, therefore, we intend to apply the limit as set out in the members' handbook whenever testing takes place.

### **TAGGING**

With the 2017 race season well under way, the wholesale programme of rollage tagging is now considered to be complete, with around 3,400 cars having been checked, and no further "bulk" tagging sessions will be held. Anyone owning a car that's so far escaped tagging will need to make arrangements with one of the three tagging officials (Vernon Mackenzie, Phil Rogers or Martyn Tinker) to get the car tagged before it's allowed to race. Irish members should contact Shane Houlihan or Sean O'Grady of West Waterford club, who will be co-ordinating Irish tagging requirements with the directors in charge.

You'll all be aware by now that no car is allowed to race without the blue tag. If this does happen it will be regarded as a serious disciplinary offence, both for the driver and the club that allows it to happen. Any tampering or falsification of tags will also be severely dealt with.

To help cover the costs of the tagging exercise, from now on there'll be a £20 fee for each car to be tagged, whether this is a new tag or a replacement tag.

Finally on tagging, to answer one question that's been raised, once the "red tag" programme is under way, confirming various construction points rather than just material thickness, there'll be no further colours of tags to be added. The intention is that eventually all cars will carry two NASA tags, blue and red, but no more!



# **NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER**

## **Issue 7 – June 2017**

---

### **OTHER CHANGES AFOOT**

The NASA directors recently had a most interesting meeting with Mr John Symes, the former technical director of the MSA, who is now carrying out consultancy work worldwide as a leading expert in motorsport safety. John will be supporting NASA with track inspection procedures, but is also advising us on many aspects of our procedures and safety-related rules. It's too early to suggest what we may end up changing after taking on board John's advice, but it's fair to say that our existing rules may be tightened up in some areas, but made more flexible in others where the existing rules may be out of proportion to the risks, or unrealistic to enforce.

### **PROMOTIONS**

Several clubs and leagues around the country have undertaken or are planning local promotional events. NASA are all in favour of this as we believe that for our sport local publicity is often the best publicity. Not wanting to miss anyone out, one example was South Wales League staging Saturday morning displays in shopping centres in key towns within their catchment area (as many clubs have in the past).

The highest profile event so far this year has been the West Midland League's presence at the Bromyard Festival of Speed, which involved static displays and demonstration laps of the Herefordshire town centre. The cars were certainly a hit with the public and we hope this event will continue to develop in future years!

We don't always hear of all the local events being planned, although we're often able to help, if only by providing clubs with proof of public liability insurance. We'd encourage any club or league planning promotional events to contact us; we'd like the chance to help where we can, with promotional material or other practical help, and also to get your feedback on what sort of support we could be offering you.

To this end we've set up a promotional team comprising Vernon Mackenzie, Warren Beatty, Phil Rogers and Martyn Tinker, supported by Diane Tomkinson, and you're invited to discuss ideas with any of these.



# **NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER**

## **Issue 7 – June 2017**

---

### **DISCIPLINARY TEAM**

Another one of the many changes the current Board are looking to make is moving away from the directors having the sole input into any disciplinary hearings or appeals. Although the board must continue to control the disciplinary process, we'd like to use the experience of members from outside the boardroom as well. To this end we've set up a disciplinary team, headed by director Martyn Tinker, backed up by league chairmen Barry Holloway, Emyr Evans and Phil Sherwood. Other members may be called on to replace any of these should a conflict of interest arise (for example if a case involves a member of one of the team's own leagues). A disciplinary panel selected from this team will investigate and hear evidence (following the existing procedures in the members' handbook) before passing their recommendations to the Board for a final decision. It's also the intention to speed up the process of formal communication of the results of any disciplinary case.

### **SEAT BELT WARNING**

Our attention was drawn to an incident at one of this year's opening meetings when one driver, apparently unknowingly, managed to complete a race with a seat harness shoulder strap undone. We understand that the strap, which appeared to be securely fastened, released itself at the start of the race due to dust/grit in the buckle.

