



# PIT SIGNALS



LATE BRAKING NEWS FOR VARAC VINTAGE RACERS - August, 2019 - JEREMY SALE



## Our first VARAC Vintage Festival, 40 years ago!

The first VARAC Festival was held at Shannonville on August 18/19, 1979. The cars were fewer in numbers than today but perhaps more exotic. Some of our hon members who were there then are still racing today. Phil Lamont for one. Phil had the distinct honour of having a certain race driver by the name of Stirling Moss drive his Cooper Formula Three at the Festival in 1981. Phil relates a bit about this in this special edition of Pit Signals. Plus the winner of one of the races that first weekend, John Winter, tells us how he bought his 1961 Alfa Romeo Sprint Zagato, drove it back from California, won the handicap race, and how he still has the plaque to prove it!



*Jack Boxstrom has the full story of the 1979 Festival in this edition.*

# Jack Boxstrom, the Legend continues....

It was back in the late 1970s that one of VARACs founders, Jack Boxstrom, purchased Shannonville Motorsport Park. Jack talked to his bank and blithely told them that if the purchase didn't work out they could sell the property for farming. However the bank inspector took a closer look and realized that under a few inches of soil was nothing but granite! So off went Jack to another source, someone who fortunately, turned out to be a race enthusiast! Thus the purchase went through, but Jack says he almost went broke as "all my friends came out and drove around for nothing." He then decided to put on a race for vintage cars and motorcycles in August of 1979. It was to be held under the auspices of VARAC and BARC. Jack called on all his race friends in Canada and south of the border and managed to attract more than 50 competitors.



# The First VARAC Vintage Festival...

*The following  
contemporary  
account is by  
Jack Boxstrom  
and has been  
edited.*



“The weather was rainy on the Saturday morning and the wet track led to a certain amount of aquaplaning, with several spins and agricultural excursions, but no damage to the cars. The nine vintage motorbike racers wisely decided to wait until Sunday.

The weather cleared up somewhat in the afternoon and the first race; a 15 lap affair for post war production cars, saw a grid including marques such as MGA, Lotus, Frazer-Nash, Deutch Bonnet and Porsche. Denis Wilde won in his Lotus Elite, followed home by the Frazer Nash of Bob Fergus, with another Lotus Elite in third, driven by Jack Davidson.

The next race was for pre-war cars and three Bugattis battled for the lead until John Sebert’s Frazer Nash finally managed to take the win, followed by the Bugattis of Don Lefferts and Fred Willets.

A 15-lap race for sports racers was next with Charlie Gibson managing to keep his mighty Lister Corvette on the damp track to win. Gibson said “I had so much wheel spin I put the car in third gear and left it there the whole race.” Dave DuBrul’s OSCA Maserati finished second. Back in the pack Ollie Clubine’s Lotus Six and Tom Berent’s Lester MG had a good race, with Clubine prevailing at the flag.

PARTICIPANT FIRST ANNUAL  
V.A.R.A.C.  
**SHANNONVILLE**  
MOTORSPORT PARK  
VINTAGE FESTIVAL 1979



Left: Action in post war sports racing grid...



*"I had so much wheel-spin I put the Lister Corvette in third and left it there the whole race..."*

Charlie Gibson won the 15-lap sports racers feature in the rain.

Dennis Wilde's Lotus Elite getting out of shape in the wet. Wilde won his race on Saturday.



Dennis Wilde's Lotus Elite

The final race on Saturday was for post war single seaters. A small field of only six cars was led to the flag by 18-year old Jeremy Dale, driving a Cooper Formula Three in his first race! He managed to hold off the veteran Phil Lamont (right) in a similar machine while third place went to Tony Clarkson's pristine Stanguellini Formula Junior.

The festivities continued on Saturday night at the Four Seasons Hotel in Belleville. "Burmah-Castrol hosted a giant reception to which all who had braved the day at SMP were invited. This was followed by a roast beef dinner, with the party that followed carrying on until the wee small hours of the morning".



Coopers doing battle at SMP.

