



DARVI

The History

Much has been written about the longest running racing formula in the world, the 750 Formula. Many famous names have started their careers there, be it in construction/engineering or as drivers, or both. Many cars have enthusiastically been constructed over the last 60 years, with a lot of them still surviving and racing today. One of the most sought after and well known marques still dominates entries in the current field...The DARVI.

It all began about 45 years ago in Buckinghamshire. In the late 60's and early 70's, two brothers from High Wycombe, Dick and Jon Harvey, spent their spare time watching all sorts of motor racing. As we all know, watching is fun, but "the Bruvvers" decided that perhaps they should have a go. Well, they couldn't do any worse than some at the back, could they? So the hunt for what to race was on. Dick saw an article in a magazine about a constructor called George Jeffrey who was selling kits for a do-it-yourself racing formula, the 750Formula. Dick and Jon bought a kit, put it together, built bodywork, joined the 750 Motor Club, and raced the Jeffrey for a while.

The Harvey brothers appeared to have some aptitude for the racing game and the thought of building a new car from scratch at home became a firm thought in their minds. They sold the Jeffrey to Nick Parker, beavered away in the family garage and produced a new car for the 1974 season, called it a DARVI, and the Darvi Mk2 was born (the Mk 1 being the Jeffrey). About this time they met a young lad who had thoughts of being an "Anglia" boy racer, Mick Harris, who was training to be a mechanic. The three of them were immensely happy traipsing all over the country to race meetings every weekend and spending every waking moment in the garage in the evenings.



1974. Dick Harvey, no 416, Darvi Mk2, at Silverstone, being chased by Nick Parker, no 81, in Dick's old Jeffrey, Darvi Mk1



L to R, Jon Harvey, Dick Harvey (in car) Robert Harvey and Mick Harris, Darvi Mk2

In those days, there were so many 750's racing that there were "main"/Championship races and "consolation" races on the same day to accommodate everyone wanting to buzz round in a car they had built themselves. Two drivers often raced the same car in the two races. Mick "the Boy"'s help was rewarded with a typical gesture from Dick....."Ere you are, Boy, have a go". (It was easy to just get a licence and go out on a race circuit in those days!) And so the racing career of Mick Harris started at Lydden in 1975. Despite a spin, he managed 3rd place. A taste of things to come.....



Mick Harris in the slightly modified Mk2, the Mk2C

The three minds together inevitably produced new ideas. Their desire for speed and the constructor/racer "bug" were now firmly embedded in the Harveys' and Harris psyches. And so a new car was built, the Darvi Mk3. It was lower, sleeker, on 10" wheels which were wider at the back than the front, and with the radiator mounted at the back (later this was abandoned and the rad put to the front again "where God intended rads to be").



Dick Harvey, Darvi Mk3

Yet another long non-racing winter and certain cash-flow problems saw the sale of the Mk3, and the building of the Mk4, developed from the ideas of the Mk3 with better aerodynamics, on 13" wheels, with a rear wing and the rad firmly at the front! Although now a "750 man" Jon was caught by the idea of racing, well, anything he could get his hands on, and he soon showed considerable talent in Minis. Dick and Mick continued to share the Mk4 in the 2-race days with Dick in the main race and Mick driving the consolation races, with Jon racing Dick's car occasionally. All that was needed on the day was 2 drivers, 1 car and an extra black sticky-back-plastic number!



Darvi Mk4. .Dick Harvey (no7) and Mick Harris (no57)

With two determined and now knowledgeable drivers in the same car, developments were constantly being tried. Dick was racing with some success in the main races, and Mick was starting to win the consolation races too consistently for the other competitors to bear. "Mutterings" in the paddock about Mick's prowess reached the Harvey/Harris ears, and so it was decided that they would build another new car for Dick, the Mk5, with Mick running the Mk4, updated to Mk5 spec, both in the main Championship races. And so the two friends now both had a car and started to do battle against each other. With both of them normally at, or near, the front, the Darvi legend grew and grew with each close-fought race.



Dick Harvey (no5) in the Mk5 (now belonging to Bill Rutter) and Mick Harris (no4) in the Mk4/5 (now belonging to Tim Cousins), Silverstone 1982

The "Darvi colours" now emerged....BMC Tahiti Blue and Ford Sebring Red, with the mudguards and rear wing in blue for Dick and red for Mick, and full sidepods were added. Wins for both Dick and Mick through the late 70's and early 80's proved the Darvis and their drivers to be a force to be reckoned with, with Mick winning his first Championship title in 1982 and again in '83.



Dick (no3) and Mick (no6) ready for the "off" at Snetterton, with Gary Randall completing the front row

The 750 Formula encourages those of an enquiring and mechanical mind to be innovative. New ideas were taking shape in the early 80's in the garage in High Wycombe and plans were drawn up for the next development. The Mk5 was sold, and so, in 1983 the Mk6 was born.....same colours, but the narrow nose, rocking-arm inboard suspension and various other mods took the Darvis to a new level and caught the eye of many spectators and would-be racers alike. Dick raced the Mk6 for a couple of seasons, with some success, but the lure of a pocketful of money caused him to part with the car at the end of 1984 to Peter Nicholls. It now belongs to Martin Kemp and is still proving to be just as quick as it ever was. Martin took the win in it at the first race of the 2008 season at Snetterton.



