

# Castle Combe Circuit – The first 60 years

**By Paul Lawrence and Peter Stowe**

In August 1997, the outright circuit record was re-written in the most spectacular style. The BOSS series, open to a wide range of powerful single-seater racing cars, was headed by Nigel Greensall in a former Grand Prix Tyrrell 022 entered by Paul Stoddart's European Aviation Racing team. Greensall, a regular racer and winner at Castle Combe in a wide range of cars, rose to the challenge and smashed the circuit record by lapping in 50.59 seconds, an average of 130.93mph.

It was a stunning display that thrilled the bumper Bank Holiday crowd and would make Greensall the all-time fastest driver in the circuit's history. The circuit changes instigated before the 1999 season ensured that his record would not be broken.

*"The first time I went to Castle Combe was in a Multisport in 1991," said Greensall. "Then I did Formula Forward and Formula Ford after that, but it was basically one race a year. Then I ran the ProSport 3000 there in 1995 and 1996. In August 1997, I was due to race the ProSport on the same day as the Formula 1 car, but the engine failed in qualifying."*

*"The number of people who turned up that day was fantastic. It was a shame in some ways, because we had a 20-minute untimed session and it was pouring with rain. Then the qualifying session was held in the wet and although it wasn't raining so hard by then, the track was still soaking wet. So the first dry lap in the Tyrrell was the first lap of the race. Had it been dry in the morning, there were a few things we would have done differently on the car, which would have found us more speed," said Greensall.*

*"The main challenge in the race was Swedish racer Johan Rajamaki in the Arrows, but his engine failed before the race so there wasn't a serious threat in terms of speed. The big challenge then was to see how quick a lap we could do. The car ran well for the first two thirds of the race but then the gearbox started to fail and I was stuck in fifth gear. That cost us the chance of putting in an ever quicker lap. It's frustrating to look back on it because we could have gone under the 50-second mark, but the lap time was still pretty good."*

*"It was a fantastic sensation racing that car at Castle Combe. In a car like that you obviously notice all the undulations in the surface and there were quite a few occasions when the car was airborne. Looking at the data, there were quite a few spikes on the speed graphs. Up over Avon Rise we were getting airborne as the wheel speed graphs were showing 186mph but we were only actually doing 182mph, so the rear wheels were obviously skipping off the ground. It was sixth gear all the way from the startline to Avon Rise," he said.*

*"Quarry was third gear before going back up to sixth and holding sixth through Old Paddock. I was braking very lightly for Old Paddock because in the race, I was able to be quite conservative as there wasn't a direct challenger. We were also trying to make sure of a finish as we were chasing the championship. I knew I'd got to get the car to the finish, as well as enjoy it and entertain people."*

*"The arrival speed at Old Paddock was 178mph and about 145mph turning through the corner. We then got back up to just over 170mph down into Tower, which was a third gear corner. The peak speed on Dean Straight was 179mph before Camp. I tried Camp in fourth gear and fifth gear and it seemed to work better in fourth, although with a bit of work I think we could have got through Camp in fifth and got a better lap time. It just felt fantastic," said Greensall.*

*“Castle Combe has always been how I feel racing should be. On reflection, it has made me realise I wish I’d been racing in the 1960s and early 1970s. I got such a buzz from it and it reminded me why I first got into motor racing.*

*“In some ways, I wish I’d been a spectator that day, because it would have been great to stand on the bank and be that close to a Formula 1 car travelling at those speeds. The crowd seemed to enjoy it. I’m a bit sad that the circuit then changed, because as a driver I loved the old lay-out. The danger is that as circuits get safer, driving standards drop, so it is nice to have the circuits like Castle Combe that are a real challenge. It was a real highlight for me and I’d love to go back there with a Formula 1 car.”*