



A FAMILY AFFAIR

A father-and-son team dominated the 2017 Jaguar Classic Challenge, as **Malcolm McKay** explains...

Typified by strong grids with E-types always the front-runners, 2017's Jaguar Classic Challenge produced a lot of close, fast and fair racing that wowed the crowds at four major historic festivals in the UK and the finale at the Six Hours of Spa race weekend in Belgium. The season kicked off at the Donington Historic Festival on 30 April, with 28 of the 36 cars competing being E-types. Es raced in Class D for FIA GT homologation 34 (1961 spec including cast-iron cylinder block), Class E for FIA GT homologation 34, 100 (1963) or 184 (1964) including alloy block, and Class F (same as Class E but with minimum weight 1100kg, steel monocoque, cast-iron block and standard angle cylinder head).

The highly experienced Gary Pearson took pole position in his much-raced E-type for a bright, dry race at Donington. From the start, though, and for the first 10 laps, he had a great battle with series newcomer Ben Short – unsurprising because Short had qualified a minuscule 0.003 seconds behind Pearson, with Thomas/Lockie third and Folch-Rusinol/Hadfield fourth. Both Pearson and Short drove solo, though of course still had to stop as long as the rest for the mandatory pitstops, and the race ended with Pearson 14 seconds ahead.

"I am absolutely delighted to win the first event of the season in what was a great race and the perfect start to the season," said Pearson afterwards. "I pushed hard for the opening laps, which paid dividends at the end. It was truly exciting racing against Ben Short, he is an excellent driver and is learning how to race E-types very quickly. He will no doubt be a threat throughout the rest of the Jaguar Classic Challenge season."



- Top: Graeme Dodd gets the drop on pole man Alistair Dyson (155) at Oulton Park – they would finish first and second
- Above: the Dodds took their first win in the second race of the season at the spectacular Brands Hatch circuit *Photo J Retter*



- Left: Costas Michael took third overall at Brands in his Class F semi-lightweight
- Below: the Chris Milner/Nigel Greensall Class D car in the pits at Silverstone Classic. The 1961-spec OTS raced in USA when it was new, as seen in this great period image (inset)
- Bottom: fantastic grid full of E-types forming up at Silverstone Classic. Julian Thomas and Gary Pearson lead the way



Ben Short deservedly won the Driver of the Day award but, as it turned out, more of a challenge for the rest of the season would come from the third-placed car. Father and son Graeme and James Dodd, experienced competitors both but racing their E-type for the first time, drove a canny and consistent race from fifth place on the grid to finish on the podium.

Past winners Julian Thomas and Calum Lockie set fastest lap at an average of 89.26mph, but could manage only fourth place on this occasion. Class F winner was Tim Mogridge, with Bob Binfield fastest and winner in Class D.

The cars were out again two months later, on the first weekend of July at the Brands Hatch Superprix, again on a dry track, and the Dodds had clearly built on their first-race experience. With Pearson and Thomas/Lockie absent from the 25-strong field, they qualified a clear first ahead of Robert Oldershaw's E-type, with the storming Ben Short third fastest.

The Dodds would hold on to their lead throughout, lapping all cars up to third place. After Rob Oldershaw dropped out, Jamie Boot finished second. Third place on the podium was taken by Costas Michael, racing his semi-lightweight E-type in Class F – an impressive performance that won him the Driver of the Day award.

Graeme Dodd commented: "I really enjoyed racing at Brands. The first two laps were quite difficult because I had to readjust myself to the car and track. The E-type is such an iconic car in which to win a race!"

Son Jamie added: "The car was brilliant and went really well – I dialled into it quickly and the traffic behaved when we came back through the field. It was a fantastic race."





- Above: Silverstone Classic, and Graeme and Jamie Dodd watch as Ben Short is congratulated on his third-place drive, while Gary Pearson appears to be wondering how to get that massive trophy home...
- Right: the Dodds took over the lead at Spa to score an emphatic final victory in the race and the championship



Just four weeks later, the Silverstone Classic weekend produced a phenomenal 45-car grid, 35 of them E-types, qualifying on a dry track. "There are 10 cars here worthy of a podium," commented Graeme Dodd before the race. "Trouble is, we only have three steps. It's going to be a great race!"

Thomas and Lockie were back, taking pole by a narrow margin from Gary Pearson, closely followed by John Pearson, with the Dodds fourth just ahead of Ben Short. There was no doubt an exciting race was on the cards!

And so it proved, in bright, dry conditions as Julian Thomas led a fierce battle before sadly retiring after three laps, leaving the lead to Gary Pearson. He had no easy task, however, with Graeme Dodd and Ben Short soon snapping at his tailpipes, after Short had got the better of an exciting duel with John Pearson. After the pitstops, Jamie Dodd pushed Pearson ever harder until he finally spun at the tricky Maggots/Becketts complex: Dodd took the lead, but shortly afterwards the race was red-flagged as Bob Binfield rolled his E-type and, as the rules require, the positions at the last full lap are counted, handing the win back to Gary Pearson.