This isn't the first such case that we know of, so we must advise drivers who use the rotary buckle or "aircraft type" buckle harnesses that these are prone to getting filled in with mud and dust and should be thoroughly cleaned, not just for every meeting but for every race. The "NASCAR latch" type harnesses are regarded as more suitable for use in dirty environments, but we recognise that all drivers will have their personal preferences.

We'd also take the opportunity to remind you to have a careful check of all your personal safety equipment, not just at the start of the season but before every meeting and if necessary, as with the seat harnesses we've referred to, before every race.



# **NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER**

## **Issue 7 – June 2017**

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### **CLUB CLASSES**

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We've been considering approaches from those who believe it's time for the "budget" classes of Stock Hatch and Formula 600 to be fully integrated into the NASA class structure. We're still looking for feedback on this as we can see some definite advantages, but also disadvantages to those involved in the classes.

The proposals we've received stop short of including these classes at the National Championships, as the existing "unofficial" Stock Hatch Nationals, and the new F600 Nationals, give these classes a chance to headline their own meeting, which is also an opportunity for smaller clubs to stage a major event. Arguments against NASA "adopting" these classes include the view that this would take direct control away from the drivers in these classes as they'd be governed at NASA board level with a reduced, or no role for their own steering committees.

We've also had arguments that NASA currently has enough classes to administer and taking on two more would increase the workload, particularly for the scrutineering department.

Possibly the existing status of the classes gives leagues the best of both worlds; if they think that adopting Stock Hatch and F600 in their leagues will help them grow membership, they're free to do so, but if they feel that they don't have the resources to run and control two additional restricted classes, then they aren't forced to.

This issue will continue to be discussed so please give us your feedback via your league reps, or for drivers in the classes concerned, through your existing class committees.

In the meantime we're keen to encourage participation in these entry-level classes where the local leagues wish to promote them and we'll be including direct links to the Stock Hatch and F600 supplementary rules alongside the other class rule books on the NASA website.



# **NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER**

## **Issue 7 – June 2017**

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### **INSURANCE CLARIFICATION**

After a couple of recent queries it's been confirmed by our insurers that clubs' public liability cover only relates to racing events – clubs don't have any public liability cover for their race venues between events. It's assumed that in most cases the landowner's public liability insurance will cover any injury or damage incurred on the land when it's not in use as a race venue, but if this is a concern to any clubs we recommend they firstly discuss it with their landowners before looking into taking out their own cover if it's considered necessary.

We'd remind you that any queries regarding NASA's insurance cover should be directed to Margaret Allen; members, including club and league officials, should not be approaching the insurers direct in connection with NASA's policy, although our brokers, Integro Group, will always be happy to discuss your other, non-NASA, insurance requirements.

### **NASA'S CONSTITUTION AND FINANCES**

For a while now we've been working on a set of "by-laws" to govern the operations of NASA. NASA's only legal constitution at the moment is the Articles of Association of the company. It's not practical for the company Articles to give detailed directions on how we work within NASA, and on how NASA interacts with its member leagues and clubs, so we need an additional layer of rules, which is where the by-laws come in.

Earlier this year we reached the stage of circulating a final draft of the by-laws to your league representatives, who were given the opportunity to have input into the drafting of these rules. Having made various amendments, as a result of members' feedback, we're now asking the league reps to formally adopt the by-laws at an Extraordinary General Meeting June. Once adopted, we'll publish the by-laws that's been called for Saturday 10 June on NASA's website, which we hope will provide more clarity to members on the way NASA is run.

Also on the agenda for the June EGM will be, as usual, the approval of NASA's statutory company accounts for 2016. Your league reps will be welcome to question the board on your behalf about NASA finances but the board has already received and reviewed a report from the company auditors that confirms that there were no errors or weaknesses in our accounting. We're sure you'll all join us in thanking Margaret Allen for her thorough and accurate work in looking after your money!



