



Members' Newsletter – New Year 2021

We'd like to wish all our members a Happy New Year!

At a time when the news is looking ever more dismal, with the only consistent message being that things are going to get worse before they get better, we just have to pin our hopes on the "light at the end of the tunnel" which, although we might not be able to see it now, should be getting a bit brighter by the spring and summer.

Whatever happens we're confident that we'll be able to enjoy a racing season in 2021. While the restrictions we worked under in 2020 were hard for some to accept, we've learned a lot from the experience and will be in a much better position to open up to a competitive season for 2021, just as soon as Government restrictions are lifted to an extent that allows grassroots sports to resume.

We're under no illusions that we're going to be faced with a difficult start to the season – although that's nothing new for us, and only a couple of years ago we recovered to enjoy an excellent season after the first couple of months were wiped out by the weather.

With all five nations where Autograss takes place currently in full lockdown, we have to anticipate that we'll be lucky to see restrictions eased much before the end of March. But after that, depending on which news you've been listening to, and how much of it you believe, we can anticipate changes coming fairly quickly, and we think we'll be ready!

The focus for the Board since the end of the 2020 season has been to plan for as "normal as possible" a season in 2021. By planning a full season, which looks very much like 2020's programme did at this stage, we'll be best placed to take advantage of the easing of restrictions as it happens. It will be easier to start with everything planned and in place and then, if necessary, modify our plans to comply with any restrictions forced on us, than it would be to try and pick up momentum as the year progresses. In this newsletter, we'll try and give you an outline of how our plans are coming together so far.

WHAT CAN WE DO NOW?

We've said many times, and we won't apologise for saying it again, the Board are 100 per cent committed to a return to competitive racing for the 2021 season. That means we're pushing on with plans that will ensure that there is as much Autograss action as can possibly be allowed.

We can't deny that Covid-19 is very much dictating our day to day lives and, regardless of the speed or otherwise of the vaccination programme, it's going to be with us for some time yet.

While the Board will be working behind the scenes to ensure that we'll be right up to date and ready to get the season started, there's a lot to be done at club level too. We hope that club



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members everywhere will use the experience gained from the 2020 “practice day” events, whether they hosted events or attended as visitors. We’re considering many different scenarios in our planning; we hope clubs are doing the same and communicating as much as possible with their landowners in particular to help things go smoothly when the season starts. Those clubs who weren’t able to host events in 2020 (in most cases to respect their landowners’ wishes) should be encouraged by how well, and safely, other clubs’ events were completed.

YOUR 2021 LICENCE

We know a lot of you will be saying, let’s just hold back before spending money on a licence, and see how well the country’s doing by Easter. We’re appealing to you though, please rejoin your club for 2021 and get your licence sorted as soon as you can. By doing this, as well as being ready and avoiding any last minute panics, you’ll be giving your club much needed support and encouragement that will be a vital part of getting the show back on the road.

There’ll be logistical problems, particularly for those of you who would normally sign up for your licence by attending a club night. Clubs around the country will be doing everything they can to make it easier for members to rejoin, and NASA will be giving them maximum support and encouragement through this process.

Some clubs already have their own membership application systems that feed into the NASA licence process. We’re currently working with one club to introduce a full online membership system, and if it works for them we’ll share the details with any other clubs who want to go down that route.

We want to see every club survive this crisis and come out the other side in as healthy a position as possible, and in a position to help us quickly get back to racing. As you’ll read further down this newsletter, NASA have taken action to help with this, but the one thing that will make the biggest difference to any club is the ongoing support and loyalty of its members. We know we can rely on you!

2021 FIXTURES

We pretty well have a full fixture list now compiled which we hope to have live and online in a few days’ time.

The list as it stands features exactly 200 race meetings, comprising 241 individual race days at 34 different venues. These break down into 160 single day race meetings, 20 multi-day meetings with separate days’ racing, and 20 “championship format” two-day meetings.

Out of the 51 NASA clubs, 31 have booked race dates, 10 are involved in running meetings at centralised league venues and 10, to the best of our knowledge, don’t currently have access to a venue. Over 34 weekends, starting on 6 March and ending on 24 October, there are 170



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days' racing planned in England, 17 in Wales, 12 in Scotland, 19 in Northern Ireland and 23 in Southern Ireland.

