5-23-26: Arlington Stadium

Track #280 | Hailsham, England | ¼ Mile Paved Oval

Up until about two hours beforehand I didn't know that I was even going to be going to this track tonight, as a few days ago I wasn't planning on going to anything then I realized that I could get a double at Snetterton and an oval. Then the rental car place didn't have my car for an hour and a half which left me out of time to get up there. Sitting in the parking lot waiting for the car to arrive I had to scramble and do some research to find backup options closer by and settled on Arlington. I had wanted to see banger racing when I originally planned this trip, and though I was happy with my decision to do autograss and F1 stock cars instead, it was good to get a chance to see them.

After navigating the traffic out of London I made my way down to the track. Parking was in a big field behind and I walked right through the pit area before even buying tickets at the turnstiles.



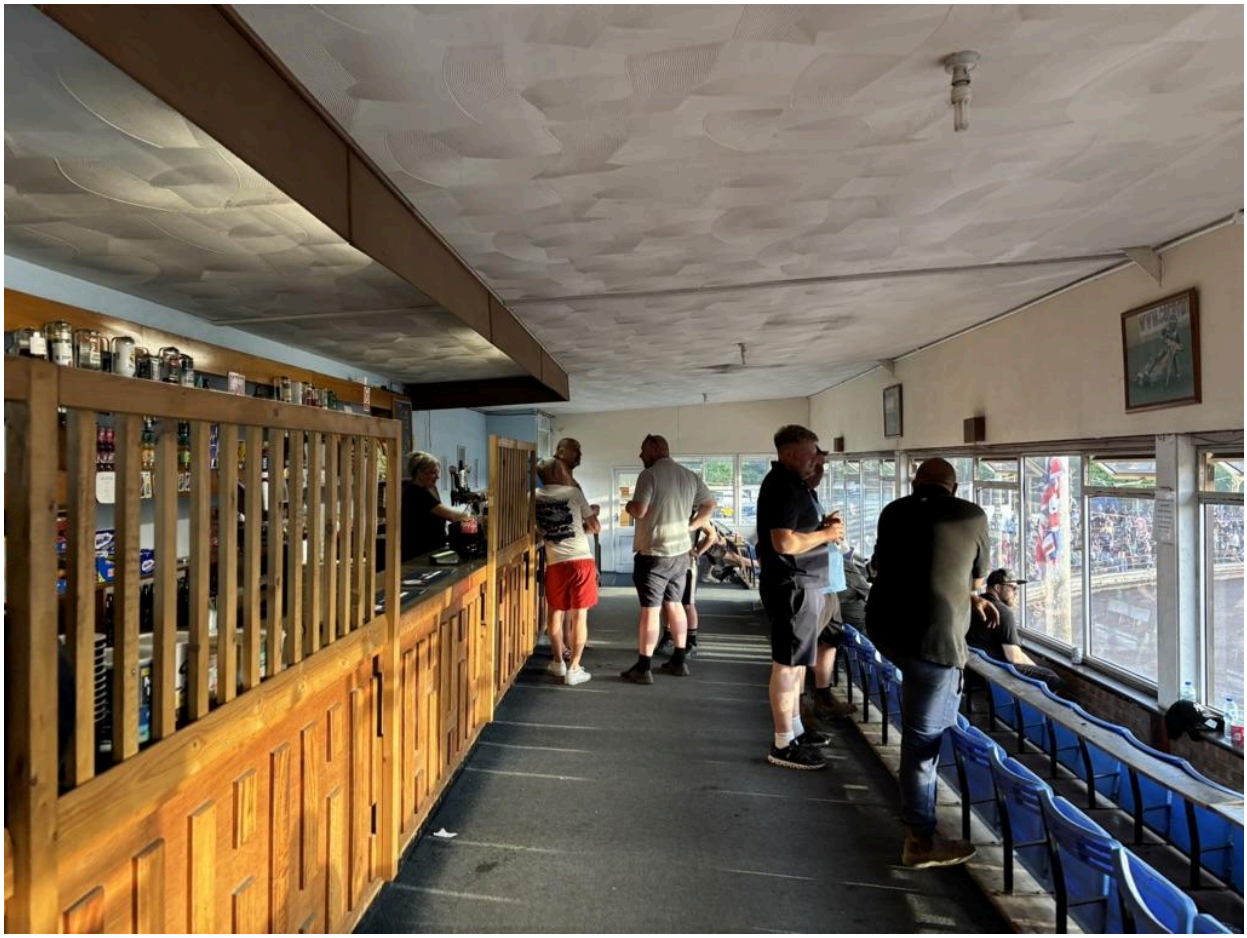
The pits are nestled into the trees to a degree that I don't think I've seen at any track before which was pretty neat. The pit stalls were between the trees.

The other wild thing that I didn't expect was the haulers that the teams had. Almost all of them had flatbed trucks with cranes built into them! I suppose there's the expectation that the cars aren't going to be in a state to roll onto a trailer at the end of a banger race but I had no idea the cranes were going to be such a prevalent thing. It was a really unique aspect and something I was glad to get to see.



