



## **NASA UPDATE - October 2020**

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### **LOOKING FORWARD**

We're approaching the end of our short 2020 "season" with just three days of events remaining, subject of course to the weather, which wiped out all last week's events.

At this point we must say that, although designating all events officially as "practice days" has helped us get through the last three months, we certainly don't want this to apply any longer. We started to move forward with plans for Invicta Kent club to run a trial meeting with spectators - that's been delayed by the weather but we're still hoping it can take place on a new date. We're also making plans for, weather permitting, at least one event to take place as a full race meeting before the end of the year.

We're determined that in 2021 we'll be back to proper competitive racing, and we very much hope that those clubs that weren't able to run this year will all be back in action.

What we've achieved this year is to prove that our clubs, and our members, are capable of organising events that are compliant with all recommended safeguards, and of behaving responsibly when attending those meetings. So we believe there'll be no reason to hold back from running competitive events in front of spectators, even if we're still having to restrict attendances to some extent and imposing rules to enforce social distancing and contact tracing.

We have to start somewhere, and we'll shortly be sending out fixture list forms to all our club contacts, in our normal format (or an online version of that), based on our wish to run as "normal" a season as possible. Over the last few years we've encouraged clubs to work together as much as possible to achieve a "structured" fixture list - by which we mean one that gives everyone enough local racing to keep the sport attractive to members who aren't able to travel far afield, but at the same time avoiding clashes between clubs with overlapping catchment areas, which only serve to dilute each event. We think that's more important than ever now, so we're going to be working hard with clubs to try and achieve a more balanced spread of events.

We'll also be working with the organisers of the main championship series to make sure there's enough flexibility in our plans to accommodate as far as possible what members want from racing at that level.



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## **LOCAL LOCKDOWN**

One of the biggest, and most contentious, problems facing us in the last few weeks of the season has been the growing number of localised restrictions being imposed.

At a fairly early stage we established a NASA policy that anybody living in an area subject to local measures that are stricter than the National guidelines should not attend a NASA event. Our main motivation was that we should not be seen to encourage anyone to travel from a "higher risk" area to a "lower risk" area, whether or not this travel is allowed by the actual guidelines.

Although we have attempted to apply this policy consistently, it's become more complicated week by week. The first "local lockdowns" were just that, but more and more restrictions have been introduced that aren't really "lockdown" at all. People in some areas have been prevented from socialising with their neighbours, but are still free to travel outside the area. There's little consistency here – in some areas travel is "discouraged" but not forbidden; in others it's not restricted at all. It doesn't help that the press still refer to "lockdowns" regardless of the extent of restrictions. Some members have been confused as they're told they live in an "area of intervention" without the words "restriction" or "lockdown" being used – unfortunately it's all the same thing for our purposes.

The fact remains that these areas have been flagged by government as having a higher rate of increase in infections than the national average – which we must accept, even if we believe the statistics behind the decisions are suspect. So NASA policy is, if you're in one of these areas, you can't attend our events. We've been accused of being over-cautious and over-restrictive in continuing this policy – but we can take that. We'd rather be accused of this than of being irresponsible.

Another practical difficulty is that the restrictions are being based on local authority boundaries, not on county boundaries (as they were in Ireland) or postcode areas. Some official websites have defined the restricted areas by "whether the city council collects your bins" or "who you pay your council tax to". We've had to deal with queries about a couple of drivers who've turned out to live just a few hundred yards within the restricted area. We have to trust members to an extent – you will know which council area you live in, but it's difficult for clubs to check out every visiting driver.

The problems we've faced are illustrated by restrictions now applied in Wrexham and Warrington. Similar areas in a way, with similar Covid statistics. But they're on different sides of the Welsh border, so Wrexham residents aren't allowed to travel outside the borough, while those from Warrington can travel anywhere – even into Wales! NASA policy treats both these areas the same – it's up to you to decide if we're being fair!



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Many of our members from Scotland were subject to local restrictions, until the Scottish Government extended those restrictions to the whole country. At this point, those drivers were only subject to a national level of restriction, which wasn't so different from the national restrictions in England, so they were again free to travel to English NASA events – for a couple of weeks. Now those in a wide area of Central Scotland are now subject to extra restrictions, which include advice against unnecessary travel out of their area.

Unfortunately though, it appears the season in Ireland has come to a premature halt with the extension of "Level 3" restrictions, which were in force in Dublin and Donegal, to the entire county. The travel restrictions, although not a full lockdown, are serious enough to stop club events altogether for a three week period bringing us to the end of the season – although a Christmas meeting is being mooted by one club, in the hope that conditions ease.

As for England – well, there's not much left of the season. We were hopeful that the government would adopt the proposed "traffic light" system, with "red", "amber" and "green" levels of restrictions applied in each local area. If that happened, we'd have some consistency to work with, and we could simplify NASA policy by excluding everyone from a "red" area, and warning those in "amber" areas that their status might change at short notice. But this move is being delayed by disagreements between government ministers, and if it does happen it will be too late to help us much this year.

### **WHO'D BE A DIRECTOR?**

It's the time of year when any new candidates interested in standing for election to the NASA Board of Directors should step forward and make themselves known.