On Sunday the weather turned bright and dry with the motorbikes putting on "a first class display for a club in its first year of operation." Winner of the 10-lapper was Gary McCaw, Velocette, second David Moffat, BSA Gold Star and third John Davis on a Manx Norton.

Handicap races based on previous performances followed with cars setting off one at a time at staggered intervals. The idea is that everyone should cross the finish line at the same time. This never happens of course but the closer the handicapper can get to this ideal the better the race...



The first handicap race on Sunday was for production sports cars, won by John Winter in his Alfa Romeo SZ. See his story on the following pages. Gregory Prehodka was second in his MG TD, with Lew MacKenzie's Lotus Elite taking third.

The final handicap race combined the rest of the entrants. The first three places overall went to post

war racers. Dave Berger won it in his 1956 Deutch Bonnet Le Mans, second was Ollie Clubine, Lotus Six, with Richard Stafferton taking third in his Alfa Romeo TZ. First post war single seater to finish was the Wheeler Special of Bob Atrell. Dorien Berteletti was the first pre war car home in his gigantic 1934 Hudson Indy Special. (*Incidentally Dorien still races this car.*)

That concluded the very first VARAC vintage festival weekend.

It was to be the beginning of an annual event that now attracts racers from across North America and has included F1 machines, Can-Am and more. It must be noted that the event is only made possible by the huge volunteer effort put forth by the VARAC board, its members and the help of many others.



*Top photo; Winner of first VARAC race held was Bob Dengler in his 1954 Ferrari 375MM. This race was held prior to the Festival, in May of 1977. Bottom photo: Phil Lamont grins and wins in his Cooper F3.*

# John Winter wins at first VARAC Festival!

John Winter was a member of VARAC and a vice-president of the club in the early days. John recently met up with his old friend Richard Poxon, who put him in touch with Pit Signals. I was delighted to get some stories about the early days of VARAC and especially pleased to learn that John won one of the handicap races on Sunday at the first VARAC Vintage Festival at Shannonville in

1979.

40 years ago this summer... the very event we are celebrating this year!

John related the following about his winning car. "The car was a 1961 Alfa Romeo SZ (Sprint Zagato) 1300 cc. Very rare, they only made 31 of



that model for racing and rallying. I bought it sight unseen in Beverly Hills, California over the phone in the mid-seventies. I flew out and literally drove it back to Toronto over several days (no tow car or trailer). It was quite the adventure; I had several breakdowns, one just south of Death Valley, one of the hottest places on earth. It was stinking hot in that summer month, over 40 degrees C. I managed to limp on to Las Vegas and carried out more permanent repairs there. One of the problems was that the radiator had sprung a leak and had to be topped up every 50 miles or so. Luckily I was carrying plenty of water."

## ...And he has the proof!

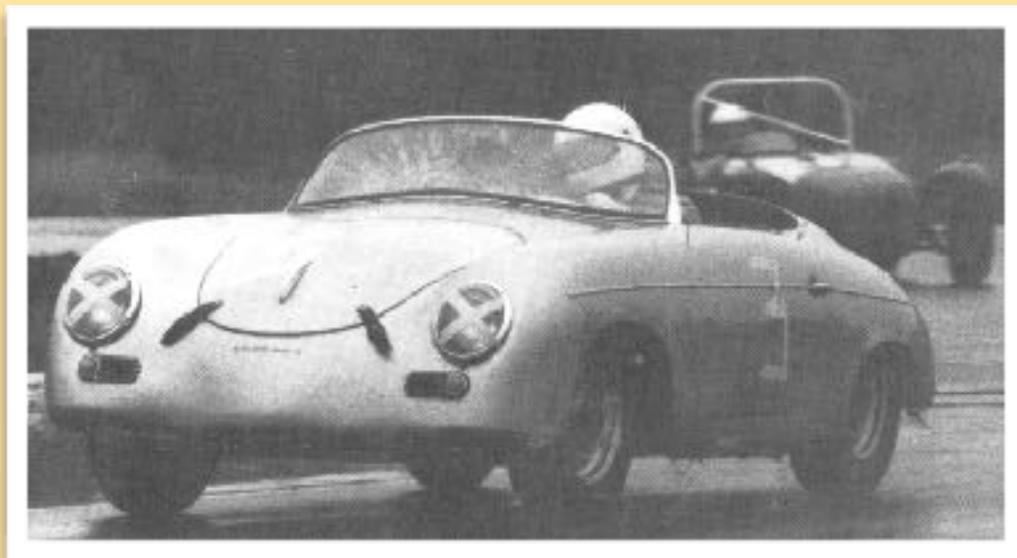
"I made it all the way back to Yonge and Eglinton, Toronto, at 3 am, half a mile from my home, only to be pulled over by the police because I was driving on old Italian license plates! When I told them my story, they stopped writing me a ticket and escorted me the rest of the way and made sure I parked in my driveway. I had to promise that I would not drive on those plates again. The police were more understanding then!"

