



A display of RS200s helped celebrate Ford's famous Boreham at the Wheels, Wings & Dwellings exhibition, so we take a look at the plant's history.

THE HISTORY OF BOREHAM

Words and Photos:
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Boreham has only ever meant one thing to Ford fans: motorsport. Its secluded location, huge perimeter track and wide variety of surfaces made it the ideal place for Ford to develop a series of world beating rally cars.

But that isn't the whole story. It has served many purposes over the years, and its suitability as a motor development facility owes as much to the US Air Force as it does to Henry Ford's decision to buy the site earlier in the 20th Century.

To celebrate the story of Boreham, Chelmsford Museum recently curated an exhibition entitled 'Wings, Wheels and Dwellings' which tracked the development of the site from pre-history to its current purpose as home to the Essex Police and Air Ambulance helicopters.

To compliment the exhibit, Simon Rudge – an ex-Boreham man – decided to organise a day with an impressive display of RS200s, and sent out an open invite to all ex-employees with impressive results. The afternoon turned out to be a who's who of Ford's sporting history.

The origins of the Ford Motor Company's involvement with the Boreham site couldn't have been further removed from the world of international rallies and the glamour of top-level motorsport. Henry Ford bought the Boreham House Estate in 1930 and established the Henry Ford Institute of Agricultural Engineering. Ford was an innovator and it wasn't just cars which benefited from his attention.

BATTLE STATION

When Mr Hitler decided to cause trouble at the end of the decade, Boreham would also make its first contribution to the war effort when it became a temporary training ground for the Women's Land Army. As the war progressed and the Allies began to prepare for their assault on Hitler's Fortress Europe, Boreham's role was to change dramatically.

Neighbouring land was compulsory purchased by the government and a massive airfield housing over 2500 service personnel with three runways and a 50ft-wide perimeter track was built on the site from scratch before being decommissioned at the end of the war.

As life returned to normal, motorsport enthusiasts started to look for opportunities to begin racing again, but like so many other aspects of life that had been adversely affected by the war, many of the major pre-war motorsport venues around the country had been left ruined by wartime activities. Brooklands had suffered in air raids, Donington Park had been transformed into the largest military transport base in the country, and Crystal Palace was littered with unexploded bombs. But it wasn't long before enthusiasts realised that the now unused military airfields, with their good quality runways and perimeter roads, could be quickly adapted for racing.

It's fascinating to note that between 1950 and 1952, Boreham was to become one of the country's major motorsport venues – a fact almost forgotten today. The owners had been encouraged by the first motorcycle event held in September 1950, and gave permission for circuit racing to take place on the perimeter roads. Repairs to the surface were carried out, and grass planted on the outfield areas. Spectator safety was limited to straw bales and a rope fence – any changes had to be quickly reversible



Jenny Van Hilten brought her RS200 over from Luxembourg for the event. She's owned and competed in the car since August 1987. She's just sold the car to Yves Franssens, pic left.

www.rs200.co.uk with permission of Fast Ford Nov 2011

THE WHO'S WHO

It's a rare treat when you get to meet the people who created motorsport history. It's even rarer when you just have to stand in one place – in the car park of the Chelmsford Museum, surrounded by RS200s – and these great men are introduced to you, one after another. Simon Rudge had put out the word, and the great and the good, the names that made the Ford Motorsport story turned up.

Bill Barnett was deputy manager of the Ford Comps Department from October 1962 until March 1973, and was responsible for moving the department from the Lincoln Cars building in Brentford to Boreham.

The team he put together came from within the company, "but they all had to have an interest in motorsport," adds Mick Jones, the legendary Boreham workshop foreman. He joined the team in 1962, and if you look at old pictures of the workshops, of cars on test or scenes from the international rallies, you'll spot Mick in the thick of it somewhere.



Also present on the day was Bob Howe, who started his career as an assembly line worker in 1951, worked his way up through the production planning department, working on the Cortina Lotus Mk2 and Escort Twin Cam, and was responsible for the legislation programmes on the RS200 and Escort Cosworth. He was also in charge of selling every RS200.

Bill Camplisson started his career with Ford at Boreham in

1962 as a graduate trainee and went on to be Product Planning Director, involved with many significant projects including the RST and RS200.

