

# INSIGHT: CLASSIC TOURERS

Photos: Paul Lawrence and LAT

**A**nyone around the British Touring Car Championship in the Nineties will need no reminding of the spectacle delivered during a truly golden era for the championship as manufacturers queued up to field works teams with star drivers.

It was the era that brought Gabriele Tarquini, Frank Biela, Alain Menu, Rickard Rydell, Jo Winkelhock and Laurent Aiello to Britain to compete with home grown stars like John Cleland, Tim Harvey and David Leslie as well as F1 aces Nigel Mansell and Derek Warwick.

Cleland and Harvey were both on good form when the Historic Sports Car Club launched its Super Touring series at Autosport International ten days ago and are both eager to get back into a touring car for at least some of the races.

"I'd be right up for doing it and it would be great to bring out some of the other old champions," says Cleland, BTCC champion in 1989 and 1995. Harvey, champion in 1992 after an explosive final race at Silverstone when BMW team-mate Steve Soper and Harvey's title rival Cleland went out in a controversial clash, says: "I'd love to drive any of them, not just the ones I drove in period."

Since it was first won by Jack Sears in an Austin Westminster back in 1958, the British Saloon Car Championship, which evolved into the British Touring Car Championship for 1987, has been at the forefront of British racing. Today, it is more popular than ever, with huge crowds, blanket TV coverage and, for 2013, the prospect of overflowing grids.

The idea of a series to celebrate 30 years of touring cars came to reality last July in the Touring Car Trophy races at the Silverstone Classic when prime mover Dave Jarman and his squad fielded a 40-car entry. For the historic purists, it was a significant development as cars as little as 13 years old raced at the pinnacle of historic racing. But it was a success and encouraged a new generation of fans to visit the event.

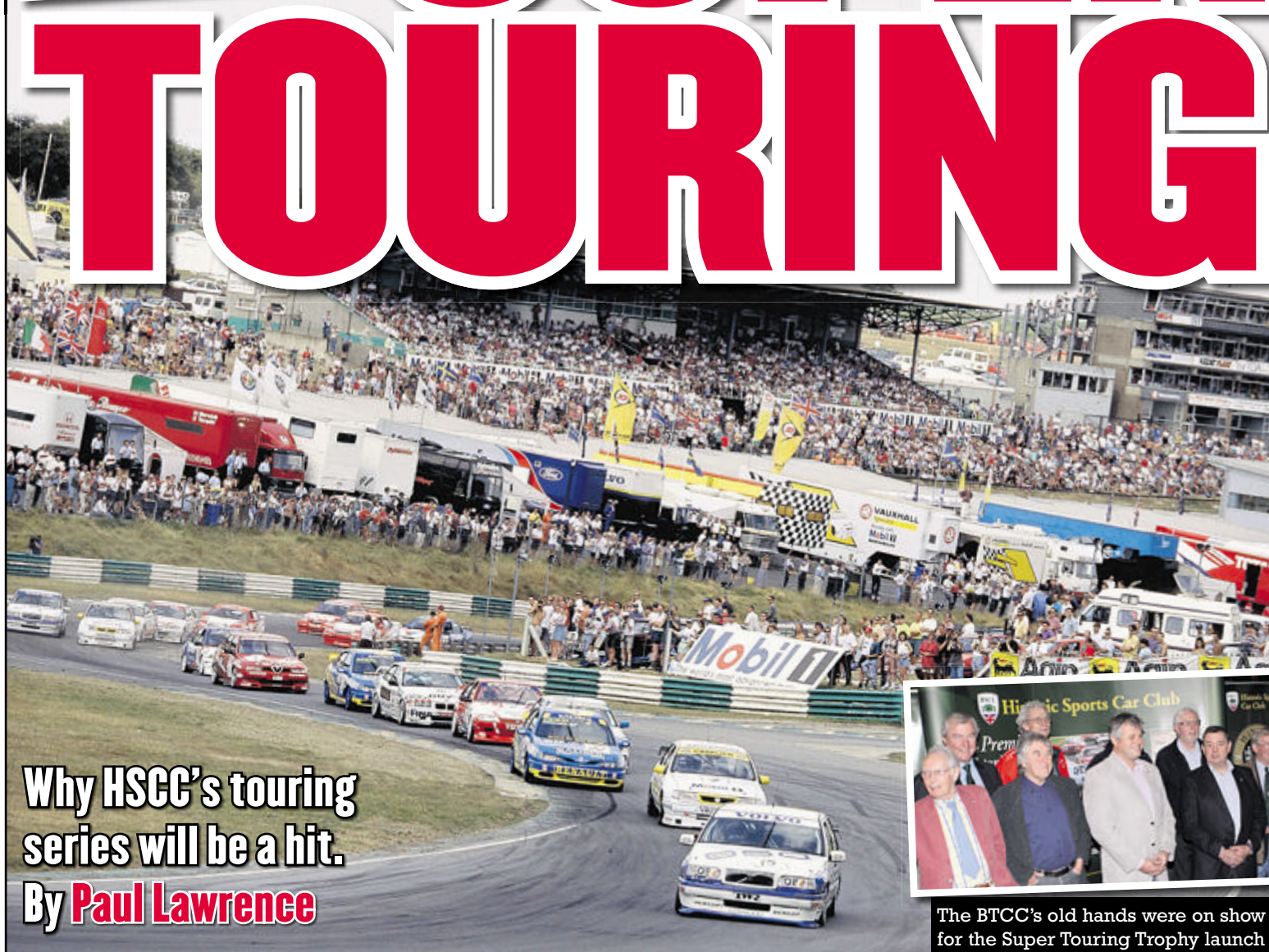
At the core of the series are the Super Touring Cars of the 1990s. This was a golden era for the tin-top series as it enjoyed unprecedented levels of manufacturer support, with works teams from Vauxhall, Audi, Toyota, BMW, Mitsubishi, Alfa Romeo, Honda, Ford, Peugeot, Mazda, Nissan, Volvo and Renault all competing.

