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# ALI BRAY

# UK MOTORSPORT'S MOST SUCCESSFUL DRIVER?



One for the album: Champion Ali Bray

## *Matt James talks to a racer who took a stunning 23 wins from 23 in the highly competitive Mazda MX-5 Championship last season*

**Taking a clean sweep of wins in any motor racing championship is extremely rare. It is even more unusual for it to happen in the hotbed of competition which is the single-marque national racing ranks of the UK, where the action is frenetic. That is what makes Ali Bray's record of 23 wins from 23 Mazda MX-5 Championship rounds in 2025 so remarkable.**

The AB Motorsport team owner, 32, has been eager to put together a full season of racing since he created his team more than a decade ago. He managed to finish runner-up in the 750 Motor Club's MX-5 contest in 2017, his only full campaign before 2025. However, the hectic schedule of running title-winning cars for others, plus the financial strain of competing, meant a return was a dream that had to go on the backburner until the start of last year.

"It was amazing, last year, to have the opportunity to do the season in a car which the team was going to build from scratch," he says. Bray has enjoyed sporadic outings in MX-5s, in various guises, over the past seasons but this was a campaign he would be able to fully focus on. "At the beginning of the year, we knew we would be in with a shot of the championship, just due to the knowledge of my guys and the effort we put into it. We joked around and said it would be amazing if we could win more races than any other driver.

"The grid has always got so much depth to it and it is single-make racing. We might have joked about it, but it was never really on the radar to do as well as we did in all the races."

The season began in the middle of March at Silverstone and finished on the International Circuit on the same venue in October. Bray's achievement was taken despite there being three rounds per weekend (apart from at Oulton Park in the middle of the season, which had only two), which meant an early slip could prove costly in terms of keeping a winning run going.

Once Bray had found the winning groove over the opening portion of the season, that is when the interest ramped up to keep the streak going. However, the driver himself said he didn't feel the pressure. "It got to the point where I was thinking 'we've got to try and keep this up'," he says. "But we didn't change anything and did the usual preparation on the car. We made sure we didn't lose our way in testing on the Friday, even if we weren't the fastest. We just chipped away at it really.

> ***"We thought we might win a few races, not all of them!"***
>
> ***Ali Bray***


Ali Bray: racer and team principal

"There were several times where we weren't the quickest and I knew I would really have to get stuck in and just do what I could. The longer it went on, it came into focus: it was unbelievable and looked impossible, but I wanted to roll with it and see where it could take me and give it our best shot.

"I think one of the stand-out races for me was race two at Donington Park in the middle of the year, where I found myself in seventh place with two laps to go and I had to pull everything out to battle my way back through there."

Given the curious points scoring system in the MX-5 Championship, he still wasn't assured of the crown heading into the final three rounds at Silverstone in October. The desire to battle for a clean sweep was measured by his eagerness to claim the title that he had been hunting throughout the previous 20 races.

Photos: James Roberts, Steve Jones




Bray went on the victory hunt at Silverstone




A full season had been a long-held dream

"Before the final at Silverstone, it was looking like the championship was there for the taking, and I thought if I had to take a second place or a third, I would do that to claim the crown," he recalls. "I didn't want to get involved with too much and I didn't want to throw away the opportunity of winning the title.

"When we turned up at Silverstone, I rolled up my sleeves and I suddenly realised I wanted to win them all. After we won the first two of the races at Silverstone, I have never wanted to win a race three as much! I wanted the record."

He managed to achieve that by sealing a win by a buffer of almost two seconds, a margin unheard of in the action-packed series. The record was his, but it was even more significant as he had done it while running a team, looking after customer cars, and coaching some of his other rivals in the line-up too.

"It isn't easy [to run the team and drive as well], but it is kudos to the lads around me that I have working for me. Nowadays I have to do very little at the circuits apart from the set-up work and looking at the data with the drivers.

"We do take it all very seriously although my team is a very family-based atmosphere and, at the end of the day, we go there to enjoy our racing. When it comes down to crunch time, everyone knows what they are doing and it was a case of me just being able to jump in the car and concentrate on my racing."