Dick in the Darvi Mk6



Martin Kemp (no5) Mk6, Ian Allen (no8) ADR, Bill Rutter (no9) Ex-Dick's Mk5, Mallory 2007

Mick's brain had also been working quietly behind the scenes for some time on the idea of a rear-engined, enveloping-bodied Darvi. The Mk4/5 was also sold and the Harris garage near High Wycombe went into the full time production of Mick's dream.....the Mk7. Finally it emerged in 1987 and became the Darvi 877, originally in red. Everybody said at the time "Too heavy, it'll never work". But it and Mick have proved them all wrong, and Mick has since won the Championship in the 877 no less than 8 times, taking his total of 750 Formula Championships to an unprecedented 10.



Mick Harris and the Championship trophies

Because Mick was building the Mk7, Dick built the Mk8! This was a development of the Mk6 and new suspension ideas proved the car to be quite a handful. While trying to sort out how to handle the new-found problems, the front end was totalled by another car/driver at Silverstone in 1985. The Mk8 ideas that caused such handling inconsistencies were shelved and the car to emerge from the reconstituted wreckage in 1986 became the Mk6-9. This car proved to be Dick's finest. In 1987, from 14 starts, Dick and the Mk6-9 took 10 poles, 11 wins and the 1987 Championship title.



Dick Harvey and Stirling Moss

In 1988 Dick built two more cars, copies of the 86-9, one for Ernie Frost, the 88EF (now called the 88P of Peter Bove, in which Peter has just won the 2008 Championship for the 3rd season in a row) and the 88CMP for Keith McPherson, currently being raced in

the hands of Andrew Gent. He also built a Mk5 for Bob Couchman, who was very quick, until he totalled it (or so he thought) in the banking at Lydden, just after setting the lap record.



Mick (no1) facing backwards to see who was behind, with Ernie Frost (no10) seeing who was in front in the 88EF



Pic 14 Keith McPherson (no10) in the 88CMP attached to the back end of Mick's 877 and the SS of Bob Simpson.



1999. Tim Cousins with the ex-Mick Harris Mk4/5. Tim held the Silverstone National lap record in this car for many years until only recently deposed.

Alan Avery's Avalan Mk1 (Darvi Mk5-lookalike) raced for a while with Mk5-type bodywork, until Bob Couchman took it over, put on an all-enveloping body and it became the BCR (Bob Couchman Reliant). Although not a Darvi, it has a unique place in the history of Darvis and the Formula. Over the Millennium, 750F numbers were dropping rapidly. There became an urgent need of a suitable replacement for the brittle Reliant 850 engine (Robin, to you and me). This car passed into the hands of Jon Harvey, and because it had been built to Mk5 dimensions, Dick, Jon and Mick worked through 2002 to fit what was hoped to be the Formula's salvation. The Avalan/BCR was the first 750 to be fitted with a Fiat engine. Jon was allowed to race it at the end of 2002, not to collect Championship points, but to see whether the virtually standard Fiat 1108 FIRE engine was comparable in power and performance to the race-prepared Reliants and to see if it would fit into the majority of the other cars on the grid. It was, it did, and now almost all current 750F cars have converted to Fiat. This car has passed to many owners in the last few years and is now in the hands of John Paget.



The Mk5 lookalike of Alan Avery, Avalan 1 with Mick's Darvi877

The 877 of Mick Harris had its debut in 1987, but 1988 proved to become a battleground for the two friends in their very different Darvis.....the mid/rear engined 877 vs the sleek, pointed-nosed Mk6-9. Mick eventually emerged the victor over Dick from the season-long tussle for the Championship after a Saturday race at Silverstone, and on the Sunday, Dick unfortunately wrote off that car, and briefly himself, in an horrific, and much documented, accident at Mallory.



1988, Dick (no1) defending his title and Mick (no7) trying to win it!

Darvi production ceased for some time while Dick recovered the ability to walk again, but in July 1991, with Mick helping out for the day as chief mechanic, and with pedals adjusted to accommodate Dick's now varied leg lengths, Dick was back in the seat of his new car, the Darvi 91-D. This car, later painted yellow, was raced by Dick until a major stroke in March of 2003 stopped him in his tracks.



Dick, Darvi 91-D, Pembrey, 1999

Dick and Jon also built another car, very similar to the 91-D, which emerged in Jon's hands as the Darvi 92-J, and was raced for a while against Dick's 91-D, Mick's 877 and many other Darvis until sold to the current owner/racer, Paul Morris. As the Harvey household happened to have some yellow paint lying around, and stocks of the Darvi blue and red were low, both Dick's and Jon's 91 models, and the new bodywork of the 877, sported the new Darvi trademark, yellow paint.



