



February 2018

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Alan Smith

Special Bulletin

As many members will have heard Alan Smith, our regular timekeeper for several decades, died on Monday 12th February. His caravan, towed by his faithful Mercedes, was a regular sight at motorsport venues, particularly in the northern half of the country.

His health started to deteriorate shortly after his wife and timekeeping assistant, Dorothy, died although Alan kept his timekeeping duties going and as a club Longton stayed loyal to him.

Along with many other clubs over many years we benefitted from his generosity of reduced charges in comparison to those of normal costs. He was always a gentleman and respected by many.

At the end of 2017, he decided not to renew his timekeeping licence, as during the season his health and physical strength had deteriorated.

On behalf of the Officials, Committee, and Members of Longton and District Motor Club, we offer our condolences to Alan's family and friends. He will be missed and remembered by many.

Funeral details, **Wednesday 7th March, 12 o'clock**
Lancaster & Morecambe Crematorium
Powder House Lane
Lancaster
LA2 6AD

Alan Smith – A short history

Alan joined the Westmorland Motor Club after leaving the forces in 1948, and was aware the club operated an awards points system, in which competitors of club events – be it in sporting trials, scrambles or grass tracks, even treasure hunts! At the year end the competitor who had won the most points was awarded the title of Club Captain. In 1949 he bought a brand new all aluminium engined Matchless trials bike, and on it, quite quickly, won many of the points available, so much so that he had the title of Captain in 1950 and 51.

From 1950 to 1953 Alan was involved at the start line at Barbon and proceeded to improve the system for starting the clocks. In 1953 after the original method for starting the clocks broke down, he had been experimenting with a flat contact plate to place under the front wheel. This had been untried, but was all he could do to keep the event running, but even this had a drawback, at this time he'd never heard of front wheel drive cars, and soon found out when the first French car appeared on the start line and he got the starting pad wrapped around his neck!

In 1954, Alan started his Public Address business, primarily to serve the scrambles and grass track events, which, in those years were almost every weekend somewhere or other in the Northern Centre. Away from events he was quietly designing something more up to date for timekeeping. The first venture was a system similar to that being used at Barbon, this turned out to be quite successful and was used frequently at Autocross events. When the original timer at Barbon would break down, they could now wheel out his modified version, which kept the event on track until the end of the day. The first time it was used officially was the first motorcycle hill climb in 1960.

With championship events on the cards, now was the time to get rid of mechanical stop watches, and Alan commenced designing a series of electronic timers. At the first National event the chairman of the RAC timing committee came to check both the timekeepers and the equipment and immediately placed an order for some of the new equipment. As a result of this during the 1970's almost all the major events in the country, including the Channel Isles and Scotland used this timing equipment. Even today, some of these units are still in use.

1979 saw the first digital display clock in use at a hillclimb. Designed in his workshop in Lancaster. There are now well over 60 digital display clocks all over the country in the hands of timekeepers, one set of timers and spectator displays were even sent to the Royal Palace in Jordan! Many more of these displays can also be seen at running and marathon events throughout the country including the London Marathon.