With all the current challenges, we've gone along with the dates that clubs have proposed. Historically the fixtures we've published have not been a centrally co-ordinated "NASA fixture list" but a collection of individual club and league lists. In today's world, we recognise that this approach needs to change. We've been asking clubs and leagues to be a bit more critical in their planning of dates, working with their neighbours to avoid clashing fixtures in the hope that all clubs can enjoy viable and sustainable events.

Looking at the list we have, there's more to do on this front, but the list reflects the essential problem that we've had for many years. Clubs have to strike a balance by offering enough racing to keep their local members interested, but are under pressure to fit these meetings into a limited number of weekends that aren't occupied by major events. Potentially the busiest weekend of the year is in mid-June with 13 events in England and Wales. That's not surprising as it's the last weekend before the normal National qualifying deadline, and there are major events on the three previous weekends. The next weekend in June, there's not one event planned in England or Wales! We've now tried to ease that situation by extending the qualifying deadline by a few days, offering clubs the chance to move clashing fixtures back a week.

We'll be closely monitoring event attendances as the year goes on. At this stage we're offering advice but avoiding direct intervention in fixture planning, which would be difficult to impose fairly. We must recognise that it's likely to be a difficult year for everyone and we'll have to decide if a more formal fixture planning process is needed in future, either at a national or regional level.

At one time the fixtures that came to NASA, certainly from the more "busy" areas, had already been filtered by, for example, the Western Region Association or the Northern area's annual dates meeting. Those have fallen by the wayside and, at times, communication between clubs and leagues seems to be lacking, so you can expect more national "supervision" of fixtures planning as soon as we get back to normal conditions.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

There is one major gap in the fixture list as we don't yet have a confirmed venue for the 2021 National Championships. Our hope was that the Yorkshire Dales club would be able to transfer its 2020 plan to 2021 but unfortunately they've had to pull out, for reasons we quite understand and sympathise with – they were unable to make the necessary financial commitment for a second year running after incurring substantial losses on their 2020 planning. We're therefore looking for a new host for the event, scheduled for 7/8 August. We know this isn't going to be easy, given the uncertainties of making a firm commitment at this stage. What we're looking for is expressions of interest from leagues or clubs, who the directors would then work with flexibly to ensure the best chance of a successful event.



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The Ladies' and Juniors' event, to be held on 4/5 September, does have a confirmed venue as Radford club, the intended 2020 hosts, have reconfirmed their commitment to the event. The main change you'll see here is in the entry process, which we're planning to move online, although we'll keep a manual option in case any entrants aren't quite ready for an online system. We hope to open the event for entries early in the new year. You won't receive the normal entry form with your 2021 licence, but you'll be given a link to the online entry form, which will be submitted direct to NASA. You'll still need to contact your club to arrange payment.

FINANCIAL HELP FOR CLUBS

Since the restricted 2020 season began we've been receiving a stream of enquiries as to whether NASA could do anything to help clubs with their financial losses. We apologise for the fact that we had to delay giving any firm commitment because it was very much dependent on what help NASA could negotiate with our insurers.

We can now confirm that we'll be able to support clubs' finances in two major ways.

The first, and most obvious, is that every club that was forced to cancel race meetings during 2020 will receive a full credit for their public liability insurance premiums relating to their cancelled events. That will mean that most clubs that paid their insurance in full for 2020 will start the 2021 season with enough credit to cover all their race meeting insurances.

The second, possibly less obvious but we hope equally helpful in the long run, is that all NASA affiliation fees and other charges will be frozen at their 2020 prices per member. The fees that NASA invoices to clubs at the beginning of the year are always based on the previous year's membership numbers, and the reduced membership in 2020 will therefore hit NASA's income for 2021. However, we obviously made significant savings in our normal running costs during 2020 and we'll be looking to continue some of those savings into 2021 (holding meetings online, where possible, being one example).

By passing these savings onto clubs, NASA's preliminary budgeting indicates that we should finish 2021 in a similar financial situation to when we started 2020 – with sufficient reserves to weather at least one "crisis" year, which has happened twice in the last twenty years (of course we now have members who won't remember the Foot & Mouth interrupted season in 2001).

