

CLASSIC DRIVER

Warming up for the new historic racing season at Goodwood

Lead

Another cram-packed season of historic motorsport beckons. What better time, then, to dip our toes in the proverbial water and assess a selection of entry-level classic touring cars on the historic Goodwood circuit?

Who hasn't peered over the fence at the Goodwood Revival, watched in awe as fearless drivers threaded priceless classics around the infamously challenging circuit with millimetre precision, and wondered what it must feel like from the driver's seat? Thanks to the Goodwood Revival Racing Experience, you need wonder no more. Well, sort of.

A tantalising taste



Corporate 'away days' could be worse than acclimatising yourself with a delightful array of classic touring cars on the historic Goodwood circuit, following, quite literally, in the tyre tracks of countless motorsport heroes. The experience aims to give you a taste of the Revival, more specifically the St. Mary's Trophy, from a driver's perspective.

As with the event proper, it's not all about the driving. The Glamcabs Girls greet you when you arrive, 'Viv the Spiv' is on hand to barrage you with banter and flog his hooky wares, and a personalised telegram invitation is hand-delivered by a pair of period postmen, riding authentic 1940s motorcycles. It's quite surreal, and it captures the spirit of the event beautifully, albeit on a much smaller (and more intimate) scale.

250 GTOs? Pah!



While the blue-ribbon RAC TT Celebration — yes, the race with all the Ferrari 250 GTOs — garners the most headlines at Goodwood, it's the St. Mary's Trophy, in which motorsport heroes past and present have gone door-to-door in an eclectic selection of classic touring cars, that's always a firm crowd favourite. Where else can you witness nine-time Le Mans winner Tom Kristensen jostling a gigantic Ford Galaxie and fighting tooth-and-nail with Barrie 'Whizzo' Williams in a Mini?

The assortment of cars at the Revival Racing Experience is wonderfully diverse, comprising a Mini Cooper, Lotus Cortina, Jaguar Mk II, BMW 1800 Ti/Sa, Alfa Romeo 2000 GTV, MGB Roadster, Ford Falcon, and a Porsche 912. More importantly, they're all fitted with roll cages, harnesses, and sticky tyres. Oh, and variable rev limiters and better brakes — this is an event for novices, after all. With the historic racing season looming (and the grassy banks of Goodwood, thankfully, devoid of crowds), it seems like a good time to choose the car in which we'd most like to launch a season-long campaign.

Reassuringly responsive



Cocooned in the low and cosy cockpit of the [MGB](#), harnesses compressing my chest, race cams barking incessantly up ahead, and wheel, pedals, and gearstick beautifully — and reassuringly — positioned, for a fleeting moment, I feel like a proper racing driver who’s about to head out for first practice at the Revival. A genuine ex-racer, the MGB is a joy — balanced, focused, and sincerely swift. The short-throw gearbox and narrow pedal box is a treat, too, making heel-and-toe downshifts an approachable and rewarding task. The same certainly couldn’t be said for some of the other cars.

Elephant in wolf’s clothing



For all its sporting intentions, the big [Jaguar MK II](#) wallows with admirable grace. From behind the huge wooden-rimmed wheel, legs splayed accordingly, you almost have to lift yourself out of the seat to wrestle the car around the corners. I can’t help but pity the poor policemen who had to catch criminals with these cars in the 1960s. Oh, and notice that the cigar lighter is still intact in the walnut veneer — just what you need as you careen into No Name.

Pedal to the metal



The key to keeping a [Mini](#) pointing the right way on a lap around Goodwood is, according to our instructor, to keep your foot buried to the floor. While that might sound like slightly terrifying advice, given the notoriety of the circuit, but in reality, it’s terrifyingly good fun. Its small steering wheel, tilted to the point its almost flat, and rock-solid suspension give the car a genuine go-kart-like feel, as you hop and skip around the circuit, lifting ever so slightly through Madgwick and St Mary’s and only ever dabbing the

brakes into Woodcote.

Hunter-gatherer



Despite the somewhat cumbersome three-speed automatic 'box, nothing can detract from the glorious 5.0-litre V8 in the mighty [Ford Falcon](#). The engine dominates the driving experience, providing creamy ladles of torque and causing your vast chrome grille to close in on the Mini like a hungry shark chasing down a helpless fish. For a big car, it handles quite well, although you need to really stamp on the brakes to get the thing to slow down — this is slightly disconcerting on the approach to Woodcote...

Delicate, dainty, delicious



The rorty *bap-bap-bap* of the brilliant red [Alfa Romeo 2000 GTV](#) at idle quickens the pulse a little more than any of the other cars as you await the green light at the end of the pit lane. The lightweight looker's handling is confidence-inspiring from the off, and the welcome fifth gear — the only one of the bunch to boast one — gives it the legs on the long straights. The brakes are fantastic, too. One can only imagine how Frank Stippler feels as he dances his full-fat Giulia GTA around here — probably even more magical than it feels to spectate!

Channelling Jimmy





The undoubted star of the show, in my opinion, is the [Lotus Cortina](#). With the evocative image of Jim Clark cocking the inside front wheel of his 'Tina as he seared through the chicane bouncing around my brain, I strap in and take to the track. It doesn't disappoint — the raspy twin-cam engine oozes with power (and makes a terrific din), and the car feels so light on its toes, darting from corner to corner and almost crying out to be manhandled. I enjoyed it so much I snuck in an extra lap. And for those two minutes or so, I *was* Jim Clark. For that episode alone, it's worth begging your boss to book the Revival Racing Experience. Who *really* enjoys playing golf or doing trust exercises, anyway?

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Gallery

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