



NASA MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

June 2020 – Covid-19 Update

Up to now our (irregular) NASA members' newsletters have been primarily aimed at keeping you up to date with rule changes, reminding you of procedures, and generally trying to encourage you in the right direction to keep the sport running smoothly.

This year, of course, times are very different. Much as we'd like to be dealing with all the myriad issues that would be arising in the busiest part of the season, both at club and championship level, the NASA Board of Directors currently only have one item on their agenda. We want to get back on track, and how can we manage that safely, in accordance with all government guidelines, and in a way that respects the many different needs of our diverse membership, and the communities we live in, and want to race in? To that end, as well as our constant daily email exchanges, the directors have been meeting (over "Zoom", of course!) more or less weekly to try and push forward.

Like our members, the directors have been dealing with many different challenges over the past three months or so. Some of us have been lucky to carry on working in our "day jobs", some have found ourselves busier than ever, others have seen their working lives interrupted, some have reluctantly fallen into categories that the Government's been advising to "self isolate", and we're all dealing with fundamental uncertainty of what the future will bring.

At the same time, we've never lost sight of our responsibility as directors of NASA, knowing that Autograss is a big part of most of our members' lives. For some members, loss or uncertainty of income and employment, the struggle to ensure that businesses representing a lifetime's hard work can survive, and sadly in some cases personal tragedies, mean that motorsport will have slipped down their list of priorities. Whatever your circumstances, we sincerely sympathise with you. We certainly don't intend to put any pressure on anyone to take any steps they're not comfortable with.

It will be a long time before life gets back to anything approaching "normal" and this is particularly true of the Autograss community who have all got used to enjoying the vibrant social scene around our chosen sport. However, we think we owe it to the wellbeing of our members to do all we can to get some aspects of our lives back to being "as normal as possible".

In addition to our regular social media updates, we thought it would be of interest to members if we took some time now to fill in a lot more background to what we're dealing with, and try to give you some insight into what we're doing, and thinking.



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WHAT THE GOVERNMENT ARE SAYING

We've obviously been following the constantly changing UK Government guidance through the lockdown period, and finding it as confusing, and often contradictory, as most people have.

Our Irish members have had a somewhat clearer government "roadmap" to work from, with dates set out for a five stage easing of restrictions, although even this was open to interpretation of whether different forms of motorsport might be possible in "stage 4" from 20 July, or "stage 5" from 10 August. That schedule's now been accelerated a bit, with stages 4 and 5 expected to merge, although of course everything's still subject to change.

In the UK we've had to cope with the Welsh and Scottish governments setting their own policies, while Northern Ireland has had to try and work consistently with both UK and Irish guidance.

There have been two stages in the UK "Plan to Rebuild" that have given us hope. From 1 June more and more types of workplaces have been allowed to re-open in weekly stages. "Non essential" shops and some leisure facilities are now allowed to open, IF they can do so within all the necessary restrictions. Individuals in England have been allowed unrestricted "day trips", at least as far as the Welsh and Scottish borders, although our Welsh members still haven't been allowed to travel more than five miles from home.

From 4 July we're led to expect that there will be a gradual start to the re-opening of the hospitality sector, with the possibility of overnight stays being allowed – although the Welsh Government have been suggesting their five mile limit could go on for another 12 weeks!

The fact that NASA has to look after the interests of members in five increasingly divergent nations certainly complicates our task. But writing this on a Sunday morning, by the time you read it later in the week a lot might have changed!

MOTORSPORT'S HOPES

On 1 June the UK Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport updated their document "Guidance for the public on the phased return of outdoor sport and recreation in England". If you've read that, you'll end up believing that motorsport doesn't actually exist! There's very little, if anything, in here that helps us set a schedule for the return of Autograss racing.



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There are two key points stressed in this guidance:

- Gatherings of more than 6 people are not permitted (unless an exemption applies, for example, if you are from one household or if it's essential for work purposes).
- Social distancing of 2 metres applies to people outside of your household.

The "social distancing" rule is something that we'll have to learn to live with, and devise our own procedures to ensure compliance in the context of what we do. If, as is looking a bit more likely now, the 2 metres is reduced to 1.5 or 1, that will make compliance easier, and potentially increase the capacity of our venues, but the principle looks likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

The UK's restriction of "gatherings" to 6 people is a big one for us and it's going to make it very difficult for us to authorise any events until it's lifted to a more realistic level for us to work to. Ireland now has a more clearly defined limit of up to 15 people for organised outdoor sporting activities with hopes of larger gatherings being allowed when "phase 4" arrives on 20 July.

OUR MAIN CHALLENGES

The first thing that we've had to appreciate is that Autograss has some very different challenges to cope with compared to other motorsports.

