

INSIGHT: LIVE CLUB RACING ON TV

Club racing goes live

It took a huge effort to get a BARC race meeting on television

by **Matt James**
racing editor



Sunday's club race meeting at Mallory Park looked from the outside like a perfectly normal event. Seven categories lined up for a brace of ten-minute races each but there was a huge difference – last weekend, the action was broadcast live across Europe to millions of potential viewers.

The Motors TV Live Race Meeting was a first for national racing, with a day's action designed purely for broadcast.

It was the brainchild of promoter Magnus Laird who had taken eight months to pull together this toe-in-the-water event. With a strong positive reaction to a great day's club sport it is something that Laird is keen to repeat on several occasions next season.

New satellite-based technology from production company Hayfisher enabled the action to be produced live from the circuit at a fraction of the cost of a traditional broadcast and Laird capitalised on that to bring grassroots action to



Photos: John Bryant and Mick Walker

There were live pit interviews



David Addison (top) and

Eight cameras plus on board footage from a car in each category was supplemented by commentary from David Addison and veteran racer Barry Lee (and occasionally MN's Matt James) as well as post-race interviews by presenter Diana Binks.

Thirty staff from Hayfisher put the broadcast together while a further six commentators were overlaying words in their own language to viewers across the continent including Portugal and Germany.

A big screen was also erected at the venue to allow trackside fans to see what was being broadcast. Entry fees across the meeting were raised by almost £100 to cover the extra costs involved but the competitors reacted warmly to the plan.

"It's been pretty nerve wracking," says Laird. "But it is something that's been done with rallycross and we had a 'Eureka' moment and realised we could transfer it to national racing. We realised that if we could package up short, sharp races with big grids and get good racing then we would have something people wanted to watch. By adding something extra to what would already have been a

strong club meeting, we had hoped that it would be something that will appeal to racers too."

And so the idea of the Mallory meeting was born. Initial plans included an autotest to entertain the crowds between races where each race winner would pit himself against the winners of the other races but space constraints in the bulging paddock ruled that out.

Laird explains that the idea had been through several evolutions to reach its birth.

"We picked that we thought it would provide big grids and close action, but that meant we had a full paddock," he says. "The event ran without a hitch, but the planning hadn't only been confined to the TV firms. Ian Watson, business director of the British Automobile Racing Club, was responsible for the infrastructure to enable the

meeting to fire through its ambitious 14-race timetable, which was squeezed into four and a half hours on Sunday afternoon.

"We up-scaled everything that we would normally have at a national race meeting," explains Watson. "For example, we would usually have had two rescue trucks but we had three, and we had more

"We aimed to show club racing at its best"

Richard Hay

marshals than we would normally have."

With the race director in constant touch with the TV director, the on-track programme was tailored to the on-air output, but there were a few touches that the BARC were able to implement along the way. With only a few minutes turnaround between each event, the BARC girded the cars up in order in the assembly area before they took to the track and started each race with a rolling start, which dispensed with formation laps and

the normal countdown procedure. With only one relatively lengthy rescue to undertake in the opening race of the afternoon, it meant that the timetable ran as smoothly as possible. "It's certainly not impossible to get through the races quickly," adds Watson.

"Look at things like the British Racing Drivers' Club's Racing Ahead meetings that took place in the 1990s. A quick turnaround has been done before, we just had to have everything in place to make it happen. There are things that a club could use from a meeting like this and put into a normal event to speed them up."

Everything had been meticulously planned but an act of God nearly threw the whole day off track before the competitors had even arrived. A power failure across the entire Kirby Mallory area meant that there was a last-minute scramble to get the programme to air.

The power problems also left the timekeepers without workable equipment for the early part of the morning, which meant there was the suggestion that some of the

grids for the non-championships would be decided by the current points standings.

However, an emergency call back to Hayfisher's base in Worcester meant that enough generators to allow the broadcast to take place – and to supply timekeepers' TSL – were rigged up at the last minute. Producer Richard Hay was delighted not only that the broadcast got off the ground amid such problems but with the quality of the entertainment.

"Two race finishes were determined by just thousands of a second and the action was non-stop throughout the day," Hay says. "The club and the circuit worked hard to make it happen, and the racers delivered a vast amount of action. There can't have been any viewer who watched the broadcast who wasn't enthused by some great racing and racing that's better than that delivered by some of the more prestigious categories."

"What we were able to do was to show club racing at its very best, and that is what we got, and that's got to be good for everybody." ■

DRIVER REACTION

Rod Birley

Winner
Dunlop Motorsport News Saloons
"There was a fantastic atmosphere throughout the day, and the action on the circuit was amazing too. It adds a certain buzz to the meeting to know that the pictures are being shown live – and it's got to be better than some of the rubbish that's on the box. This is proper reality TV."

David O'Keefe

Winner
2CV parts.com 2CVs
"Everybody wants entry fees to be lower, but what we've had here is a fantastic showcase. It has certainly been a hit with the viewers if you count the amount of calls and text messages I have had on my phone since I won the races. It's the sort of thing national racing needs."

Keith White

Winner
Qualle Internarque League
"I have really enjoyed it. I am sure there are people out there who have watched the racing who now realise that you don't have to spend a fortune to get out there and have some real fun. My brother Colin races in the Ginetta G50 championship so he's on TV every other weekend. This time it was my turn: I hope he was watching..."

Keith White: as seen on TV



View from the armchair: no glamour, but some truly great racing

On BBC One, Jake Humphrey and David Coulthard were stood on a yacht in Monte Carlo harbour, discussing Michael Schumacher's latest controversial manoeuvre. Over on MotorsTV David Addison and Barry Lee were debating how many – or to be precise, how few – horsepower a Citroën 2CV has. That was the first thing you

noticed about the MotorsTV Raceaday: the lack of glamour. This was a proper Mallory clubbie, with small crowds and drivers who mostly looked bemused when a TV camera and microphone was pointed at them post-race.

Thankfully, the second thing you noticed was the quality racing. Ten-minute races kept the action tight, and quality



Winners got their spot on TV



Cameras were everywhere...