We'll be keeping the position under constant review with a view to controlling NASA's costs in any way we can, which in turn means that we can control the costs we pass on to clubs, who can then control the licence fees they charge members. Every club is different and has different needs, and therefore we can't go as far as promising reduced individual licence fees, much as we'd like to.

However, clubs can now set up for 2021 in the knowledge that their NASA fees will be set at exactly the same rates as they were for 2020, and in reality most clubs will actually be paying NASA significantly less than last year.



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BOARD CHANGES

Most members will be aware of the outcome of the NASA Annual General Meeting, and an Extraordinary General Meeting called by your league representatives, at the end of November. We hope everyone's had a chance to read the minutes of those meetings, which are available on the NASA website.

As a result of the league reps' vote in the Extraordinary meeting, we lost the services of Martyn Tinker as a director. We'd like to thank Martyn for all his work over his four years on the board.

The vacancy on the Board created by the EGM has been filled by one of the two new candidates who put themselves up for election at the AGM, Chris Allanson, so we welcome Chris to the Board and look forward to taking advantage of his many years of experience as a driver, constructor, club member and businessman.

The three directors up for re-election, Margaret Allen, Barbara Harper and Ray Wyeth, were all re-elected for a further term. The other candidate, Simon Farrar, was not successful on this occasion, but we thank Simon for his interest.

The directors have already held two full meetings since the AGM, with one of the main priorities being to allocate roles and responsibilities going into the New Year. Most of the directors agreed to continue with the work that they were already carrying out. However, we needed a new appointment to oversee the safety and risk assessment process. Recognising that this is the most important job of all within NASA, we will have a team of three directors working together (of course, with support from all other directors as all our jobs overlap).

Ray Wyeth will be heading the safety team, with support from Darryl Smart and Chris Allanson. The new team are already making excellent progress in updating our risk assessment documentation, and we'll be reporting to members in more detail on this in the coming weeks and months. The message we'll be putting across is that the Safety Officer is the most important position at any race event, so we'll be working hard to ensure that all your club and league Safety Officers receive support, training and encouragement to help them carry out their roles effectively and confidently.

It would be very helpful if all club and league safety officers could ensure that their up to date contact details have been advised to us via Diane Tomkinson, as we don't want to lose any time in kicking off the communication and support process.



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FORMULA 600 PROGRESS

On the Board's agenda for quite a while has been the status of Formula 600, a recognised "club class" which has always aimed to be an affordable and ultra-competitive entry into open-wheel Autograss racing.

There's been a long running discussion of when the time would be right to change the status of F600 to a nationally recognised NASA class. The "other" established club class, Stock Hatch, was formally adopted at the end of 2019, although unfortunately last year's restricted season has meant that their "transitional" period has extended into 2021.

The Board has now received a formal proposal from the F600 drivers' committee, setting out their vision of how their style of Specials racing could help the development of the sport nationally. This is now high on the agenda to be followed up; we can't yet anticipate what decisions may be agreed, or timetables set, but everyone with an interest in this class should know that its case for National acceptance is now making progress forward.

NASA ADMIN DEADLINES

You might like confirmation of the various 2021 deadlines relating to the National Championships.

The signing-on sheet deadline is Sunday 16 May 2021 – that is the last day on which cars signed on to race at any meeting will be counted towards their leagues' Nationals allocations.

The licence cut-off date is Wednesday 26 May 2021 – everyone wanting to race at the Nationals will need to have their licence by this date.

The "R101" date is Tuesday 22 June 2021 – this is the deadline for leagues to advise NASA of their drivers qualifying for the Nationals. The date is usually 19 June but it's been extended by three days to allow leagues to potentially run a qualifying meeting on Sunday 20 June, easing the pressure on the previous weekend's fixtures.

The closing date for entries to the Ladies' and Juniors' Nationals is Saturday 25 July 2021 – as mentioned above, the entries will be submitted online this year, but payment also needs to be confirmed with your club by this date.

A final reminder of the actual Nationals dates: the "men's" Nationals is scheduled to be held on 7/8 August 2021, at a venue to be decided, and the Ladies' and Juniors' Nationals is scheduled for 4/5 September 2021 at Radford.