Paul Morris (no 13), Darvi 92-J and Sue Buxton (no 27), Darvi 5/97, Pembrey 2006

Sometime in the early 90's Dick built another Mk5 for our (then) sponsor, who raced it briefly. He and the car disappeared abruptly. Some years later Peter Sleight managed to find it, in a garage somewhere, and raced it very competitively for a few years, until selling to its current owner and racer, Paul Collins, the "Custard" part of the "Rhubarb (Bill Rutter) Andy (Andrew Lake) Custard" group of mates who share their love of 750's and Darvis. The Rhubarb and Custard cars are striking

for their standard of preparation, red and yellow colours, and the occasional packet of Bird's custard or stick of rhubarb attached to inconspicuous parts of the chassis!



Bill "Rhubarb" Rutter (no 9) and Paul "Custard" Collins (no 14), Mk 5's

Also at around that time, Dick built another Mk5 chassis, to which he added the running gear of Rick Goodyear's Hague. This car was raced by Rick and then hadn't been seen for some time when it came on the market a few years ago. It was quickly bought by Dick Hartle's brother, Dave, who intended to race it, but his plans changed and he then sold it to its current owner/racer, Colin Wolstenholme. Colin has prepared the car to an exceptionally high standard, which has won him the coveted Jem Marsh Trophy for Best Turned Out 750 in 2008.



Colin Wolstenholme, Darvi Mk5, Mallory, 2008

Dick had no intention of building any more. Enough was enough, retirement was becoming appealing in his mind and general repair/engine work for the Formula kept him more than busy enough. But then in 1996, I went to a 750MC meeting at Snetterton. I first raced 750's in the early 80's in a Harrison, but always admired the Darvis from afar for their sleek good looks and obvious speed. I had never dared speak to the "Big Boys" as they were then (Dick, Mick and Bob Simpson were revered as the Gods of 750). I swore I'd never get back into racing after many years abroad, but I was hooked again by the 750 "bug" and went off to Southampton to buy a car called the Milmor. I needed some help to re-instate it as a racer, and so I dared to ring the Maestro at Dick Harvey Racing Services.

After an initial check-over of the car in Dick's garage, it was pronounced all but dead, a variety of things not up to current spec and with very little hope of getting it so. A forlorn and now skint Sue was revived by a strong cup of Olive Harvey's tea and the words from the maestro....."Leave it with me, I may have a plan". A couple of weeks later, we were working together, gathering spares in boxes, huffing and puffing, welding, brazing, cutting and scavenging. Dick "purloined" the rear end (and many other bits and pieces) of the Darvi Mk5 that Bob Couchman had thought he had previously destroyed, and we started from there. At the end of 1996 I had a chassis and a huge amount of assorted metallic and fibreglass objects lurking in my garage, and a phone in constant use to High Wycombe as I assembled the strange jigsaw that was to become the Mk5/97.



Darvi Mk5/97, Christmas '96 in a cold garage in Kent

In 1997 my new Darvi 5/97 was ready to race. At 12 years old, mine is the youngest Darvi, and the only female one ever built (!). She lives in my garage, now alongside her partner, the 877, and the two of them form 'Im 'n' 'Er Racing. Dick always reckoned the Mk5 to be the fastest Darvi shape he ever built. And the 5/97 has proved to be an exact match for the 877 in straight line speed. It's just the nut behind the wheel that's slower through the corners, although I do sometimes have my moments!



'Im 'n' 'Er at home in Kent



Sue Buxton (no27) Mk5/97, Mick (no3) 877, Peter Bove (no1), Lydden 2007

After Dick's stroke in 2003, brother Jon took over the 2002 winter rebuild of his brother's beloved 91-D. He intended to race it again for Dick, but lack of time has now forced the sale of this car to a very worthy Rhubarb and Custard 750 Racer, Andrew Lake, and we all hope to be seeing it out again doing battle in 2009.



Birkett Relay 2003 team Darvis. L to R Peter Bove (in car), Bill Rutter, Peter Sleight, Dick Harvey (seated), Mick Harris, Sue Buxton



Jan 2009 Dick's 91-D about to be made ready for a return to the track early in 2009 in the hands of Andrew Lake

Dick still follows the Formula closely and is still often to be seen at meetings with Jon, but now in an electrically powered vehicle which he seems to drive in exactly the same forceful manner as any Darvi he ever sat in. Mick is as keen as ever to win the Championship again in 2009 in the 22-year-old 877, after a frustrating "development year" in 2008 when he finished 3rd, but has his work cut out beating many other quick Darvis, amongst many other formidable opponents (his mind is still working on a Mk10 though). The rest of the current and ex-Darvi owners/drivers all share a part in the history of the Darvi legend, and long may they continue.



"Hear No Evil....." Bob Simpson, Dick Harvey and Mick Harris, Birkett Relay 2001



Jon and Mick "problem-solving" 2008

Sue Buxton

(For, and on behalf of, Dick Harvey, Jon Harvey and Mick Harris)