

Driver Profile.....Sue Harris (nee Buxton)

Lives.....within earshot of Brands Hatch with husband Mick Harris

Occupation.....owner of garden nursery, The Tree Garden Kent

Current car.....Darvi 597

I'm never one to use a few words when a lot will do better, but this time.....a picture paints a thousand words, or so they say. You'll still need a cuppa tea to read this one!



Spent my youth living on a farm, driving tractors & mostly, doing this.

While my Dad had been doing this for many years until (& for a bit after) he became a farmer. This is where I get it from.....note the grim Buxton race-face.



Left...Silverstone 1959
Above....Mallory 1969



My Dad taught me to drive on the farm, so I passed my test on my 17th birthday (it was easier then!). Drove to the 1982 GP at Brands & as a result of a bet from my non-driving boyfriend, here I was 2 days later. Pictured with Karl Jones (later of BTCC fame), Brands Hatch Racing School initial trial. FFord 1600

Loved it. Signed up with the school for race tuition (instructed by Tony Trimmer, F1 Indy LR holder) & the end of the 1982 season races.

1st race, Lotus Talbot Sunbeam, August 1982



Loved it so much, I signed up for the full 1983 season at BHRS. Finished 10th overall out of about 45 drivers.

Giving the Fiat X-19 some stick.



Then I had to find something to race for '84. FFords? Minis? Not easy with £3 in the bank. VERY nice bank manager said I could use the bank's funds when I had found what I wanted.....

Went to Brands to watch a club meeting autumn 1983. Saw the 750 Formula cars. Interesting. Ingenious. Diverse. But 2 stood out from the rest. Managed to get a sneaky photo of them, both called a Darvi & I wanted one of THOSE! They were THE BIZ!



No 4, Darvi Mk6, driver Dick Harvey

Car behind, Darvi Mk4/5, Mick Harris

Strange how life pans out.....nearly 20 years later one of these became one of my dearest friends & racing mentor, & one turned out to be my husband!

Pictured....Dick Harvey with red overalls talking to Pete Knipe, Mick Harris with black T-shirt & lots of hair. Mick talking to his brother & sister-in-law & son. Now MY sister/brother/nephew in law!



Joined the 750 Motor Club. Couldn't find a Darvi for sale, but found an unraced Harrison (Mk2) locally. Bit of work was needed (!!), but I was always up for a challenge.....

Much work later.....Sue Buxton, 1st 750F race, Brands Hatch, 1984. Harrison Mk2



Managed to win the British Women Racing Drivers Club Newcomers Trophy 1984 for my efforts!



Harrison vs Harrison, 1984. Keith McPherson (64) Harrison Mk3, Sue Buxton (30) Harrison Mk2, with Mick Dore & Martin Joliffe in close pursuit. Silverstone 1984

My then boyfriend had been away in Papua New Guinea for most of '84, but had been offered a 2-year contract with a large accountancy firm. He would accept if I went with him. Followed my heart. Sold the car to Colin Tapp, watched him race the brands GP circuit (DNF), packed my bags & went to Heathrow for a new life in a country I'd not even heard of before 1984.

Spent 10 years in PNG, in Mt Hagen & then Port Moresby, mostly back in the saddle & riding every day, teaching & organising events. But then I found "Speedy Cars". Raced on oiled dirt track ovals in Mt Hagen & Goroka in an assortment of Aussie "utes" & saloons powered by aero fuel! Dukes of Hazard-style. Yee Ha!

PNG Ladies Champion for 2 consecutive years sometime in the late 80's.
Favourite saloon, Mt Hagen track.



Came home in late 1995 to care for my ailing mother & boyfriend went to New Zealand! Sorted out being homeless, penniless & man-less fairly quickly & settled in Kent, not far from my old farm. Unfortunately my fiancée passed away suddenly in 1996. Had to keep busy. Far too much time on my hands, so went to watch the 750's at Snetterton to see if the old Harrison was still going. It wasn't. But there were old faces still there doing their stuff...Dick Harvey, Mick Harris, Nige Cowley, Pete Knipe, Bob Simpson & many more.

Envy got the better of me by the time I got home. Re-joined the 750MC. Bought a Milmor. Took it to a gruff, rather frightening, but highly knowledgeable man in High Wycombe for his opinion. "The steering wheel's ok" says Dick Harvey. "The rest of it isn't legal any more".

Sat in the garden all afternoon with Dick & his mum & numerous cups of tea formulating a plan to keep me busy & get me back on track. That was the start of a long best-friendship with this guru of the 750Formula. "I want a Darvi" says me. "I can't build you a car" says Dick "because it's a protected Formula & professional building is not allowed, but I can make the bits, give them to you & you can build it".

Crikey. I know I wanted to be busy, but.....