# **NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER**

## **Issue 7 – June 2017**

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### **DONAL O'BRIEN**

We were shocked and sorry when the news reached us on Sunday May 13 that Donal O'Brien had died following an accident while cycling near his home. Just two weeks earlier Donal had been part of the team that delivered the extremely successful BAS round hosted by Mallow Autograss. Donal was already a successful rally driver when he took up Autograss in the early 2000s, racing for the Cork club until he joined the group who set up Ireland's newest Autograss club at Mallow. Racing in Class 8 and Class 7 Donal was one of the first Irish racers to appear regularly in the major UK events and he soon became one of the most popular competitors on both sides of the water. More recently Donal had returned to rallying with his superb Mk2 Escort, but he never reduced his dedication to Autograss and this year he was being seen regularly around the tracks supporting daughter Nicole's Class 8 racing. The whole family, Donal, Sandra and Nicole were deeply committed to Mallow's re-emergence as a top race organising club and Donal's organisational flair was also seen in events like Mallow's annual New Year "Fun Sprint" which brings together drivers from all disciplines of Irish Motorsport. Nobody ever worked harder to keep the fun in motorsport. Our sincere condolences to Sandra, Nicole and their very many friends in both Ireland and the UK.

### **JOHN BRIGGS**

We were very sorry to hear of the recent death of former NASA Director John Briggs. As a member, and former Chairman, of Scarborough club, John acquired a big reputation as a racer, with a succession of striking Jaguars including, most famously, an E Type which he raced successfully in the late 1970s.

John was one of the club officials around the country who were instrumental in the growth of NASA as a national body through the 1970s and early '80s and he was one of the "subscribers" and original directors when NASA took its current form as a company in 1984. John served on the board until the end of 1995 when he stepped away from active involvement in the sport, although he still kept in touch as a "patron" of NASA and as a regular guest at the National Championships.



# **NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER**

## **Issue 7 – June 2017**

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### **SAM GRIFFITHS**

Another sad loss to Autograss was the recent passing of D. N. "Sam" Griffiths, whose Worcestershire-based DNG Race Engines concern had earned a formidable reputation as one of the top engine builders in the sport for over 25 years. Sam's engineering brilliance and meticulous preparation helped drivers in all classes and at all levels in Autograss, but he will be best remembered for his success with Class 1 Mini engines, which it's fair to say totally transformed the standards within that class. A character who never sought the limelight for himself, but who was invariably approachable and helpful to all he met, Sam will be greatly missed in the sport and we extend our condolences to his family and friends.

Although not active Autograss members themselves, we must also express our regret at the recent passing of two other legendary race engine builders, best known in the Mini racing world, who have served Autograss competitors well. Glyn Swift of Swiftune fame and Buckinghamshire resident Welshman Rob Selby, best known in Mini 7 racing although he briefly raced in Class 1 at St Neots, will be sadly missed throughout the sport.

### **KEVIN PACEY**

We were also very sad to hear that Kevin Pacey passed away suddenly at the end of February. Kev was chairman of Leicester Autograss Club for many years. He and Elaine raced successfully until the early 1990s, being known for the immaculate presentation of their Class 8 and 10 Specials, while their son Richard raced a Class 1 Mini as a Junior. Elaine will be well known to all NASA members as a long standing member of the NASA administration team, and Kev always provided valuable support in that role, and on site at the Nationals. To Elaine and the family, and their close friends within NASA, we extend our sympathies.



# NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

## Issue 7 – June 2017

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### HINTON HALL CLOSES

Unfortunately our sport recently lost the use of another long standing race venue when North Shropshire club had to leave their Hinton Hall, Whitchurch, track following their last National qualifying meeting in May. The North Shropshire members have now finished clearing the site and the track will be sadly missed, having been the club's home for 23 years after replacing the iconic Black Park venue. During those years Hinton Hall hosted several BAS rounds and was also the venue that saw Autograss return after the Foot & Mouth crisis in 2001. We wish the North Shropshire members, and those of the other clubs currently seeking new venues, every success with their search.

***If you have any issues that you'd like to bring to the directors' attention, your first option is to follow the established procedure and ask your league representatives to submit agenda items for the Chairmen's, Scrutineers', Marshals' or Safety Officers' committees. You're also welcome though to contact any director personally (our contact details are all on the website and in the fixture books) or to email us all via [diane.tomkinson@national-autograss.co.uk](mailto:diane.tomkinson@national-autograss.co.uk).***