

NEC Classic Motor Show report 2021- Stand 1.610 - 12-14th November

by Steve Horne

Well, 2020, our chosen Centenary Year, has passed and we missed out on a potentially bumper-size NEC stand with up to 12 cars; and we realised only too clearly that space was going to be at a premium, with widened walkways and spatial distancing becoming the norm. This year, the organisers, Clarion Events Ltd., were somewhat delayed in getting their act together, being unsurprisingly hesitant in allocating space for fear of



other Covid-19 Rule changes. With that in mind, we still managed to persuade Clarion that we needed more space than the usual 5 cars as we were still celebrating the formation of The Alvis Car and Engineering Company Ltd. in 1921. We initially planned for 10 cars but settled on 9 to fit the September space allocation. There appeared to be no theme this year which allowed us to form our ideas on displaying decades of Alvis car development. Last year's proposed layout, with more enclosed spaces was unlikely to be very easily accepted, so Dave Dobson decided on a more open plan layout, but still incorporating a much larger lighting gantry which would completely fill the 21m x 12m space and to erect more signage on that high gantry which would illustrate the cars and the centenary in multicolour detail. Given the larger gantry on eight instead of four legs, our main concerns were for the extra time required for erection and the interference that would cause on backdrop Quadlite framing construction and decoration, as well as getting the cars on the stand, apart from extra manpower to create the build-up of the stand on Wednesday as well as Thursday, prior to the Show's commencement of Friday.

I believe Covid has created a reticence in not only event participation but also in volunteering, so we anticipated that our requests for volunteers to man the stand and owners willing to offer vehicles for display might cause difficulties; it was inevitable that all



members are living with greater uncertainties and it hence becomes more difficult to plan ahead or even commit to events many months ahead. As it turned out, our rather repeated calls for assistance actually produced more volunteers than was perhaps required, but Dave Dobson decided that we needed the create a 'pool of new recruits such that each could be involved this year in the hope that many will become a fixture in future years allowing some of the diehards to settle back into future retirement from the Show's organisation and volunteer network. We were both exceedingly pleased with the support given for both set-up , breakdown and stand-manning over the 4-5 days. Thanks to all of you.

What of the cars you ask? A Centenary clearly has to include the first and last of Alvis production, but we were fortunate to have the loan of Alan Stote's 1922 10/30, one of the few readily available and in running condition and David Little



stepped in with his red 1966 TF 21 drophead coupe, which has been on a stand before, but filled the gap when many other TF owners were unwilling to offer their cars as the Show date came ever nearer. One of our newer members, David Halsall drove his immaculately restored 1931 12/60 to the NEC and stayed all weekend to help before driving home on Monday morning. At least two years prior, I had asked Stephen Whitaker to offer his newly rebuilt prototype Speed 20 Vanden Plas drophead coupe and luck seemed to be on our side in that the car had only just been finished and had only driven a few metres before it was required to be driven from the NEC car park to enter Hall 1 – a proud moment for him for it to be able to arrive under its own steam, albeit requiring a little tuning! Last of the pre-war models, we were able to display Alan Stote's 1937 Olympia Motor show car, the Lancefield Carriage Co. Art-Deco concealed-hood Speed 25; the epitome of luxury and performance of the Alvis range at that time. Then the Post-War austerity period was covered by John Harris' 1947 TA14 utility/estate car, again beautifully restored in recent years, representing the UK home market choice of that period when very little steel was available to the automotive industry. And then Debbie Fortune/ Mark Hayward's 1950 TB14 A.P.Metalcraft roadster, as destined



to fulfil the Government's and Alvis export drive for much needed Dollars. We had hoped for an early 3 Litre, in the form of a TA21 drophead coupe, but due to Covid concerns, replaced that with Robin Johnson's green 1955 TC 21/100, which has also been on the stand in 2019. We were very appreciative of his willingness to step forward only a week or so before the Show and indeed to be a stand volunteer on Sunday for the first time, a task he seemed to actively relish. Being a principal organiser, I try to

avoid the complexities of bringing any of my cars to the Show, but this year we needed a Graber to represent the transition from few Alvis cars being available in the period 1956-58 to the Park Ward production of TD -TF models. Hence the appearance of my 1958 TC108G in the absence of other owners offering any Graber or Willowbrook car that has not been on the stand before.