"I won the Sunday handicap race at the first VARAC Vintage Festival in 1979. First place actually, erroneously, went to an Austin Healey 100 and it took a victory lap with the checkered flag, then it was discovered that the time keepers had made a miscalculation

and I had actually won. I was robbed of my victory parade lap, I have never quite gotten over that but I do have the plaque on my bedroom wall to prove that I won! Over the years other people have also said they

won that race, it was a bit of scramble at the end and the time keepers got confused, but I have the plaque and they don't!"

*Cheers, John Winter.*



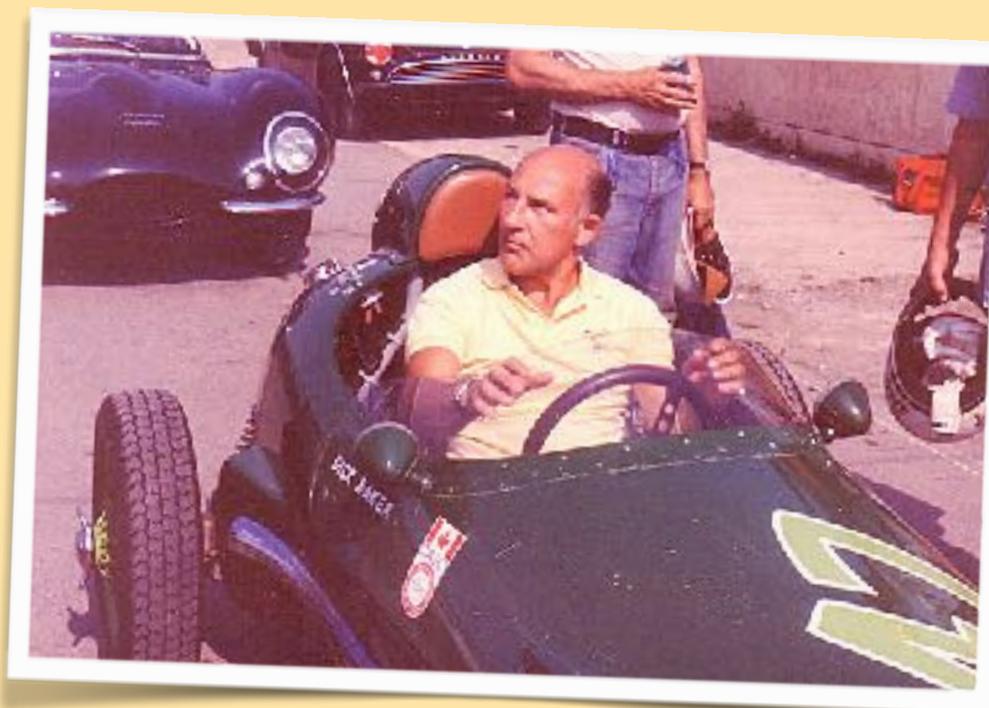
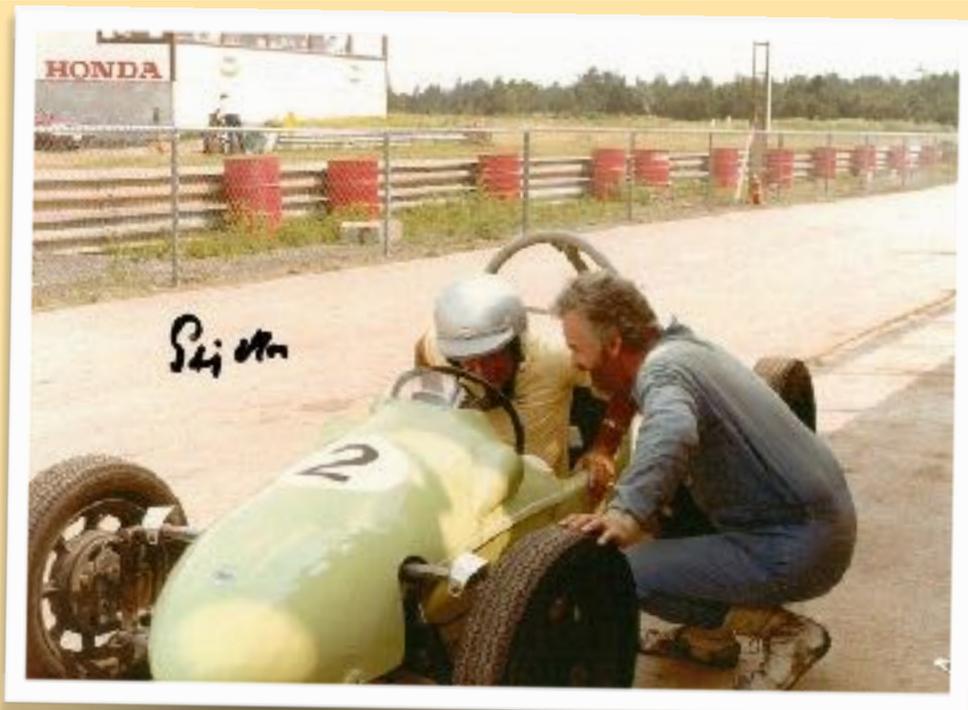
*Above: John Wright's Porsche 356 Speedster*