The legacy of those heady days was a fleet of cars that filtered down into private hands and for the last decade some have been raced at club level in series like the now defunct Formula Saloons and in Classic Thunder. However, until last July, there had not been a truly high-profile platform for these cars and the switch to the historic or classic arena seems to have been the best move yet.

Cleland is certain that the series is great news. "We're looking at cars that five or six years ago were pretty



The Silverstone event was a huge hit



Why HSCC's touring series will be a hit.

By Paul Lawrence



The BTCC's old hands were on show for the Super Touring Trophy launch

worthless and sitting in someone's garage," says the Scot, always good value and always with an opinion. "It's bit like many of the historic cars: at one point they weren't worth a lot of money but today they are worth fortunes because there is a series to race in and people want them. I think the Super Touring Car series has got all the legs to fly and become something really special."

Harvey is equally sold on the idea and, of course, the chance to race against his old sparring partner has some appeal. "I grew up watching the British Saloon Car Championship, whether it was Bill McGovern or Tony Dron," said the man who is now the voice of the BTCC. "I've either driven in or been involved in the BTCC every year since 1987, so there are a lot of my old cars around. Touring cars is so dear to my heart and it is fantastic to see the cars out there and that the interest is there."

Cleland, who has raced several historic cars over the last year or two including a Jaguar E-type, is more than ready for a guest drive. "I'd be

right up for doing it. It would just be something else," he said. "Bring back all the good old boys! Back in my day, it was bloody good fun."

For choice of car, Cleland does not hesitate. "I would have to drive a Vauxhall because that's what I spent my life doing. It would be wrong to arrive in a Hillman Imp or an Alfa Romeo or anything else," he says.

Harvey has a wider wish list: "I saw the races at the Silverstone Classic last year and I was angling to get in my old RS500, the Labatts car, but that didn't happen. My favourite cars were the Rover Vitesse that I started off in, the Sierra RS500 and the BMW M3. In the Super Touring era, the Volvo was a really fantastic car. Even the Peugeots in which I finished my BTCC career."

Cleland says that the pace of development in the later years of Super Touring was fierce and, inevitably, that arms race led to the end of Super Touring as spending spiralled out of control. In 2001, the new BTC Touring regulations were introduced to mark a new era

of the BTCC. "I just looked at my 1995 title-winning car," says Cleland. "I saw it a few years ago at Goodwood, but prior to that I'd not seen it since the end of the '95 season. I remember it being a real bit of kit and we really did the business with that car. But it was nothing special in today's terms. There was no fancy dash, there were a couple of switches and a few buttons. It was in the later days in 1998, '99 and 2000 that Super Touring became really technical and you needed a laptop to start the car."

The new series is not just about Super Touring cars. The grids will include a gaggle of Group A Ford Sierra RS500s and BMW M3s, Group 1 Ford Capris, Group 2 Ford Escorts and mighty Jaguar XJ12s.

"I hope that this series takes off," says Cleland. "It's got the right tracks to go to and it's got all the pedigree."

"It is fantastic to see the cars out and for a lot of people their favourite period is the mid '90s Super Touring era: it brings back a lot of fond memories," said Harvey. "If I get a chance to race in it, I'll be there." ■

## SUPER TOURING TROPHY

The new-for-2013 Super Touring Trophy will run at four high-profile historic race meetings, headlined by a return date at the Silverstone Classic (July 26-28). The season starts at the Thruxton Easter Revival (March 30/31), followed by rounds at the Historic Super Prix at Brands Hatch (July 13/14) and the Oulton Park Gold Cup (August 25/26).

The classes will mirror those used at the 2012 Silverstone Classic, when 40 cars lined up to deliver two superb races. Classes will cover Group 2 (1970-'73), Group 1 (1974-'83), Group A (1983-'90) and Super Touring Cars (1991-2000) and there will be an invitation class for historically significant cars, including those from the World and German Touring Car Championships of the period. Cars will run exactly as they did in period and will comply with relevant period FIA regulations. The series is restricted to genuine cars with a period history and the planned four-event schedule is the perfect platform for car owners.

For the series-organising club, the Historic Sports Car Club, this represents a significant step forward in time as the club's portfolio.

For more details, visit [hsc.org.uk](http://hsc.org.uk).



Classic tourers will find a home