

Paving the way towards a street race

Despite the troubles encountered at the first 'On The Streets' event, a second was organised in 1980. The 'Lucas On The Streets Sport Spectacular' was run over a 2.5 mile circuit around the back streets of Hurst Street, Moat Lane and Barford Street, by the wholesale markets which were used as a paddock for the racing cars. The temporary circuit had a racing feel as it was fully decorated with racing banners, and marshaled by members of the British Motor Racing Marshal's Club. Again, many famous names, associated with well-known cars, took part.

There were seven Formula One World Champions at the event, and guests were given the chance to run solo around the demonstration circuit: Juan Manuel Fangio in his Mercedes 300 SLR (which he drove to second place on the 1955 Mille Miglia); Sir Jack Brabham in his loaned Brabham BT2 Formula 2 car; Carroll Shelby and Roy Salvadori, reunited with their 1959 Le Mans-winning Aston Martin DBR1 car; Phil Hill guesting in a JCB Ferrari Dino; and the newly crowned 1980 Formula One World Champion, Alan Jones, in his Saudia-Leyland-sponsored Williams FW07B.

Prompted by the success of the event, and questions over the Birmingham road race project, Barwell said publicly: "I think the time is right following the tremendous success ... to reopen the issue." City engineers had already made a feasibility study of the proposed circuit drawn up by Martin Hone. They found no major snags with the plans. The two mile circuit met international regulations and a major international race



1980 'On The Streets' programme.

could be staged as early as 1984, followed by more prestigious events afterwards.

Roughly a year later, Hone and council leaders felt they had finally found a suitable circuit to host a road race in Birmingham. In October, Martin Hone submitted a package of proposals to the City Council, believing he had found a 2.5 mile route around the city that would fit the bill.

This came after scrapping a controversial proposal to run the circuit through Lee Bank council housing

1986 – The Halfords Birmingham Superprix

Monday 25th August 1986

Race officials had mounted a night-long vigil to prevent the Armco barriers being tampered with and avoid a repeat of the vandalism that marred the qualifying/practice session and wasted so much time the previous day. The *Express & Star* quoted Andrew Marriott of CSS

Promotions: “Everything is set now and its all systems go for a memorable Superprix.”

The timetable was modified once again:

0840	Thundersports	Heat 2 qualifying session
0900-0940	Pro-Am Renault	Practice session
1000-1020	F3000	Warm-up
1035-1100	FF1600	Qualifying session
1120-1155	Formula Libre	Timed qualifying session
1215 Race 1	Pro-Am Renault	2x 5 laps
1300 Race 2	Thundersports	30 laps
1435 Race 3	F3000	51 laps
1635 Race 4	FF1600	10 laps
1715 Race 5	Formula Libre	15 laps

Race 2: The Halfords Birmingham Superprix: 51 laps

As the crowd continued to grow around the street circuit, the rain became even heavier. Hurricane Charley had arrived, and it was a deluge! The cars set off on the warm-up lap, and into a ball of spray thrown up from the wet tyres. Visibility was poor and traction was worse. As a result, Tommy Bryne and Pierre Henri Raphanel had minor spins and, on arrival for the grid, Raphanel had to weave through to slot himself in the starting position at the fifth row. It was an offence that would end in disqualification.

At 2.35pm, the Halfords Birmingham Superprix was set to start. The tension built and, despite the weather, there was an electricity in the air. The cars were lined up, the warm-up lap complete, everything



David Leslie prepares for the start of the 1986 Celebrity Renault 5 race under wet conditions, ahead of local Birmingham MP Roger King. King was drawn in 5th place by ballot, using Peter Gottlieb's car.



Eventual winner Stefano Modena heads a tightly bunched group.

ahead of the chasing pack. Wallace then had to divert his attention from chasing Modena to defending himself against Gugelmin and a rapid Martini.

Wallace held off the onslaught from the Brazilian for a further seven laps, and Roberto Moreno gained a lot of ground up Peter Barwell Hill, into Halfords Corner. On the approach to Ferodo Corner, Wallace suddenly moved across and slid wide under heavy braking. His Madgwick Motorsport Lola careered over

first lap); Barilla; Bailey; Euser; Hytten (after an amazing first lap); Leoni; Belmondo; Apicella; Foitek; Spence; Nurminen; Moreno; Langes and Ferté.

At the end of the sixth lap, Stefano Modena had built a good gap between himself and Andy Wallace,

setting the fastest lap time so far of 1m 29.63sec, with an average speed of 99.2mph. Modena was even quicker on his next lap, setting a time of 1m 24.99sec (104.62mph). The Italian was in dominant form, increasing his lead to 8.5 seconds

City skyscrapers provide the backdrop as cars hurtle into Halfords Corner.

the gravel that covered a roundabout there, which it cleared before ending up in an escape road. He quickly booted the throttle and spun the car 180 degrees. When he rejoined the track he was in 5th, behind works Ralts of Moreno and Gugelmin, as well as Luis Pèrez Sala.





The melee at Zenith Bend, which resulted in an irate Spence being removed from the track – still in his car! ...
(Stuart Knibbs)





Allan McNish negotiates the wide Halfords Corner in front of a bumper Bank Holiday crowd.

A Lola floor stay had punctured through the side of the Reynard and penetrated the radiator. It was a cruel fate for him, and with Comas struggling a deserved nine points would have opened the championship up. "It's obviously impossible for me to win a race," he shrugged. "I don't know if my luck will ever change." The Italian nearly made it to Formula 1 with the Japanese Dome outfit (details in *Unraced* by SS Collins), but his bad luck remained and Apicella only ever started one Grand Prix, for Jordan, where he crashed out before the first corner. Today he races sports cars.

Van de Poele was now leading the Halfords Birmingham Superprix. Before Apicella retired from the race van de Poele had simply been keeping the Reynard in sight. The car was clearly smoking from early on, and obviously getting worse. People were sure that van de Poele was just sitting back, waiting for it to go pop before striding away into the distance.

On the 25th lap, Frentzen had a moment at Ferodo, but managed to keep his momentum and get

close into Gilbert-Scott for the exit of Halfords on lap 26. He jinxed past Gilbert-Scott at Ferodo Corner with a superb move around the outside for second. Frentzen then began to eat away at van de Poele's lead of 5.9 seconds after 26 laps. After setting a lap time that only Apicella had bettered, Frentzen reduced the gap to 3.36 seconds after 28 laps. He was pushing hard, just barely ahead of the mid-field scrap, feeling like he had a chance of winning, only to bin it at Dynaglaze Corner in the gravel trap. He jumped out of his car and shook his head in disappointment. "After Apicella went out I really thought I could win," he said later, "but the car was oversteering more and more for several laps." It was a shame for him, considering van de Poele's problems, but a more experienced driver would have bided his time. "The car felt a bit funny for a couple of laps, as though the steering rack was bent or something. It just got away from me," sighed the German. "When I saw van de Poele just ahead. I really thought victory was possible." It was the third time he had managed to find the same gravel trap over the whole weekend.