## Stirling Moss and VARAC...

Not too many people have a signed photo of Sir Stirling Moss getting out of their race car! Phil Lamont does!

This is Moss at Shannonville at a later VARAC event, following a test drive in Phil Lamont's F3 Cooper. Sir Stirling and Phil are chuckling about the "good vibrations" experienced when driving a car powered by a Norton 500cc single! Moss had forgotten about that aspect - he started his career in a 500cc single-seater.

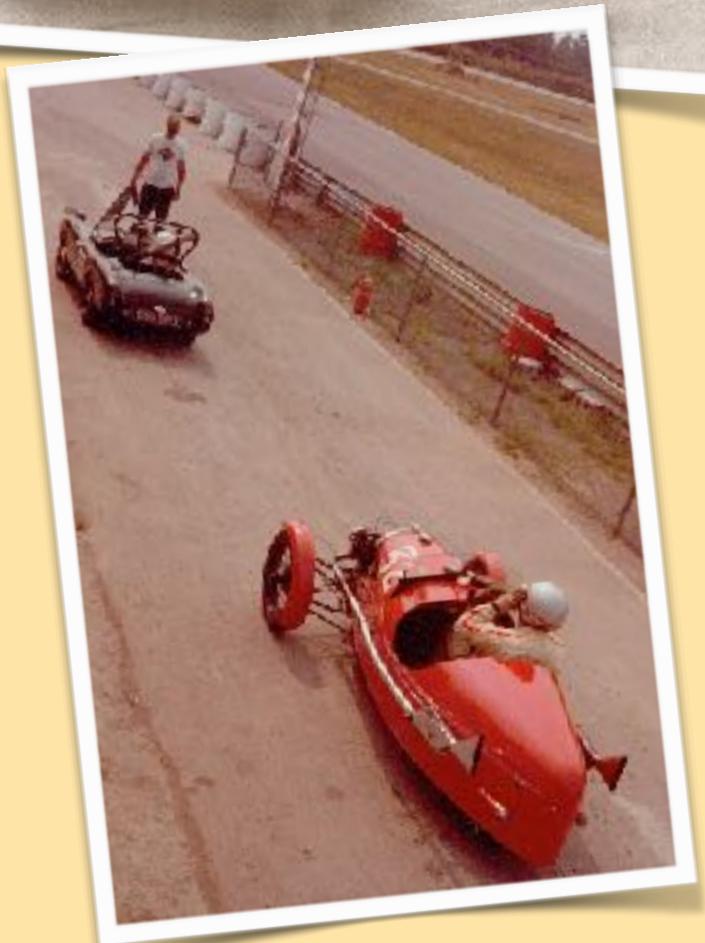
Right: Stirling Moss came to other VARAC Festivals, he is seen here at Mosport in Dick Baker's Bandini Formula Junior. *Photo courtesy of Stephen Burnett.*