The list of names goes on and on – legendary engine builders Terry Hoyle and Geoff Page, John Mitchell ex-Boreham and now head of Mountune, Jenny Van Hilten who travelled with her RS200 from Luxembourg with the RS200 she has competed with since new, and many of the guys who worked at Boreham through the years including John Green and Terry Bradley.

Simon's planning to organise something similar next year, so if you're a fan of the glory days of Boreham and Ford Motorsport, don't miss it.



Q8-sponsored Sapphire Cosworth (above) wasn't a great success, but it didn't lack support (top)!



RS200s at Boreham back in 1986. We're loving the Motorsport-liveried Transit support van...

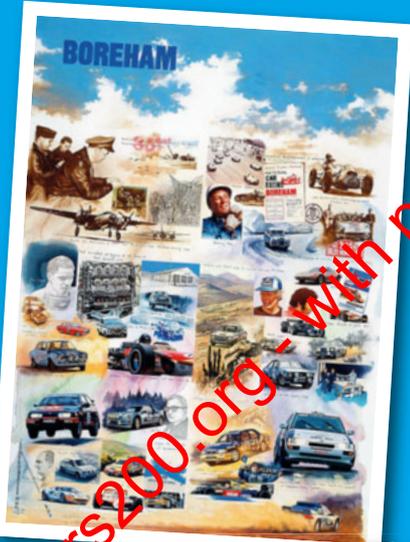


SIMON RUDGE

"It all started because I work with a youth project – the Chelmsford Chances Motor Project – working with 12-16 year olds on mechanical things. I started to introduce the kids to motorsport, and we've built a Fiesta Mk1 Classic Touring Car which we've set records with. The project is run by the Chelmsford Borough Council at another site which belongs to the museum, and the thought was, 'could we get an RS200 to the museum for the day to tie in with the exhibit?'. I talked to a few of the guys and it all went horribly right!"

Of course, Simon's well connected within the Boreham network. He started his working life as a technical apprentice at Ford and progressed through the company. He was based at Boreham with the Test Operations Department and worked on the Cargo project in the early-'80s. He got to know people, and has become very involved with RS200s over the years.

"It's been an amazing day," he said, "way, way better than I was expecting – the cars and the people. We've brought together a reunion of the Boreham guys!"



Boreham's first motorsport task was to prepare Cortina GTs followed by the Lotus Cortina



RS200 interior is a mix of parts-bin bodgey and motorsport essentials. Note the second 'gear lever' used to control the torque-split

"The Daily Mail International Festival of Motor Sport of August 1952 was widely anticipated to put Boreham on the international motorsport map."

as in those uncertain years, airfields had to be capable of being returned to operational use within 48 hours. Racing on both two and four wheels drew huge crowds, and riders and drivers alike were impressed by the quality of the circuit. Many of the top racers would compete at Boreham including Stirling Moss, Mike Hawthorn and John Surtees, and although the venue was never to make it onto the official Grand Prix calendar, it would host races featuring all types including Formula 1.

The Daily Mail International Festival of Motor Sport of August 1952 was widely anticipated to put Boreham on the international motorsport map – the programme included two 100-mile races for Le Mans style sports cars, Formula 3 and a 200-mile race for Formula 1 and Formula 2 cars. An estimated 50,000 spectators packed the circuit.

MAIL STOP

Plans were already being made for the 1953 season, but two months before the first event was due to happen, the motoring press announced that racing at Boreham was finished. The reasons were never made entirely clear, but as a racing venue, Boreham had continually lost money. The withdrawal of the Daily Mail's sponsorship was doubtless the final straw.

For many, the golden age of Boreham began in 1955 when Ford took over the site for vehicle testing. Engineers attempted to create environments that vehicles would encounter both in Britain and around the world. The three mile perimeter road was used to simulate motorways while the main runway was assigned for acceleration testing. Other stretches were constructed as Korean,

East African, corrugated and Belgian Pavé road surfaces. A crash test rig, complete with 100 ton block of concrete, and a 2.5 mile assault course with conditions that could be found on international rallies were also built.