We decided also to freshen up the backdrops with a mix of period black and white Motor Show or Alvis Works shots and some totally new 3 x 1 or 2 x 2m banners based on the 'Centenary' theme.

We are particularly indebted to Alan Stote and Mike Hicks of Red Triangle and Steve Wilson of Fisher Restoration/Performance who supported us with transport and exhibition of a number of the cars.

Friday evening heralded a meal and drinks reception by Lancaster Insurance in association with Classic and Sports Car magazine, the latter offering an array of awards for clubs and individuals, either by nomination or judging by experts on the day. We were saddened by the fact that Stephen Whitaker's Speed 20 did not achieve status as Best in Show, probably because an Alvis had won the award the last time in 2019, but huge numbers of visitors to the stand came to state that they believed his car to be the best at the show this year. Likewise, we had very many complimentary



comments about our Alvis stand but did not receive an official accolade for the quality of the stand itself; but we have other major players in the Small Club and Large Club categories who utilise the 'Shell' timber-construction principles which are hugely costly, both Jensen Owner's Club and Mercedes Benz Club spending budgets in excess of £12k and £15K, respectively to achieve that goal.

However, our Centenary theme seemed to bring its rewards in that we achieved the 'Most Interesting Selection of Cars' award – an engraved salver for the greatest diversity of cars on any stand at the NEC. That rather reflected the quality of the cars exhibited as well.



Were there any surprises this year? There were a number of former Alvis employees visiting the stand who mainly worked on aero engines or Alvis Fighting vehicles; one former apprentice, Martin Rigby, stood out as he worked as an Alvis tester and then later as Service engineer; he was present when the prototype TA 350 -Issigonis project was torched; it stood in Experimental Dept. for ages, then set on fire by the Maintenance Department (two individuals, Oddball and Frank) under Management order so as to prevent the Moulton hydroelastic suspension being copied or removed by any other party. He confirmed that

rumours of a second car buried in the underground tunnels were untrue, but he did remember finding a complete new chassis/running gear of a Speed 20.

New member subscriptions were only 6 this year, but in addition a few re-joins, some of which had lapsed since 2003! And a number took forms away to apply at their leisure from home. Our best potential signing was a very young lad, Thomas, brought to the show by a family friend, who had inherited his grandfather's Alvis 12/50 4 seater tourer; he was beaming when given the chance to sit in David Halsall's 12/60; I shall be discretely in touch with his mother, Jemma, to offer him AOC membership for his Birthday. As usual, there were a few visitors seeking information on the whereabouts of a number of Alvis, wanting to sell or buy Alvis, or trying to reclaim a lost registration number - these will be checked and followed up.

Sadly, Covid-19 restrictions had dissuaded our usual overseas members from coming over to visit us on the stand. I believe visitor number were down by at least 15-20 percent, based on footfall on our stand and whereas Friday and Saturday were very busy, Sunday was relatively quiet throughout the day in Hall 1. Thankfully we had over 90 AOC members visiting or assisting. Although things were a little more spaced out to aid social distancing, clubs, dealers, traders, motoring celebs and a strong crowd of visitors could enjoy a triumphant return for the UK's flagship classic vehicle event. The numbers certainly back that up. There were around 3000 cars on show across seven halls, with 270 car clubs celebrating various milestone anniversaries that occurred in 2020 as well as 2021. But the standout figure is the 63,328 enthusiasts who attended over the three show days – which given the circumstances, is a remarkable number.

Overall, an excellent show that was well supported by AOC volunteers, which made it all simpler to manage, and a great turnout of visitors to our stand 610 showing interest in the Alvis marque.

