

# The CAPTAIN The HEALEY AND THE SCAFFOLDING POLE



Between 1952 and 1955, a small village on the Devon / Cornwall border brought Motor Racing to the South West of England, for the first time. Based on a former RAF airfield, it played host to many forms of racing, including Formula 1 and the attracted top drivers of the day. It was the circuit, at which Lotus gained its first F1 win.

Davidstow was also the backdrop to a very narrow escape, involving one of the NEW Healey 100s - which we recount here, with the help of Peter Tutthill (from his book - "Davidstow - A History of Cornwall's Formula One Race Circuit").

## Davidstow. Monday, 2nd. August 1954

The entry list was very satisfactory and contained what appeared to be very exciting news. The release headlines read "New Car to race at Davidstow", going on to report the entry of a new British Formula One single seater. It was recorded as being an Aston Martin, built by David Brown to the new 2 litre Formula 1 and to be driven by Eric Brandon - absolutely wonderful news. There was a list of important entries and details of a further 300 yards of spectator enclosure on the back straight.

Peter takes up the story. "Practice on the Sunday brought 59 cars to the circuit, as George Abecassis in the HWM Jaguar whistled round in 1 min 21 sec. (82.11 mph), to be the quickest. The arrival of late entry, John Coombs' Lotus Mk.8, looking startlingly streamlined in its new unpainted aluminium bodywork, caused further excitement" "before numerous excursions into the scenery by other competitors brought proceedings to a halt. This was not because of any devastating accident to man or machine, but simply that so many straw bales had disintegrated under impact, that a reserve supply had to be brought up as replacements".



Practice then "came to a premature halt, due to very thick mist on the course; surprise, surprise August Bank Holiday at Davidstow was not a pretty sight. In fact, it wasn't even in sight, due to the density of the fog". Autosport were absolutely correct when they wrote:- The Organisers C.M.R. "must surely be the unluckiest people in motor sport today, for once again adverse weather conditions were instrumental in keeping away a record crowd last Monday".

Peter continues, "The old hands at motor race spectating could be picked out. They were shapeless and dripping, in oilskins and waterproofs - but dry and warm." which was near the truth, but not completely, as unfortunately the "drizzle meant that even those in waterproofs found it gradually penetrated their defences. The mist and fog had now turned to drizzle, better in that visibility would just about permit racing, but worse in

that it was much, much wetter. Racing did get under way soon after eleven o'clock and the programme of eight races was completed, so it wasn't all bad news."

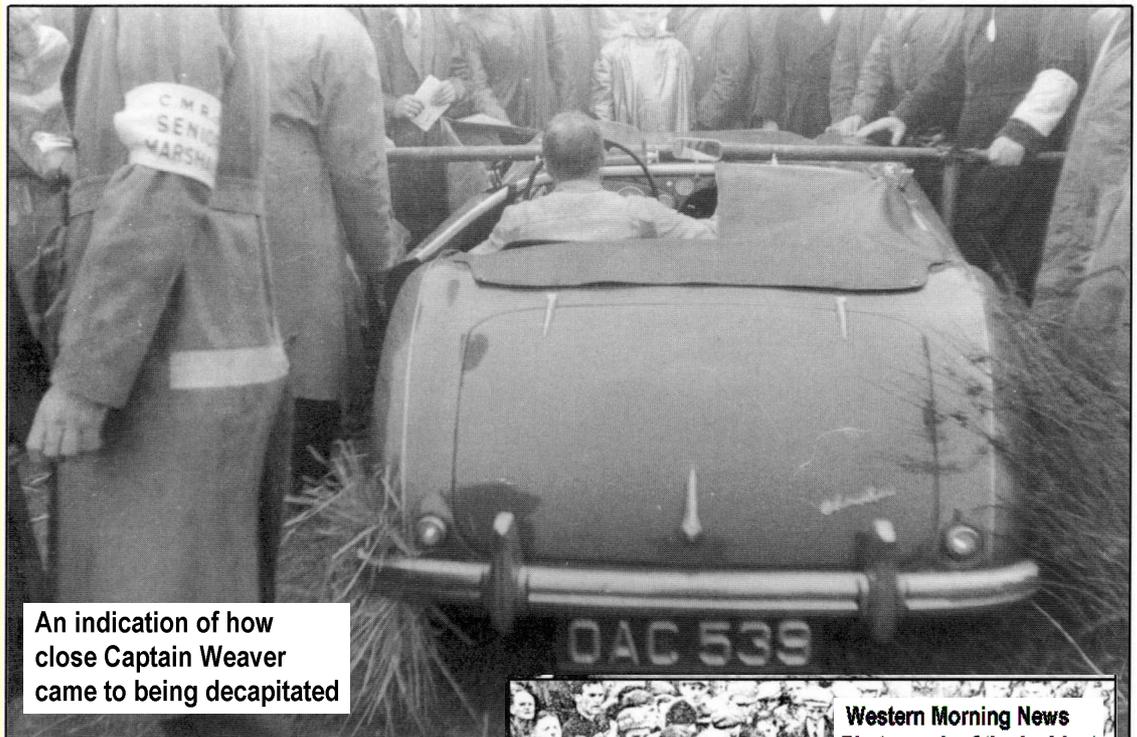
Our Healey interest came in Race 3 as Peter Tutthill explains:

### Race 3 Sportscars - Unlimited Capacity. Heat 2

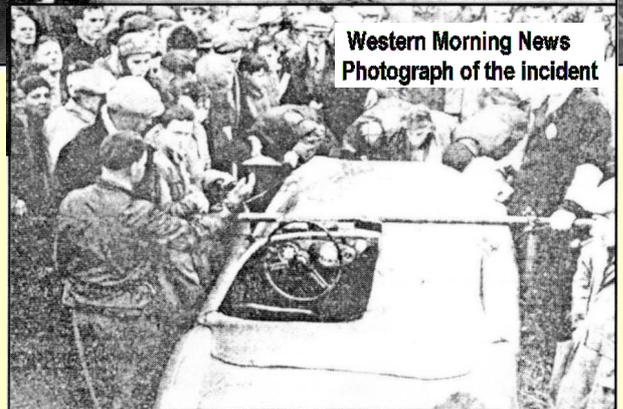
"Jack Walton shot into the lead with Tom Sopwith having to work hard to fend off John Coomb's very modern looking Lotus-Connaught, delighting the crowds in the process. The situation changed dramatically on the fourth lap as Walton's Cooper Bristol

suddenly slowed, making strange noises, his prop shaft coupling had broken, damaging the differential in the process and he was regrettably unable to take any further part in proceedings. The next lap, it was Kyffin's turn to perform a disappearing act, Bruce Halford in the Riley TT Sprite AVC 17 finding himself in third place, and driving in a very polished style.

It wasn't finished yet, as on the 8th lap, U.S. Air Force Captain R.B.Weaver, possibly thinking it was his turn to produce some drama, went straight on at Altarnun Corner scattering the bales in every direction.



An indication of how close Captain Weaver came to being decapitated



**"Car roars right at Crowd"** - was the Post and Weekly News headline, and "that was factual reporting", as "Weaver's" Austin Healey 100 continued, at undiminished speed, across the grass towards the crowd, lined up behind the barrier. This consisted of a waist high, horizontal scaffolding pole, which did nothing to prevent the car's bonnet shooting underneath it to collide with the line of spectators' cars beyond, as the spectators themselves scurried to safety. The collision was very fortuitous, as in arresting the Austin Healey's further progress it prevented what could have been a rather gruesome accident. The photos show how the driver's head had come within inches of making contact with the metal bar, and possibly of removing it completely from his shoulders."

"A lady sitting in the trackside car was somewhat shaken, one report says with slight bruising, another with minor cuts, luckily nothing more serious; as for Capt. Weaver, he escaped totally unhurt."



And so the event continued, with Race 4, for Formula 3 cars - to be raced over 20 laps - although this race received little press coverage, probably due to the continuing interest in Weaver's excursion - which was a pity, since one Ken Tyrrell put in a tremendous effort, in his Formula 3 500cc car, as the murky conditions became steadily worse.

Funny how things happen, isn't it.

ED - Our very grateful thanks to Peter Tutthill, for allowing us to use his research, his words and his photographs, to help us tell this Healey story.