"The standard of drivers in the race is truly excellent and it was plenty of fun throughout," commented Pearson. "The car

worked really well, it did what it needed to and I made a mistake as I spun at Becketts and spun away the lead. I had a really good battle with Julian at the start and then we appear to have lost time in the pitlane. With it being so close, I was pushing quite hard towards the end – but I didn't win it on merit!"

Fastest lap went to Jamie Dodd, Ben Short took the third place on the podium and the Driver of the Day award, Kirkaldy/Watson won Class F and Milner/Greensall took Class D – both also taking fastest laps in their classes.

Tim Hannig, Director of Jaguar Land Rover Classic, commented: "We have seen some absolutely fantastic gentlemanly racing and exemplary sportsmanship – but I would like to toast the inventor of the rollcage, which no doubt helped Bob Binfield after his incident on circuit..."

Five weeks on, the Oulton Park Gold Cup at the end of August hosted the final race in the UK with a grid of 20, again in dry conditions. This time it was Alistair Dyson's turn to take the fastest lap, just ahead of the ever-consistent Dodds and Jamie Boot. Unable to get a good run, Ben Short qualified down in eighth place, which promised some fun on race day.

So it proved, with Short absolutely storming. Graeme Dodd out-dragged Dyson off the line and Short also passed him before

the end of the first lap. Three laps later, he shot past Dodd to take the lead on lap four, after setting the fastest lap of the race on lap three. The mandatory pitstop brought problems, however, which forced his retirement.

Alistair Dyson and Jamie Dodd battled for the lead, Dodd finally reclaiming it when Dyson ran wide, leading to a second victory for the father-son pairing. Jamie Boot took third, 45 seconds adrift, with Russell-Jardine taking the Class F win in fourth and Robert Gate, who had battled up from 11th on the grid to fifth, winning Driver of the Day. Melling/Minshaw took sixth and Class D, just ahead of John Burton who was awarded Most Improved Driver across the season so far.

Felix Welch, JLR Classic's General Manager of Marketing, Sales and Service, enjoyed the race. "It has been an excellent weekend with some terrific action on track," he commented. "It was great to see all the drivers getting out of their cars at the end looking very happy! The Jaguar Classic Challenge is just as exhilarating for spectators, who clearly enjoyed watching the cars coming out of Oulton Park's corners sideways."

Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium looked set for an upset, as Andy Newall and German lady racer Rhea Sautter pulled out



- Above: Gomm/Keith-Lucas chase Boot/Wilkinson through Eau Rouge at Spa
- Left: Spa podium – from left, Andy Newall, Rhea Sautter, Graeme Dodd, Jamie Dodd, Lukas and Niklas Halusa

a phenomenal lap in damp qualifying conditions, more than two seconds ahead of the Class D E-type of Milner/Greensall and 4.5 seconds ahead of the Dodds, with Marcus Oeynhausen alongside them on the second row of the 34-strong grid. It wasn't the expected upset, however, because when the dry race began, Oeynhausen shot straight into the lead and started to pull away, setting the fastest lap of the race on lap two. Sautter, Graeme Dodd and Nick Riley were left battling for second, until a gearbox fault emasculated Oeynhausen's performance and he dropped right back down the field.

After the pitstops, Jamie Dodd consolidated his lead with a fastest lap just half a second off Oeynhausen's best, and 1.5 seconds faster than the Sautter/Newall best, to ensure a dominant victory in the race and the championship. Third at Spa was Niklas and Lukas Halusa's E-type from Austria, while the Class F win and Driver of the Day went to Tim Mogridge, and Class D to Milner/Greensall.

Jamie Dodd commented: "The race was a great success and the car fortunately stayed strong. Dad had a good start and kept up the pace until the pitstops. When I took over, we had such a big lead that I could back off and save the car. It's our first season racing the E-type and overall it has gone very well – we're delighted."

Graeme and Jamie Dodd's E-type was built and run by M&C Wilkinson, who also prepared Jamie Boot's E and Chris Milner's

Class D winner. Michael Wilkinson commented: "Five races, five podiums with three wins ain't bad at all. Many thanks and congratulations to Graeme and James, plus all of Team Dodd, as it's been a pleasure working together all year.

"Chris Milner and Nigel Greensall won Class D with Chris's 1961-spec E, which we mechanically rebuilt and prepare. This is a true period USA race car and so nearly won this year's Goodwood Revival Kinrara Trophy race – which made our team even more determined to win JCC Class D at Spa a week later. We did: we achieved first in class in the race, to win the class overall, and also fourth overall in the championship with a Class D car, with three class wins and a third during the season.

"Finally, our client Diane Osborne received the Spirit of Jaguar award for her great racing and contribution to Jaguar's series in her Mk1 saloon.

"We have had clients racing since the first Jaguar E-type Challenge races in 2011 right through to today's Jaguar Classic Challenge series. We are all delighted to have achieved these results in such a prestigious series."

"The competitors have made this another thrilling year," said Tim Hannig, director of Jaguar Land Rover Classic. "I am so pleased that the team has successfully staged this fantastic series in the UK and Belgium, and thank all the drivers and teams that have competed in the best possible spirit. We look forward to sharing details about 2018 in the New Year."