

Under the Hood, June 2019

The 2019 Goodwood (England) Members Meeting (actually a vintage race) will feature pre-1930 vintage race cars in an event titled the John Duff Trophy. A little history: John Duff was the first Canadian to compete in the 24 hours at Le Mans and the only Canadian to have an overall victory in that event. Duff made his racing career debut at Brooklands (Surrey, England) in 1920, and ultimately held over 50 speed and endurance records. Brooklands is considered to be the first purpose built auto race course and opened in 1907. Due to difficulties in laying asphalt on the steep banking, the track was constructed of concrete. Each concrete panel was approx. 10' X 10' and due to differential settlement of the panels, the track became rather bumpy with time. Driving a 3 liter Bentley, Duff averaged almost 90 mph on two consecutive 12 hour days to capture the Double 12 record. Imagine two consecutive 12 hour days at 90 mph in a 1920's era Bentley on a rough concrete track. This track also played a major part during both WWI and WWII in airplane manufacturing and testing. Today the Brooklands Museum features automobiles, airplanes (including a Concorde with a full interior) and commercial buses. There is even a "ride" where the visitor straps into a vehicle and drives the track encountering not only the corners and speed, but also the bumpiness of the track. Duff was one of the original "Bentley Boys". Hearing that Le Mans was going to feature a 24 hour event in 1923, Duff entered to co-drive a Bentley to a respectable finish. The two drivers returned in 1924 for an overall win at Le Mans, and this was the start of Bentley's early domination at Le Mans. After retiring from auto racing, Duff went on to enjoy his other passion, horses. Duff was a horse riding stuntman in America for several years, before he returned for the last time to England. Duff died in a horse riding accident in 1958. Last thought: It is widely considered that the Indianapolis track opened in 1909 borrowed heavily from the Brooklands design, although Indy was originally constructed with a brick track.

You might have previously read about Irv Gordon and his Volvo P1800 coupe. Irv holds the record for the most vehicle miles traveled in a non-commercial vehicle. Irv bought his 1966 P1800 on a Friday. He says he fell in love with the car and brought it back to the dealership on Monday morning for the 1500 mile service. He had a 125 mile daily commute and the miles continued to accumulate. It took him about 20 years to hit the 1,000,000 mile mark. Then after he retired, he got serious about exercising the Volvo. When he reached the 3,000,000 mile mark in 2013 he quipped that he suspected the car could make 4,000,000 miles, but he wasn't too sure about himself. In recent years, Irv slowed down and when he passed late last year, he had accumulated 3,260,257 miles. I suspect that wherever Irv is now, the wheels are still turning. When Volvo was designing the P1800 they looked for an outside contractor to build the car. Jensen Auto Limited in England won the contract and the first P1800 rolled off the line in May of 1961. The original P1800 was an odd assortment of components. The engine/transmission was Swedish, the rear axle from USA, the electrical components from Germany and the rest was English. Volvo cancelled the contract in 1963 over quality issues and brought full assembly back to Sweden. The first P1800 were of coupe design, but later in the production the coupe was replaced with the better looking (my opinion) shooting brake design. Jensen then went on to design and produce the Jensen Interceptor (with 383 or 440 Chrysler power) and the Jensen Healey sports car. I think it is likely that no one will attempt to break Irv's mileage record.

Noted car collector Jay Leno recently discussed buying his first collector car, which was a 1954 Jaguar XK120. Leno was 9 years old, riding his bicycle, when he spotted an owner polishing his XK120. Leno was mesmerized and finally the owner asked if Leno wanted to sit in the car. Jay never forgot that car and perhaps that was the start of his fascination with automobiles. I suspect we never know how our

actions might affect someone else in our auto hobby. The XK120 was the first post war Jaguar sports car. The XK120 name was derived from the fact that the car was certified to exceed 120 mph, a very fast street car for the time. This reminds me of one of our Wet Weekend tours. Steve Yabroff and I were in the hotel lobby when a family with two young boys arrived. The boys were talking about all the Vettes outside. We asked them if they would like a closer look and took them outside to sit in both cars. Both boys were absolutely thrilled, and we iced the cake by giving each of them a Corvette or CMCS hat. We saw the two boys several times that weekend and I suspect they still remember their Vette experience. I want to recite one more story about sharing our passion. For the past few years, we have hosted the annual NWACC autocross tech inspection in our garage. We have a neighbor with a son who is a car nut, so I had notified the father to bring the son over. Father & son inspected the cars and procedure and hung around talking to the participants. After Mike Roylance had finished his tech inspection, he backed his car out of the garage and asked the young man (who had just received his driver's license) if he would like to drive the Vette. Mike didn't ask the young man if he wanted a ride in the car; he asked if he wanted to DRIVE! Anyway, the young man ran home to get his wallet and I would be willing to bet that he had a bunch of stories to tell his friends on Monday. Moral to the story; share your passion for cars or Corvettes in particular. You never know where it might lead.