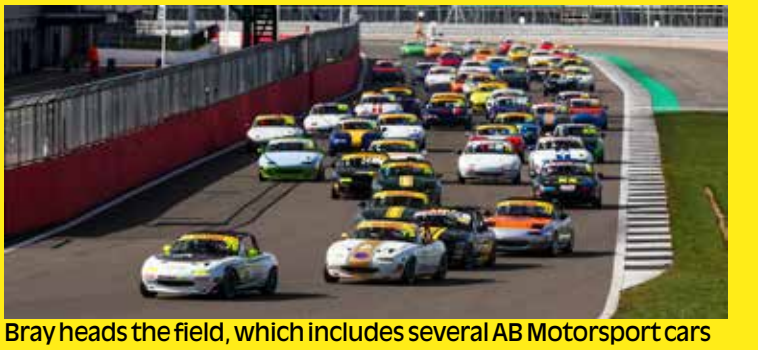
Bray says it is a 50-50 split in terms of his passion for running a team and the thrill of slipping into the cockpit himself. "I love racing myself, the buzz is second to none," he says, "but there is also a great feeling of having a customer that you work so closely with to get the results. You can help them achieve their dreams and watch them progress. I do a lot of driver coaching for the guys in the team and watching them develop is amazing.

"I appreciate I am coming up to my mid-30s, and I am not a young kid anymore. I live for the sport and there is nothing I love more than having a bumper-to-bumper battle with someone. I love the feeling of trying to get creative behind the wheel to do things that a lot of other people wouldn't and make those surprise overtaking moves."

As he stepped onto the podium at Silverstone to collect the accolades, Bray declared that it was his last full-time campaign. Despite that, he gives the impression that he might be tempted back soon. "I haven't hung up my crash helmet: it is still here to be used and I want nothing more than to race. But I have faced the usual thing that is a well-told story in motorsport, it just comes down to funds," he explains.

While that last statement might be a tale familiar to most, it comes off the back of one of the most memorable campaigns in national racing. That is something which the racer himself can cherish. n

# HOW AB MOTORSPORT CAME TO RULE IN MX-5s



Bray heads the field, which includes several AB Motorsport cars

AB Motorsport has become one of the go-to teams in myriad Mazda MX-5 Championships. When it began more than a decade ago, founder Ali Bray had been forced to park his own driving ambition and the squad was formed out of necessity.

The Cambridgeshire-based team boss explains: "I had built up a Mazda to use myself, but when it got to crunch time I realised that I didn't have the funds to race it for the year. So we turned it into a hire car and, after a couple of seasons, we had [now European GT3 sportscar racer] Ben Tuck to race it [in 2014]. We started winning races with him, and that was what evolved the company. We became a known name in the paddock and, by the end of that year, the phone started ringing."

While operating the growing concern took up much of Bray's time, he still hankered to get behind the wheel himself after cutting his teeth in club-level karting. Since AB Motorsport was created in 2011, there have been sporadic opportunities to compete.

"I have dipped in and out of racing a Mk1 on occasions where a customer couldn't turn up to a meeting and I have jumped in their car to do a one-off round," he explains. "A couple of years ago I did about 60% of the MK3 Championship and picked up a few wins. So I have been able to keep my hand in."




AB is a tight-knit operation

The success the team has achieved, with four champions including Bray's remarkable record in 2025, means that the phone keeps ringing in the Bassingbourn workshops. AB was running up to six cars across the British Racing & Sports Car Club's Mazda MX-5 Championships in 2025, and Bray says there should be even more this term.

"We have got about six or seven people signed up for the year across all the categories," he explains. "We are looking at diving into the Fun Cup too. It is a great achievement and, as a team, there are six of us, including my wife Niki, on race weekends. It is a tight-knit bunch, but it is amazing that it never really gets that stressful. Some of the lads I have got are just fantastic, and I have a lot of support from a guy called Paul Austin. He has helped me financially and he was at the circuits a lot this season."




The crew was vital to the record-breaking Mazda MX-5 season




The Mazda MX-5 expert takes the acclaim after another 2025 victory