Every year, under company law, a third of the directors has to stand down, so this year three of the eleven directors will be "retiring by rotation". All of those directors will be standing for re-election, but it's open to any challengers to come forward for those positions. That means that three positions are available, to make up the board's predetermined total number of eleven directors, and the three retiring directors will compete with any new candidates for those positions. The voting members will have the opportunity to vote for or against each individual candidate, and the three getting the most votes will be appointed.

A few years ago we opened up this process so that any NASA licence holder can be proposed for election; what they need to do is find a proposer and seconder among the 20 voting members who effectively "own" NASA – these being the one remaining "founder member", Barbara Harper, and the nominated representatives of the 19 leagues.



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The deadline for nominations is Monday 19 October (40 days before the AGM date), so we suggest anyone interested in proposing a candidate, or standing themselves, should contact the Company Secretary (Jeffrey Parish) to make sure that they get all the right paperwork lined up.

After nominations are closed, we'll make the list of candidates public, together with any "manifesto" or "CV" they want to give us, so you'll all be able to see what the candidates are offering, and you'll be able to let your league representatives know your views before they vote on your behalf.

## **THE NASA AGM**

The NASA AGM, when we'd normally be electing directors and officials for the coming year, is due to be held on Sunday 29 November. This obviously gives us a logistical difficulty. Although the directors have had more meetings than ever this year, they've all had to be held online, and we're sure the same will have applied to many of your club and league committees. At the moment we're proposing to try a physical board meeting at a new venue, but this all depends on developments with "local lockdowns". A bigger meeting, such as an AGM, even if legally possible, would be much harder to justify and set up, and some members would not be comfortable attending. So we've considered various alternatives.

The voting league members will soon receive a more detailed proposal of how we think we'll deal with this, but essentially we'll be proposing to hold the meeting on the appointed day, but online. Because of the pitfalls and scope for errors in a real-time online voting process, we propose to have votes submitted in advance by post or email, which can then be independently verified before announcing the result to the online meeting.

The downside of this is that we normally allow league representatives to invite visitors to attend the AGM – who can observe, and although not entitled to vote or speak, we'd allow them to ask questions through the chairman. The logistics of an online meeting mean that it will have to be closed to "official" attendees only, although any member can still contact their league rep in advance if they want any issues raised.

The AGM normally falls into two parts. There's the statutory company meeting, where members vote for directors, approve the accounts and appoint the auditors – which is normally about it. Then there's the "AGM of the league representatives" when NASA officials are elected, reports delivered and "any other business" discussed.

We've already agreed, between the board and the league representatives, that the "NASA official" appointments made for 2020 will carry over to 2021. That affects the NASA Chairman and Vice Chairman, the Chief and Assistant Chief Marshals, and the NASA Scrutineers. These were all elected to do a job for a racing season and, although many of them will have had plenty to do behind the scenes, they haven't had a chance



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to achieve what they wanted to, so they'll all get the chance to do this in 2021 (subject, of course, to them being willing to continue).

As well as our AGM issues, we suspect that clubs and leagues will be struggling at the moment to put procedures in place for their own AGMs, which in most cases are held as open forums for members to have their say. This isn't something we'd directly get involved with, as clubs and leagues all have their own constitutions to work to, but it's still a concern that the current restrictions are breaking a link in the normal chain of communication from members to their representatives. Although we don't pretend to know the answers, we're always available to talk if any club or league members want a second opinion on anything.

### **MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

The directors have been receiving regular updates all year on our overall membership numbers. Obviously these have seen a big drop compared to the previous year – total membership to date is 19 per cent down on 2019's figures, from 3,744 to 3,015. There's been a drop over all leagues, and over all membership categories, which is only to be expected but could be worse. We'll be doing all in our power to build confidence in the hope that most of the "missing" members will be able to re-join in 2021.

### **BE NICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

Over this year, "Social Media" has been playing a bigger and bigger part in most of our lives. With the regrettable disruption to our "real" social lives, even those of us who weren't brought up with it, and might naturally be suspicious of it, have depended more and more on their phone screens to keep them in touch with friends, and the outside world generally.

NASA ourselves have had to depend more and more on Facebook postings as the quickest way of getting messages out to our members, although we're well aware that there's still a significant number of members who this won't reach. At the same time, we follow other Facebook activity connected, however loosely, with Autograss. This is often helpful in letting us know how members are thinking, and we can pick up some good ideas to take further – although more "traditional" forms of communication, and just chatting to members at events, when we can, are still equally valuable.

Inevitably we see things on social media that we think are inappropriate. Often this is criticism aimed at the governing body, which we can mostly take as being an inevitable part of the job. We have no problem when this is intended constructively, although a small minority of members are prone to making repeated negative posts which bring them dangerously close to forcing us to take action for "bringing the sport



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into disrepute". We know that, as we balance the needs of such a diverse membership as we have, we'll upset a few people but we'd much rather they either approached us direct or through the time honoured route via their league representatives.

Equally concerning is when we see members making unkind or hurtful posts about others – even if the subject matter is nothing to do with Autograss, it's still upsetting to see members who in most cases we regard as friends, being capable of what can amount to bullying. It's not really an Autograss issue – it's a problem with social media generally, but we like to think our members are more considerate than the average "keyboard warrior". Please, just remember that we all have our personal issues to deal with in these difficult times, and just think twice before you hit "post" on what might seem a clever and witty comment at the time, but that you might regret later.

Let's all try to build on Autograss' tradition as a friendly and inclusive activity, and treat others online with the same respect as we would face to face.