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Location: Orwell, Royston, South Cambridgeshire

Current 750 Formula Car: Centaur Mk16

The long path to racing in 750 Formula

Arguably I had a lucky escape in 1989 when the job I'd lined up to start after college fell through. It would have been at Cougar Marine designing speedboats and offshore race boats. I'd already worked there as a student, mostly on the design of a new 41' model (shown right) which would top 75mph courtesy of twin Lamborghini V12s. But as recession bit, there weren't many orders for £250k sportsboats, so I fell into a career designing shopfittings and running retail projects instead. Less glamorous, but probably better paid.



Cougar 41'

I'd always been into cars of all sorts and spent much of my early teens either sliding sideways around a field in various old bangers, or watching grown-ups sliding sideways around the Complex at Thrupton – sometimes grown-ups with names like Senna, Mansell, Brundle or Palmer.

My first taste as a competitor came around 1990 when my friend Scott Adderson (now my faithful race support and spanner-man) invited me to make up the numbers at a karting evening. It was a mix of his ski club friends and a posse of car dealers. I'd never been in a kart before, but managed to win the whole event, much to the upset of the car dealers. Through a succession of work jollies over the next few years I built up quite a collection of corporate karting trophies, mostly from team endurance events. Some of them were probably achieved simply by insisting that each team member did their full stint in one go - effective, but it can hurt later!



5.7 non-rotary-litres had to go

Through those same years marriage, children, building a house and running a business kept me busy in other ways, but by 2016 I had a bit more free time. Occasionally watching a family friend, Cliff Ringrose compete in Historic 750 eventually tempted me into giving it a go, but in the 'slicks and wings' formula. A treasured Mazda RX7 with a V8 conversion was sold to free up the garage space – and some funds!

My First Racing Car – is a Centaur Mk16. Around 45 Centaur cars were designed for various formulae and built or supplied in kit form by the late Richard Scott. Six Mk16s were made, all for 750 Formula. I don't know which of them I now have, but it was originally put together around 1980/1981. It would have had the 750cc Reliant engine stipulated by the rules of the time and then subsequently have been upgraded to 850cc around 1987.

Antony Raine owned the car from 1993 to 2008 and won the championship with it in 2000. The colour photo on the cover of the *Seven Fifty Motor Club* book shows Antony leading the pack with the car in its, erm, glorious gold paintwork of the time.

Sometime around 2005-2006 Antony converted the car to run the Fiat FIRE engine, mated to a BMC A Series gearbox. The casing and tail of the box were much modified to fit, with support from fellow racers Dave Robson and Rod Hill I believe, although it still had standard Morris Minor gear ratios.

From 2008 to 2016 Andy Booth ran the car and along the way made various alterations including a new ignition system, exhaust, bodywork on top and diffuser underneath, an overhaul of the suspension and a host of other bits and pieces.

Andy and I had initially planned a handover race, where he would drive and I would support, but unfortunately that fell through so in June 2016 Andy simply delivered the car to me and I seriously started to wonder what I had done. In parallel with getting my race licence, the first task with the car was to remove the seat for sufficient leg room and work out how to sit safely in the tub without it.



Andy Booth in the Centaur

A slippery start...

My first race meeting was at Rockingham, the last event of the 2016 calendar. My father and a friend came along for support but we arrived late on a dark and windy evening and learned our first lesson about being prepared for simple things like wrapping the car up against the rain.



September 2016 - Baptism at Rockingham

I have constantly found that having routines and equipment that save time at the track, or when maintaining the car, not only make life easier but can make a huge difference to your enjoyment of the sport.

Qualifying at Rockingham was wet and I managed to spin twice on the first lap. I spun on the first lap of the race too and received a warning flag for my troubles. Not a great start and I was last in both races, but I did manage to finish, which not everyone did.

And that was largely the approach I took throughout the 2017 season. Show up, learn, try to improve, get some points. It even provided a few good humoured tussles on track, all while keeping an eye on the mirrors for front runners coming around to lap us. By the end of the season, through persistence and consistency, I'd managed to rack up enough points to win the Class B Championship despite being first in the class in just 3 of the 14 races.



March 2017 opener at Donington – wets on again



July 2017 – Chivvied by Sue Harris at Cadwell Park

Over the winter of 2017-18 I set about overhauling the car and making various 'improvements', then spent much of 2018 dealing with the fall-out: blowing a core plug and spilling all the coolant, an overheating engine, a gearbox that would constantly pop out of third gear, brake disc run-out, the flywheel bolts shearing and causing the timing wheel to break too and the valves to hit the pistons. But I kept at it, learning and fixing things, and also swapped the age-old, iron-hard wet weather tyres for something fresher, which was definitely worth it when the heavens opened at Cadwell Park.



July 2018 – Cadwell downpour



June 2019 - Croft

Through 2019 we had a few different issues, mostly fuel pump and gearbox related, but when the car was working I started to improve on my previous best lap times and achieved 7th overall in the championship. Over the winter of 2019-20 I set about what I thought would mostly be relatively minor maintenance to set it up for 2020. Unfortunately there's a familiar game of consequences emerging.

As I write, my 2020 season looks limited at best, because the engine is sick (probably a result of the very high temperatures in 2018), so is in for a rebuild. Whether we get out for any races this season remains to be seen, but even if not, we'll be back in 2021, hopefully with everything in working order. My short-medium term aim is to secure enough reliability so I can focus on getting more familiar with the circuits. Of course some higher placings would be good, but with a number of new and returning names expected on track, the competition may be strong – I certainly hope so!