Before 1963, the test circuits at Boreham were used to put road cars and commercial vehicles through their paces. It was only after the arrival of Walter Hayes at Ford in 1962 as Director of Public Affairs that the Motorsport Department was moved from its old home in the Lincoln Building on the A4 in West London. Ford's works rally cars had until then been prepared alongside the press





BOREHAM DURING THE WAR

The site was requisitioned by the government in 1942 and additional land was compulsorily purchased in neighbouring Little Waltham and Boreham parish. In May 1943, 560 men of the American 861st Engineer Aviation Battalion arrived on the site. Unlike many airfields and aerodromes around the UK which were assigned to and then redeveloped by the USAAF, Boreham was to be the only one built from scratch. Over 620 acres were cleared, including

woods and orchards and ultimately, 130,000 tons of concrete were poured to create a Class A airfield. This consisted of three converging runways at 60 degrees in a triangle formation – the main runway was 6000 feet long, with two secondaries at 4200 feet. The whole thing was encircled by a 50 feet wide perimeter track.

In February 1944, the first of 65 Martin B26 Marauders of the 44th Bombardment Group arrived, with operations beginning just 13 days later to bomb targets in occupied France. The squadrons were tasked with destroying tactical targets such as bridges, airfields and railways in preparation for D-Day.

Like so many US bases in Britain, USAAF Station AAF-161 had a relatively short operational life, and with the war over, the base was decommissioned. With chronic postwar housing shortages, the empty Nissen huts which had so recently housed American airmen were re-assigned as Essex County Council utilised it as temporary housing for bombed out families. Boreham briefly became a thriving civilian community with shops, bus services, post and telephone boxes. The children attended Boreham and Great Leighs schools. The majority of the remaining land was used by Co-Partnership Farms.



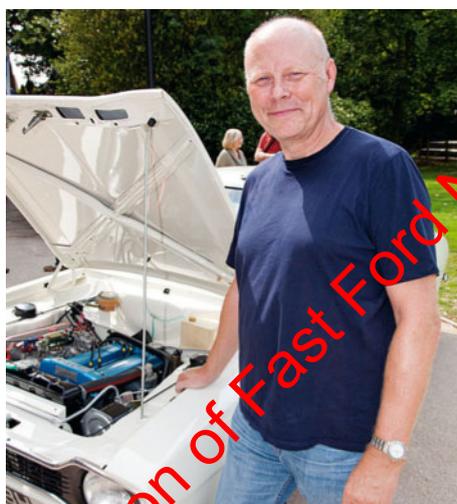
Aaron Lo brought his track-prepped Escort Cosworth along. Built around a motorsport shell and converted to 2WD, it rivalled the RS200s for visitor attention





RS200 display attracted a who's who of Ford motorsport history

“Ford Motorsport would remain at Boreham until 1996, developing cars that have become icons.”



John Mitchell, ex-Boreham Boy and now the head of Ford tuning firm Mountune, came along with his superb Mk1 Escort Twin Cam



cars and it had been on a keen amateur level with no specially developed cars and no professional drivers. Hayes saw the potential publicity value and decided to change everything.

Hayes secured a site at Boreham and commissioned a new complex to be built. “We designed the building and all the tools needed - it cost £48k,” remembers Bill Barnett. The staff were recruited from within Ford, but all had a genuine interest in motorsport.

CORT IN THE ACT

The first cars to be prepared at Boreham were Cortina GTs, rapidly followed by Lotus Cortinas. The gentlemen drivers of the past were quickly replaced by professionals. Within a few short years, the efforts of the boys at Boreham had created legends – both cars and drivers – and with the arrival of the Escort, Ford’s dominance in World Rallying began.

“Our best year was 1968 when we took six international rallies,” remembers Mick Jones, one of the first mechanics to be recruited to Boreham in 1962. In 1970, six Boreham prepared cars were entered on the gruelling London to Mexico World Cup Rally. Five would finish within the first eight places with the winning car driven by Hannu Mikkola and Gunnar Palm. And no one needs to be reminded of the complete dominance of the Escort in the RAC Rally in the years between 1972 and 1979.

Ford’s activities at Boreham began to gear down in 1987 when commercial vehicle testing was discontinued. Ford Motorsport would remain at Boreham until 1996, developing cars that have become icons including the RS200 and the Sierra and Escort Cosworths. Some road vehicle testing continued after motorsport left the site.

Today, the historic airfield and circuit are slowly disappearing as the site is excavated and gravel is extracted. The Essex Police and Air Ambulance are now based on the site, still using the control tower built by the Americans in 1943.



Dave Seaton’s 1990 RS200 ‘S’, one of a limited run of 20 with a more luxurious ‘road’ spec. Dave’s owned the car from new