

IT'S JUST ABOUT 10 YEARS SINCE MOTOR SPORT VISION (MSV) TOOK OVER THE RUNNING OF OULTON PARK, CADWELL PARK, SNETTERTON AND BRANDS HATCH FROM THE AMERICAN BASED MEDIA GROUP OCTAGON.

Cadwell Park

RAISING THE BAR

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PHOTOS: MSV

All four venues had benefited from considerable investment during the Octagon years, but there was a lack of joined up thinking and an over riding push on making sure that the Formula 1 Grand Prix at Silverstone (also Octagon run) remained the centrepiece of the groups activities. Therefore, although major works had been undertaken at the venues, much of it was unfinished or poorly finished, with an almost building site quality to much of the infrastructure.

Nobody really knew what to expect from the new owner, former F1 driver Jonathan Palmer. Many bike clubs were fearful that he wouldn't understand or be interested in two-wheeled motorsport and that the car clubs would snap up all the prime dates. For sure, a lot of the car clubs thought that they'd be able to drive a very hard bargain with this inexperienced operator. Think again boys.

When you meet someone for the first time, you are invariably left with a key word that defines them in your memory and on first meeting Jonathan Palmer, I was left with the word "astute" planted firmly in my mind. He very quickly understood the importance of motorcycle racing to the future health of his new empire, so there was no need to worry that these 4 beautiful venues would be turned into Armco lined, car focussed autodromes.

The other thing that struck me was an almost obsessive attention to detail and loathing of anything untidy or unclean. His first event in charge was a Winter Supermoto event that I was running at Brands Hatch. Instead of being impressed at the sizeable crowd on an otherwise unprofitable February date, he was absolutely appalled at the mess. I'm not talking about the inevitable dirt dragged onto the circuit by that particular

form of racing, he accepted that as a part of the deal. He was however horrified to the point of fury, by his own staffs seeming inability to clear rubbish from the paddock and spectator areas whilst the event was running. He had an almost pathological fixation with ensuring that the toilets and other public facilities should be regularly serviced throughout the event. The normal thing up to that point had been to empty the bins and clear up the following day, as there was a general acceptance that the public invariably made a mess. To this fastidious man, that was totally unacceptable. He wanted his venues to be freshly painted and spotlessly presented at all times. I can remember thinking "Good luck with that dream mate!" – but what I should really have done was to go out and buy shares in International Paints Ltd, as their shares must have jumped by about 100% in the first 12 months of his tenure. He brought a whole new level of meaning to the old military phrase "If it moves, salute it! If it doesn't move, paint it!"

The quiet amusement that many people felt at this "presentation at all costs" approach to circuit ownership, soon changed though when it became apparent that he was also addressing some serious safety issues as well. All the unfinished projects from the Octagon years were completed to a very high standard and much of the other infrastructure was improved or updated. This was a man intent on bringing his venues up to the best safety standards at his disposal. Some members of staff that had been comfortable, permanent fixtures,

were unable to update their thinking and many left or were replaced over the following 6 months. Some should have stayed, as they would have been tremendous assets to the group in future years, but years of mismanagement by the old regime had



adversely affected their ambition and drive. This is after all a people business and the old McDonalds staff slogan "Attitude! – Yours could make all the difference!" can never be undervalued. I often wonder whether the MSV group would have been even stronger now if some of those old characters had given the new owners a chance and vice-versa. What cannot be denied is that after 10 years, the MSV venues are generally accepted as the bench-mark that all other venues must strive to equal.

We at Thundersport GB know that staff attitude is the key factor in how willing people are to come back and take part in more of our events. The whole experience needs to work and we are fully focussed on making ourselves into **THE** benchmark that other organisers are measured against.