## Dave Elcomb's Morgan "Trike"

"The search for our Morgan Three Wheeler was started in 1967", says Scooter Elcomb. "It was Canada's 100 anniversary, when we were all encouraged to do something special like burn down our outhouses or do a family history. Dave bought his '57 +4 Morgan before we were married. The next year however he wanted to race a more nimble car, not one with a Tractor Engine, tee hee! So he ordered the '61 4/4 with the little 105E engine and that was another Adventure! However Life got in the way of Dreams, thus the Trike, which came to us in '68, being flown to Montreal by Air France for 400 British pounds.

Was a dark British Racing Green which soon became a Corvette Red. We enjoyed that car very much, touring and going to Morgan Meets. Perfect for VARAC, starting in '76! And that is why Dave became the Pre War rep, as he thought he could get away without putting a roll bar on it, if he was in charge..." *Dave in the Trike is above right, following Scooter in her Berkley.*



## VARAC is celebrating an historic milestone in 2019

Story by J. Wally Nesbitt with Phil Lamont

*“Originally appeared in Inside Track Motorsport News”*

In 1976, a small group of vintage car racing enthusiasts combined their passions and various talents to create the Vintage Automobile Racing Association of Canada, better known by their acronym, VARAC.

In 1979 race driver, marketing marvel and eventual vintage race tire distributor Phil Lamont was elected president, succeeding first president Llouw Broadfield.

“Jack Boxstrom conned me into running for the position,” recalled Lamont. “My good friend Jack (a talented designer, racer and car collector) became the owner of Shannonville. To help promote our vintage club and to attract more vintage racers, he did it again, he conned me into helping organize our first vintage festival.”

“So, you can blame Boxstrom for all of this,” said Lamont.

‘Blame’ should not be the term use to describe the creation and growth of what has developed into the VARAC Vintage Grand Prix, the largest vintage racing celebration of its sort in Canada. The credit must be spread throughout the organization, from the initial efforts of Boxstrom, Lamont, John Winter and BARC-OC, to today’s dedicated VGP staff.

“Our first event (August 18-19, 1979) was pretty small, we weren’t exactly overwhelmed by attendees,” admitted Lamont. “But with Jack’s track, John Winter’s persistence, Bob Hanna’s help with specific Vintage rules and safety practices, and a never-ending list of volunteers, it grew pretty quickly.”

A turning point for the new racing body came the following year when a VARAC race was scheduled to support the Formula One event in Montreal. Allowed to keep the entry fees as part of their appearance contract, “that set us up financially.”

Another boost to the coffers came courtesy of a \$50,000 sponsorship package with Carlsberg/ Carling O'Keefe Breweries in 1981.



“As a result of this deal, we got three, 20-minute TV

shows on CTV’s Wide World of Sports. That really got us the exposure that we needed,” said Lamont. “We took a chunk of that money and brought in Stirling Moss. This was something new for him then, and he did a great job to help us promote the Vintage Festival. We put him to work for five or six straight days doing television, radio and newspaper interviews, but he didn’t seem to mind.”

“That turned out to be Shannonville’s biggest ever draw.”

The VARAC Festival continued at Shannonville Motorsports Park until 1991 when it changed venues and found a continuing home at Mosport Park (Canadian Tire Motorsport Park). “I’d known (Mosport owner) Harvey (Hudes) for years and he’d seen what we’d accomplished at Shannonville. In true promoter fashion, he pressured me to bring the festival to Mosport,” said Lamont. “We arrived in 1991 and never left.”

