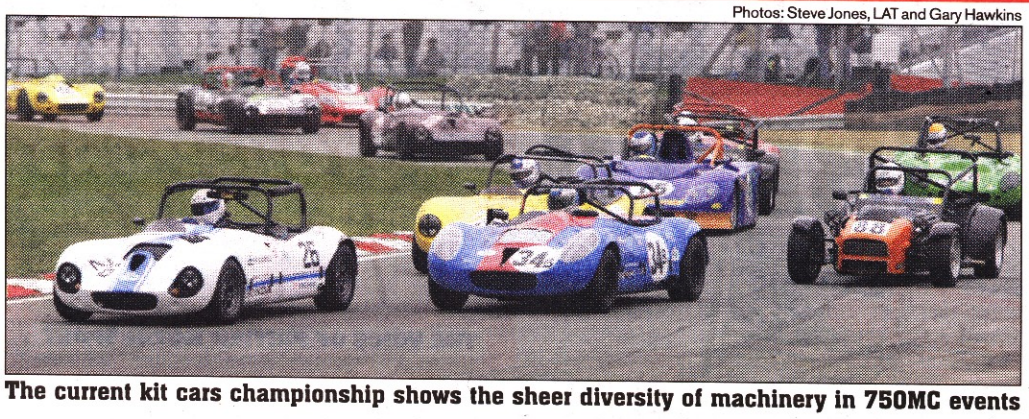
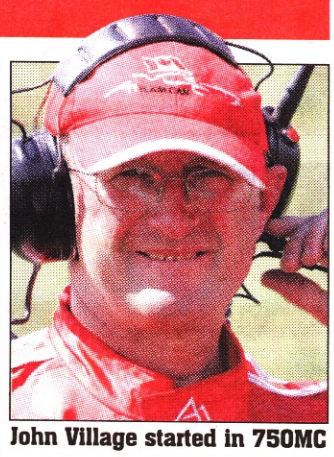
Photos: Steve Jones, LAT and Gary Hawkins



The current kit cars championship shows the sheer diversity of machinery in 750MC events

Adrian Reynard will return to 750 Formula action this year



John Village started in 750MC

self-built 1974 Reliant-engined Village V2 project. Since then Village's career has spanned to high-ranking events such as International Formula Master and A1GP under his Team JVA banner.

"I always wanted to be a racing driver but I didn't come from a motorsport background," explains Village. "I joined the club when I was 13 and eventually bought a kit car. I raced it twice and decided to put a hacksaw through it, it was that bad.

"The biggest draw of the club was its inspiring community. I learnt so much from many great people during my time there and it really gave me the foundation to get to where I am today. And honestly I don't think it has changed much since. Sure, it's expanded but the key principles remain unchanged and that serves as the main reason it's still popular today."

Nowhere in the club's ranks is there a series that shows a greater variation of machinery and imagination than its inaugural championship, the 750 Formula. Introduced in 1949 by the club's chairman Holly Birkett, the series was originally aimed at two-seater racing cars powered by a 750cc Austin engine (hence the club's title).

Over the course of its 60 years many steps have been taken to modernise the category, including the introduction of Reliant and more recently Fiat Fire engines in 2003. But the original ethos has refused to die and it remains widely open on both chassis and suspensions designs. This has led to the series retaining much of its popularity, and it is the UK's longest running racing series.

"The 750 Formula is like Grandma's old broom," says Knight. "It has had numerous new heads and even a new handle, but essentially it retains the same format and purpose. It has always been a hotbed for manufacturers tweaking projects and the fact that it still attracts a high level of engineering talent is one reason we cherish it."

The 750 Formula laid the foundations for modern series such as Formula Four and Vee to be introduced to the UK, and has a history of attracting not only famous names but also dedicated racers. The series not only produced landmark engineering achievements, but attracted an entire new breed of enthusiast to the sport. David Morgan, a 750 member since 1959 and author of the upcoming book *Seven Fifty Motor Club – The Birthplace of Modern British Motorsport*, credits the series with revolutionising club racing in the UK. "750 Formula was the first racing series to be accessible to the common man," he says. "Back in the 1950s racing was the preserve of the rich, but when 750F came along everything changed. Its relaxed regulations and low budgets meant anyone could turn up with whichever creation they had in their garage and that led to some glorious examples of machinery.

"This theory of accessibility, I believe, has made the club what it is today. Whether you want to race a home-built single-seater or a standard hatchback it's very easy to get started in a 750MC series, and that has contributed largely to the club's longevity."

The 750F also paved the way for another specialist series called the 1172 Formula, which offered drivers an alternative from the traditional Austin engines by utilising the more modern Ford 10 unit. The category had open chassis and suspension regulations and evolved by introducing new and larger Ford engines, which led the series to take the name Formula 1200 and later 1300 in the 1970s.

One of the most famous names to have raced in the category is 1962/3 F1200 champion Arthur Mallock. The now-famous Mallock marque began with a string of Austin Seven specials, most notably the 1958 Mallock U2 Mk1 (originally given the tongue-in-cheek 'You Too' title after a prominent advertising slogan at the time that read: 'You too can have a body like mine').

"With my father so involved in the club I was destined to follow him into it," says Ray Mallock, who carries on his father's legacy at RML alongside his brother Richard. "My first car, unsurprisingly, was a Seven, which I learnt to drive in a field. I used to flick through the old 750MC bulletins to find tips on modifying it and eventually built my own special. That was my first experience of engineering racing cars. The 750MC always offered a superb level of engineering freedom and still encourages people to experiment. The DNA of the club revolves around a love of cars as much as a love of motorsport. This led to some truly outstanding engineers rising through its ranks simply because they loved engineering and improving their cars, and were allowed to express themselves. Without this ethos, names such as Chapman may have never come to fruition."