There were a lot of people there and not a lot of seating options, but I found a place to stand by the fence on the exit of turn two. I got a burger for dinner that wasn't anything special.

The setup was pretty similar to King's Lynn last Saturday, with low stands along the straights and lawn chair seating on the turns, though here there wasn't an upper section of stands and the turns were sloped grass instead of tiered concrete.



They did have an enclosed upper section with a bar and two rows of seating. It seemed to be just free to walk up and sit in there, which was surprising since I’m used to enclosed areas like that being special reserved seating.



The track was paved around the outside though it was a substantial dirt section directly below that was watered regularly. There was very little banking in the turns and the walls were a similar setup to King’s Lynn with the armco backed by concrete and short cabling above, with a catch fence set further back.



They rolled the first heat onto the track before the scheduled start time and they went green right on schedule. There were around 100 national bangers and 17 historic stock cars. The bangers were separated into three heats of 30ish cars. They ran clockwise which was again a bit strange to get used to coming from the US.

It’s basically high powered enduro racing, but with more intentional contact. There’s maybe not quite as much as I expected, but there were still plenty of times that they slammed into each other pretty hard. The heats raced more like they were generally racing clean but weren’t opposed to contact.



The top 12 qualified to the feature, plus two “entertainers” who I took to mean the two cars that put on the wildest show. It seemed like many times the entertainers weren’t actually able to get the car back in running condition to make the next race though. In the first heat only 11 cars finished for 12 spots so they only took 11.

Once again they had the winner of each race ride around in the back of a vehicle, this time a sedan with the trunk taken off and rails around it to stand in.

There were multiple hearses and limos throughout the field which was entertaining. It seems like pretty much anything goes as long as it’s a V8. The only time a red flag was thrown in the heats was for a tire that fell off.



There were no fewer than seven tow trucks and they did a pretty good job of getting all the cars cleared from the track after each event.



The historic stock cars ran their heat next. They lined up like the F1 stock cars did last week but I couldn't tell what indicated their relative rank like the wing color did for the F1s. They had the same sort of big reinforced bumpers and were definitely not opposed to contact though they didn't seem to seek it out. You can feel when they hit the wall though with those immovable bumpers, there's not much give to them.



The bangers ran their consi that had around 40 cars in it, taking six plus the two entertainers. It got crazier in this one - not that it wasn't before, but they were straight up slamming into each other when one was stopped along the wall in the turns. There was one time when I think eight different cars piled in one after another. It's chaotic for sure, but not quite as fun as I thought it'd be. I think it has something to do with the expectation of carnage lessening the impact when it happens.

There was a moment where a hearse was stopped along the wall and a limo came slamming into it really hard, ripping the entire roof off and driving right up to the back of the cage. It turns out it moved the back axle up well forward of where it should be as well. They red flagged to check on the driver but afterward I found an onboard video of the driver throwing a double thumbs up when he felt that huge hit, which I think says a lot about the mentality of banger racers.



That hearse tried to come back out for the main, and was able to drive around the track but wasn't allowed to actually race. It's kind of amazing he could drive.



Apparently the winners of the heats flip a coin to determine whether they start at the front or the back of the feature. It was 15 laps with 45 cars, and started around 7:30 for a 5pm start time. It wasn't as crazy as I'd thought it would be but it definitely had harder hits than I'd expect to see at an enduro in the US. I think about 15 cars of the 45 actually finished.

The stock cars ran their 16 lap main, the longest event of the day, with 11 cars capable of starting. The threshold for yellows was higher here and they had several of them.

It was a big crowd and an unexpectedly hot day, and the concession stands actually ran out of water across the board. I didn't have sunscreen and ended up hiding behind my jacket for the times when I wasn't actively watching a race, but I did manage to generally avoid a sunburn.

I noticed at some point that a number of crashed cars had been stacked on a hauler and the crew were standing on top watching the rest of the event from the road.



The banger grand national ended the event, starting 60ish cars for another 15 laps. I think it's everyone who's still capable of running and I really appreciate the philosophy of doing such a thing.

One of the cars I noticed had left side drive like an American car which was unusual to note.

There were around 35 cars still running after one 4 laps, and they continued to decrease at a rapid pace, leaving maybe 10 of them running at the checkered flag. Speaking of which, they kept going at speed for multiple laps after the checkered, I'm not sure exactly why.

It was kind of wild seeing all the cranes lifting the broken cars onto the flatbeds to transport away. The pits were free the whole time so I wandered through at the end and watched them loading the cars.



Several flatbeds had two or three cars on them, and some were just stacked right on top of each other and strapped down wherever they could put a strap on.





I’m quite glad I was able to get to a banger race while I was in England. It’s not like anything you see in the states and I just love how the teams all have cranes to load their cars out from the track.