"Give me a week" he says, "I think I know where I can find the back end of a Mk5 chassis". He went to Bob Couchman's & found the back end of the Mk5 Darvi Bob had written off at Lydden the

day Bob & Mick Harris both got the LR. Bob kindly told Dick to help himself to any other old bits in the “rubbish”. Some years later Bob recognised his old petrol tank, pedals, diffs, wheels, axle, starter motor, gear knob, etc etc on my car!

So I sourced numerous other “bits”, Dick made them into something, put them in a box & gave them to me. With a complete but bare chassis to his Mk5 design.

Winter 1996. A cold garage in Kent. Every night & all weekends. Kept me busy. On the phone to Dick every 20 minutes! I had no idea when I started what spanners, sockets, hammers, tin snips, torque wrenches etc etc were for. Or even what FT was. I do now! Taught by the best.



Some long months later I managed to get off the floor of the garage, the ARDS was done, the gear was bought, the brain was stuffed with new skills & the Darvi 5/97 was born. Now all I had to do was remember how to drive & race, & enjoy myself while I did it. With Dick as my mentor, my aim was to finish & get faster every time out. That’s been the aim for the last 23 years, & most of the time, that’s how it’s been.

1st race in the Darvi 597.
Brands Hatch, 1997



Apart from a year off, pretty much, I've done most races of every season since then. In the early years I was in awe of the sharp-end boys coming past me when I thought I was going as fast as I could. Then I started to try to hang on to the back end of them as long as I could. Then I started to NOT be lapped. Then I started to lap others. All the time trying to be bolder, better & thus quicker.

I've made some lifelong friends in the 750 Formula family, both on & off the track, some with a life-attitude that we can all aspire to & a constant sense of humour no matter what...as I found out at Snetterton when I left the car alone for 10 minutes. Gave the scrutineers a shock when Lilo Lil turned up! Thankyou Paul Collins, Bill Rutter & Andrew Lake.



I've had some great fun & great races, with great people.

With Paul Morris & Andrew Lake at Rockingham.



Get past me if you can. I learnt from a Master!

Perhaps my crowning achievement....actually passing & staying ahead of the 10 times Champion over the line. My husband Mick Harris. Rockingham 2013



I've been invited to be part of a 750F Relay Team a good few times, first in 1984 & then in the 2000's. It's been dubbed the "world's most dangerous race" with upwards of 40-50 different cars out on track at once, but I've been lucky & careful to avoid mishap & it was always a crazy highlight of the season.



750 Formula
"Southdowns Team"

Mick Harris, Sue Buxton, Bob Simpson, Andrew Lake, Bill Rutter, Paul Collins. Manager John Sleight



Brave Darvi vs BIG Bentley



Dick "Harvey's Darvis"
Team, 2003

Peter Bove (in car), Bill Rutter, Peter Sleight, Mick Harris, Dick Harvey & Sue Buxton

I've also been a long-time member of the British Women Racing Drivers' Club for many years & have made many friends with some other crazy ladies who are all just lovely. We can normally only race against each other on points as we're rarely on track together. But the BWRDC have been invited a couple of times to the HSCC Walter Hayes Meeting in November for a ladies only race. Morgans, Hot Hatches, Lotus, a Lambourghini, Caterhams, Minis, Sports Specials, etc....and a 750. In 2014 we set a new British, if not world, record by having 38 (I think) ladies on track racing together. One of the few times I've thoroughly enjoyed racing in the POURING rain!



It always seems to be wet at Silverstone for the ladies.....2018



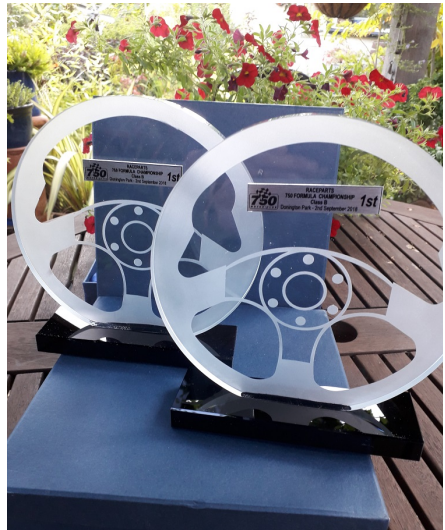
Some somewhat larger opposition!

I've also been lucky enough to win many assorted trophies in my racing both with the 750MC & BWRDC, although that is NOT why I race (but it is nice sometimes!).

750 highest placed lady driver in any championship 1998, 750 Jem Marsh Best Turned Out a few times, 750F Class B Champion, part of winning 750F Teams at the 6-hour Relay. BWRDC Newcomer's award in '84, various other BWRDC trophies over the years & then in 2018 managed BWRDC Best Senior (!! over 50) & 3rd in the main Goodwin Trophy!