Ray Mallock liked 750MC's freedom

In modern seasons the flow of new manufacturers hasn't ceased. In 1997 Phil Abbott wheeled out the first examples of a Radical Sportscar in the Sports 2000 field. The marque now has three one-make championships and is a regular runner at Le Mans.

Another new machine is set to debut this year to follow Radical's example. The new Eclipse SM1 will be unleashed in the Kit Car field by a team of club members. The SM1 is the brainchild of club regulars Clive Hudson, Paul Boyd, Lesley Wilson and Simon Childs who have engineered the car to run an innovative dual chain-drive system. It features a two-litre Duratec engine coupled to a twin chain-drive system designed to power the rear wheels independently. Five examples are expected to line up for the second round of the season at Mallory Park on April 5.

"We noticed there weren't many mid-engined kit cars so we decided to build one from scratch ourselves," explains Hudson. "The Kit Car series is perfect for us because it allows us the freedom to build the car how we wanted it without having to mould it to strict regulations. The club has a tradition of innovation and that has allowed us to build a very different and versatile car."

Not everything 750MC has tried has worked. There have been some disappointments along the way. Falling entries led to the Hot Hatch Championship getting axed last season after 15 years – although the Stock Hatch series is now attracting record registrations, despite its limited-modification ethos going against the 750MC tradition.

To commemorate its platinum year, club officials have scheduled a series of special events. The first will be a road rally from Lowestoft to Land's End, which featured as one of the club's inaugural public events. The Austin Seven will also be represented in celebrations with an anniversary race meeting at Silverstone this summer.

"The Seven has always had a place within the club and we are keen to preserve that," adds Morgan. "A celebration wouldn't be complete without the car that essentially started it all."

Today the 750MC runs 12 championships catering for almost any kind of machinery and comprises more than 30 regional centres across the country.

As for the future, the club has acted to alleviate the financial stranglehold surrounding UK motorsport by freezing entry and registration fees for all of its current series. And Knight believes the club to be well equipped to keep on growing towards its centenary year.

"We strive to make racing accessible and love to see creative engineering within our championships as much now as our predecessors did 70 years ago," he adds. "It is this eclectic mix of competition and experimentation which has made – and which will continue to make – this club special to its members and fans." ■

The 750 MC is still committed to club racing after 70 years

HOW 750MC DEVELOPED

1939: 750 Motor Club is founded based on an idea by prolific motorsport journalist Bill Boddy. Its main aim was to provide cheap motorsport for the Austin Seven.

1949: Club chairman Holly Birkett creates 750 Formula, a racing series featuring the Austin Seven engine but which featured free chassis and suspension regulations.

1952: 1172 Formula is introduced, featuring 1172cc Ford 10 engines and free chassis and suspension regulations. The series was twice renamed, once as Formula 1200 in and then as 1300 in 1954 with the introduction of new engines

1963: The club holds the first Austin Seven rally for its members at Beaulieu in Hampshire.

1971: Formula Four is introduced. The series originally ran with a modest 250cc class but soon expanded to incorporate cars with 1000cc engines

1980: Formula Vee joins the 750 Motor Club for its revival. The series began under the British Automobile Racing Club banner in 1967 but was overshadowed by Formula Ford

1984: The Kit Cars and Roadsports series are launched as the 750MC makes its first foray into sportscar racing

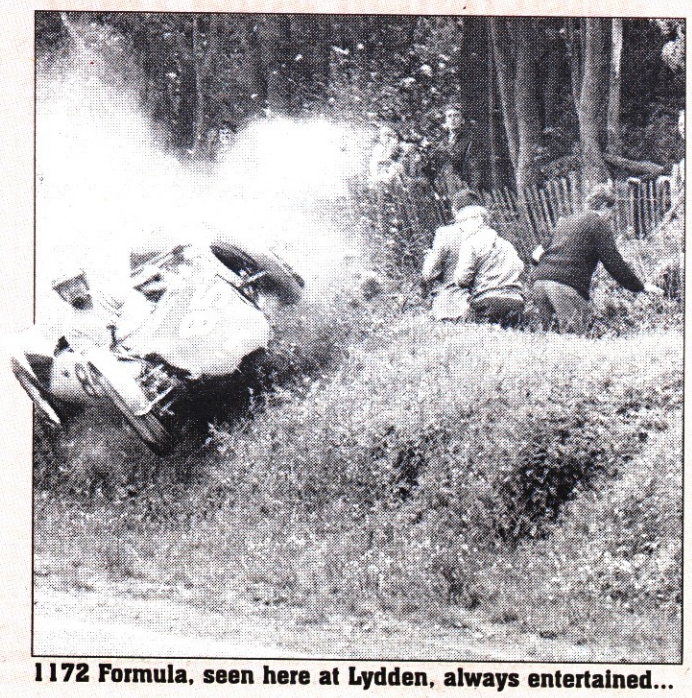
1993: The Hot Hatch Championship is launched

1997: The Stock Hatch class is started within the Hot Hatch Championship. The class grows to become a separate championship category a year later. A Caterham series is also launched

2006: Saxmax category is created for junior saloon racers aged 14-16.

2008: The MR2, Golf GTi and Bike Sports all run as championships for the first time after their initial year running as series.

RELAY RACE



1172 Formula, seen here at Lydden, always entertained...