

# COMPETITION NEWS

## The Kastner Cup

KEITH FILES

The annual Kastner Cup meeting, held in August, this year was in Topeka, Kansas at the Heartland Park Raceway. The event is for all Triumph racers who are invited to a race somewhere in the US and it is hosted by the Friends Of Triumph (FOT). The entry is not limited to US residents as FOT membership is not limited to the US and I am one Brit who regularly makes the trip as several others have done so previously.

The event of course focuses on racing but the Kastner Cup, which is awarded by Kas Kastner himself, is not always given to the winner of the race itself; the winning criteria are as stated by Kas;

"I watch every session from Thursday through the race on Sunday, see every car, and take splits and laps times on most of the cars. I see the race from a very good vantage point and watch every lap and see every car. I see poor moves and good moves and fast guys and people not having a great time, spin outs, off course excursions, close encounters and terrific driving. I make a judgment of performance as well as off track personality and thus the winner is settled."

So what happened in 2010? Well, once again as I have done for the last five years or so, I travelled over to the US and get re-acquainted with my 1963 ex-works Sebring TR4 (1 of only 2 known survivors, John Nikas has the other and it is in its original post 1963 race condition) and go out to have some fun.

We (my wife Denise, Simon Watson from TR Enterprises and me) arrived at Heartland Park on the Thursday afternoon, where the

temperature was already well on its way to 100°F, to be greeted by a big group of fellow racers including Joe Alexander, who organised this year's event, and Jeff Snook, who looks after my TR4 in the US. Getting into 3 layers of Nomex in a nice shade of black did nothing to help out with the 'OMG, it is hot here' moment and sitting in the car for the first time in nearly a year only served to increase the 'sweat' factor before driving out onto the track for the first time.

The track is 2.5 miles long with lots of low speed, technical corners and two fairly high speed straights. It is very difficult to find a flow and a rhythm which was reflected in my times which were 2:14 in my first test session and 2:09 on the second session; I actually missed the first two sessions of the day as I had been delayed overnight in Chicago. Not bad for the first day; not as fast as some but with the track layout in my head and a good night's sleep, we could hope for some improvement on the Friday.

After the first practice on Friday I was at 2:04 and after the second practice I was at 2:01 with only Sam Halkias, winner of a major

SCCA Championship this year, in one (1 of 5) of his very rapid TR6s on 1:59 - Sam was to continue to be very fast all weekend and demonstrated why he has won so much with his TR6s over the years. In the first qualifying race of the day with a mix of Porches and others I managed to finish sixth overall on a 2:00 just behind a very quick Tony Drews in his very rapid TR4 - just before the heavens opened. You have seen nothing like this, it was like standing behind the water in a waterfall! very impressive but it did curtail events for the day.

Throughout the first two days the car had run faultlessly and very little was done to the car apart from topping up the fluids in both car and driver; water for me, oil for the engine. The tyres, however, were taking a beating as the track was really abrasive and mine, which are five years old now, were showing real signs of wear; some new ones for Laguna Seca next year I think...

Saturday now, and after a good night out at the Blind Tiger (a local micro brewery that also does ribs the size of a house or two) with the team and fellow racers it was time for the first



1963 Sebring TR4.

race of the weekend. In the US the starts are rolling starts which is something that I am not really used to and I managed to travel all the way along the start/finish straight in first gear so when the flag was dropped I had already maxed out on the revs and found myself swamped by others who knew how to do this rolling start thing. Once I worked out that bouncing of the rev limiter was not good for forward momentum I got underway properly and managed to move from eighth position to third position by the fourth corner which is just where I finished with no more dramas and, for the first time ever, I managed to beat Mr Speedy, Tony Drews with, as it turns out, the fastest 4 cylinder TR time of the weekend of 2:00.5. However, I have never beaten the two minute mark, which was the aim. Race 2 of the day came and this time we had a little added spice, a bit of rain. Now you would think that a Brit would know a bit about racing in the rain - I thought so too but three abreast with Tony and a 911 Porsche into the first hairpin was destined to end badly and it did. Tony was the first to get his car sideways, the guy in the Porsche got sideways as well and there was me acting as the meat in the sandwich. What to do and where to go? Bit of a dilemma really and it is amazing how your life slows to walking pace at these moments and clarity seems to occur, or lady luck, and luck it was as there was just enough gap between both cars for me to skip through and onto the run-off area without any of us hitting each other but I did lose out on the track by losing six places and no matter how hard I tried I could not get them back. There it was, my worst finish so far in eighth place and my tyres felt like 50p pieces.

Sunday and it was the day of the big race,

all of the TRs were gridded by the fastest lap time that we had achieved in any of the previous races which meant that, to my surprise, I was on the front row alongside Sam Halkias who had managed to reduce his lap times from 1:59 to 1:55! "Hmm, not going to catch him am I, so best I try to keep ahead of the other 4 cylinder cars" I thought, and with the next six of us split by less than a second we were in for a bit of a squabble for second place. Amazingly I seemed to have got the hang of the rolling start in this race and managed to be in the right gear and hit the loud pedal at just the right time when the flag was dropped and held onto second place. I even managed to hold onto Sam for most of the first lap before he shot off into the distance. Second place is where I started and second place is where I finished and I was a hugely happy person as this was my best ever result in the US and the first time that I had beaten all of the other 4 cylinder TRs, a great moment for me.

After the race was the gathering of drivers, friends, wives, husbands, children, crew and supporters for the awarding of the Kastner Cup; there were many worthy claims to this award as many had driven exceptionally well, some had major successes in events leading up to this meeting and some were just truly wonderful people who deserved recognition for their efforts over the years so when the announcement was made you can imagine my surprise when it was my name being called out. I am never usually lost for words but I really was this time and could not say anything other than to keep thanking Kas and look at the trophy in complete disbelief.

This award is the most prestigious award in vintage Triumph racing in the US and is truly



Kas Kastner presenting the Cup to the author.

an honour for me and a testimony to the hard work from Joe Alexander (he found the car for me), Jack Drews (dearly departed now but the guy who did a lot of the preparation on the car), Jon Wood for building the engine, transmission and set-up, Terry Stetler and Simon Watson for the 'spanners' and not least my wife who helps me to live my dream.

The car along with the trophy will reside in Jeff Snook's wonderful museum in Bowling Green, Ohio for the next year (they would not let me bring it home just in case I don't take it back, as if...) before it is given to the next recipient at Laguna Seca next June.

After Laguna Seca my car, believed to be #36, the Bolton & Rothschild car, is going to be returned to Sebring specification with the help of many more friends and enthusiasts in the US and the UK not least of whom is John Nikas who not only has the #37 car but a load of detailed information and spares for the car. The story of how I came to own this car, what we have done with it and the return to Sebring specification will be another story that I will tell in the TR magazine over the coming years if there is enough interest.

A final note is to say a big thank you to all of my friends in the US and beyond for making us so welcome and for being such a great group of guys. You should know that the racers in the US have to be really admired; whereas I fly 5000 odd miles to be there some of them have 6000 mile round road trips to get to the meeting and travel with their motor homes, cars, spares, tools, welding equipment and more because, unlike in Britain, there is no specialist Triumph assistance nearby and they do self sufficiency like you would not believe - it is rare for them to be beaten by equipment.



Kastner Cup drivers 2010.



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