 2018 Season Championships Points

RACING – Goodwin Trophies					
Pos	Name	Car	Events	Points	Prf
1	Ilsa Cox	Seat Leon Cupra	Best 10 of 16	117	✓
2	Katie Milner	Ginetta GT5	Best 10 of 13	111	✓
3	Sue Harris	Darvil 597	Best 10 of 12	89	✓
4	Zoe Wenham	Funcup	7	78	✓
5	Jo Polley	Super Mighty Mini	Best 10 of 16	76	✓
=6	Jemma Moore	Citroen Saxo	Best 10 of 20	75	✓
=6	Sarah Moore	Ginetta G50	Best 10 of 13	75	✓
8	Charlotte Birch	Citroen Saxo VTR 1600	Best 10 of 14	74	✓
9	Julia Penfold	MG ZR (Orange Ears)	9	60	✓
10	Emily Linscott	Ginetta Junior G40	Best 10 of 26	53	✓
=11	Fiona James	Aston Martin Vantage	8	45	✓
=11	Gail Hill	Jaguar XJs/Jaguar XJ-5	10	45	✓
13	Helen Waddington	MG ZR 160 (Dudley)/MGF	Best 10 of 11	42	✓
14	Abbi Pulling	Ginetta Junior G40	7	37	✓
15	Maxine Nicholls	Toyota MR2	5	29	✓
16	Rachel Lovett	Swift SC99Z	9	25	✓
=17	Helen Allen	Ford Fiesta Zetec	6	24	✓
=17	Lorraine Gathercole	March 712	4	24	✓
=17	Nathalie McGloin	Porsche Cayman S 3400	6	24	✓
20	Angela Jones	Honda Integra	5	21	✓
21	Sarah Franklin	Clio Cup	5	17	✓
22	Rachel Arnold	Merlyn MK20	4	16	✓
23	Jessica Hawkins	VW Golf	1	10	✓
24	Sarah Hutchison	Lancia Beta	2	2	✓



There are highs & lows in racing. It's a dangerous sport. That's why I love it. "There's racing for you" is often said when the day's gone all wrong. I've had good times, good close racing with good people & bad times when I've tried to destroy my car & been terrified, wondering why the Hell I'm doing this to myself. But sometimes out of bad, comes good.

After a "nasty" at Snetterton, Mick Harris & Tina Simpson rescued me from Norwich hospital. Mick & I became a couple shortly after & Team Harris was born. Mick's car lived with mine in my garage in Kent & Mick continued to work & live in High Wycombe during the week & in Kent at weekends & we raced in convoy from there.



Mick had 2 fabulous close races in 2009 at Brands with a young new driver, Will Johnstone Jr, with the honours going one apiece, with the greatest respect from Mick for this quick lad.



A week later young Will was killed in a non-fault car accident. We were both very upset. You literally never know what's round the corner. Mick & I decided to get married largely because of that lovely young man being taken far too young, & Mr & Mrs Harris saw our 10th anniversary in 2019.

In 2015 Team Harris went to Mallory.

Darvi 597 & Darvi 877 ready for action. Team colours.



And we were both going well until Mick spun at the Esses. As he stopped, another driver T-boned him, the lightweight car hitting the strongest part of the heaviest car on the track...straight on the axle. The race was stopped & the other driver taken to hospital. The back of the chassis of the 877 was severely distorted & not repairable. So Mick decided to cut the back end off & fit a transverse engine. He is still working on the 877T.



So for 3 years he was my "Spanners". Who better could you have?

We will both be out again as Team Harris, but I decided 3 years for him to be out of racing after an accident that he felt was his fault, was enough & I had to see if he still “had it”. I persuaded/cajoled/forced him to drive my car at Mallory. Oh the grief of not only seeing your husband out trying to race again, but in MY car! Lordy, what stress. I decided that if he didn't enjoy it, Team Harris would stop there & then. Sell up & do something else. Our future depended on his brain forgetting what had happened.



The first race wasn't conclusive. He looked quick (quicker than me, anyway) but the race-face wasn't there. You can't explain it. It just is, or it isn't.

But then came the 2nd race.

Race-face.

He was back. We were a racing team again. It was a life-affirming moment.



So the rest of the season was Mick's & I was “spanners”. He managed to get into the “papers” & get himself back on the podium a couple of times! I always knew the car was quicker than me!





So I was due to be Spanners to Mick in 2020 & we'd both be back in 2021. That was the plan until a certain pandemic happened. The plan is now that Mick will be back in my car for the full season of 2021, keep building his new car & we'll both be back for 2022. I hope. I don't much care for being Spanners.

Strangely, when I was about 18, I was trying to buy an MG Midget (looked like fun) but had no ideas about racing at all. My Mum went to see a local psychic & I went with her. Just for a laugh. Not long ago I found the notes I had written after my "session".

Such fun. A low red car. Going fast. Thrilling.

A man who looks after other people's money. Travelling. Lots of travelling. Embrace a new world.

The number 27 will be important all your life.

A cottage. Surrounded by fields as far as the eye can see. With cats. Always cats.

Grey haired man with heart troubles. Sadness. But another lifelong partner will come along.

It's a spooky old world.....