Throughout the history of the VARAC organization, there has been a dedicated class structure for their racing machinery, with vehicles currently designated as Monoposto (single seater), Pre-War, Vintage (pre-1962), Historic (pre-1973) and Classic (pre-1999). Often appearing on the same docket as the VARAC classes are invited guests, with drivers and vehicles drawn from across the continent and from as far away as Europe, South Africa and New Zealand.

Signing the VARAC VGP guest list have been the Historic F-1 series, the SCCA F5000 and Can Am Group 7 cars, the Cars of Trans Am, those Amazing Porsches, the Cars of Italy, the Diamond Jubilee Formula Junior World Tour,



Phil Lamont in his Cooper-Norton Mk13 leading two Stanguellinis

the 50th Anniversary for Formula Fords and the Royale Formula Ford Challenge.

In 2004, on the Silver Anniversary of the Vintage Grand Prix, 'Canada Class' creations took centre stage with such notables as Chinooks, Sadlers, Dailus, Kikis, Stebros, Dreossi, Ferrets and Altona and Kelly Formula Vee cars in competition.

Racing machinery have not been the only 'stars' in attendance at the VGP, with celebrities like Bob Tullius (2014), Brian Redman (2018), Joann Villeneuve (2017) and Canadian Motorsports Hall of Fame Inductees Gary Magwood (2015) and Ludwig Heimrath (2016) acting as VARAC Grand Marshals.

Even respected film director David Cronenberg has played a part in the Vintage Grand Prix activities, most notably when he damaged his classic 1962 Ferrari 250GT in a practice crash.

For the 40th anniversary of the VARAC vintage Grand Prix, organizers have decided to recognize the homegrown talent, celebrating the people who have helped to nurture the VGP into the prestigious annual festival that it has become. A labour of love created over 40 years ago has developed into a must-attend event on any vintage racer's bucket list, and the prospect of the Vintage Grand Prix growing even further in the future looks decidedly bright.



The British Automobile Racing Club - Ontario Centre (BARC-OC) was founded in 1959 by a group of motorsports enthusiasts in the Toronto area. BARC later developed a good relationship with John Nelson who in 1974 built Nelson International Raceway, the track now known as Shannonville Motorsports Park. Nelson built the track to organize motorcycle races. When he wanted to diversify into car racing BARC got involved and organized the first car race there. Later still Jack Boxstrom bought the track and renamed it Shannonville.

In 1976 VARAC was founded and their first track event was slated for the following year, a one-day CASC authorized driver's school, May 8, 1977 at "the new 1.4 mile circuit at Shannonville, entry fee about \$40. "

In May 28, 1977, VARAC teamed up with the British Automobile Racing Club for the club's first event, a ten lap vintage race at Shannonville. The winner was Bob Dengler (1953 Ferrari 375MM). He and Gill Baker (1956 Lotus Eleven Lemans) battled for the lead throughout the race, with Ollie Clubine (Lotus Six) and Tom Berent (1948 MGTC) not far behind. Also in close contention were Dennis Wilde (Lotus Elite), Roger Fountain (Fiat Abarth Zagato) and John Winter (Alfa Romeo).

Later still came the 1979 VARAC Vintage Festival, also held under the auspices of BARC. Things were a little different then and BARC had to deal with the somewhat "quirky" characters in their vintage cars. Scooter Elcomb says " I remember a member being Black Flagged, as he was racing with his 'Fuzzy Dice' hanging from his inside rear view mirror...all in fun".

A BARC spokesperson said recently, "We are pleased to have this opportunity to revive our relationship with VARAC at Shannonville. There are lots of memories and stories. A favourite is having to stop a driver from going on track with a huge cigar in his mouth! "

Times have changed but the enthusiasm for vintage racing is still alive and well, as we celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first vintage festival, thanks to both VARAC and BARC.



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ORGANIZED BY THE VINTAGE AUTOMOBILE RACING ASSOCIATION  
OF CANADA & THE BRITISH AUTOMOBILE RACING CLUB  
(ONTARIO CENTRE)

### AUGUST 18 & 19 1979

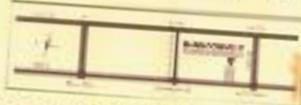
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