Following the "return to work" movement in recent weeks, many race circuits, oval race venues and commercially run Motocross facilities have been able to partly re-open their businesses by running restricted practice days or track days. These are businesses admitting a reduced number of their customers in accordance with Covid-19 risk assessments and action plans that have been approved by their regulating authorities – local councils, police and in most cases local offices of the Health and Safety Executive.

This is a rather different regime to that under which Autograss has always operated – although some venues have been subject to local council scrutiny, health and safety law does not generally apply to volunteers running a club with no employees and we make our own health and safety policy, with the guidance of our insurers.

What this means in simple terms is that we can't get straight back into running events, even practice days, in the same way that commercially run venues have – our main restriction is still the government ruling on social gatherings.

Competitive motorsport has been given the go-ahead to resume from 1 July under strict procedures laid down in Motorsport UK's "Getting Back on Track" documents, that we're sure most of our members will have studied. Motorsport UK are now issuing a limited number of permits for the different disciplines of the sport that they govern.



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Essentially all events will be held behind closed doors with only registered competitors, officials and a limited number of team personnel admitted. All organisers need to comply with very detailed guidance that was drawn up in close consultation with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

It's worth us repeating the eight fundamental principles underlying the Motorsport UK plan because all of these are equally important to us and will be the main factors influencing any moves we make:

- 1 GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION. The motorsport community will respect the law and principles of government guidance
- 2 RESPECTING SOCIAL DISTANCING. Social distancing is crucial to reducing 'R' and is at the forefront of all restart planning.
- 3 GOOD CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP. Positive public perception of our sport is important to ensure cooperation and future growth.
- 4 NEGATING HEALTHCARE BURDEN. Motorsport will not put an additional burden on public health resources in restarting our sport
- 5 EDUCATION & TRAINING. Appropriate education and guidance will be provided to event organisers to safely execute events.
- 6 RESPECTFUL OF TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS. This plan is respectful that not all UK devolved territories (*or, in NASA's case, Ireland*) are moving at the same pace.
- 7 DISCIPLINES CAN NOT ALL MOVE AT SAME PACE. The reintroduction of some of Motorsport UK's 11 disciplines, by their nature, will not be simultaneous (*most of these disciplines have little in common with Autograss in terms of the nature of their venues; three or four, such as Autocross, will have similar challenges*)
- 8 SAFETY, SAFETY, SAFETY! Safety is a central tenet and front of mind in the execution of the strategy.

The Motorsport UK documentation (specifically that covering their "Club Sport" disciplines) is vitally important as it represents the only UK government approved template for restarting motorsport below the "elite" level. Motorsport Ireland are working on similar guidance which we expect to be published on 25 June with the idea of planning events from a month later; the first phase of return will be "events held at fixed venues where access to the site can be controlled".

Now clearly our sport is not governed by Motorsport UK or Motorsport Ireland. In the UK, at least, NASA is a separate government recognised governing body, although we've had little direct government involvement in our activities since the "Off Road Events Regulations" were passed in 1995. However, we feel that the only way we can achieve our aim of restarting Autograss as soon as practically possible, while minimising risk to our members and the public, is to draw up our own guidance covering all the points identified by Motorsport UK, but also incorporating our assessment of the risks specific to Autograss.



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The big frustration for us is that nearly everything we've seen and heard suggests that the risk of transmitting the virus in the open air is negligible. We just know our members would be far safer in the wide open spaces of an Autograss venue than they would be shuffling round a supermarket or DIY store or boarding a train. But until restrictions on outdoor gatherings are eased, our hands are tied.

WHAT HAVE WE DONE SO FAR?

When we suddenly had to suspend all activities, just as the season was poised to race into life, all we could realistically do was set a series of dates when we'd review our position and update our members. The first two or three of those dates came and went with no practical change being possible.

Our first positive move, as soon as restrictions on workplaces started to be eased, was to lift the NASA ban on track work parties. We wanted clubs to have the best opportunity to catch up with their track work and be ready for a future return to action. We drew up a list of basic requirements for work parties to take place under government guidelines, and circulated these to clubs along with a template for all members attending to register and make the necessary declarations (a combination of those on the regular NASA signing-on sheet and those required for Covid-19 compliance). Clubs then have three days after the work party to send an online return to NASA, including the "virtual signing on" details of everyone who attended.

We set an arbitrary limit of 15 members to attend each work party – our assessment of the number we thought could safely work within social distancing requirements in a "typical" track build or equipment maintenance session. We were running the risk there that any "outsider" might question why we weren't sticking to the 6 person gathering limit, so clubs do need to take any local factors, and especially their landowner's interpretation of what's allowed, into account.

As the summer approached, it became obvious that the major championship events could not go ahead as planned. After extensive discussions with the host clubs we've agreed to cancel both 2020 Nationals meetings and confirmed that this year's hosts, Yorkshire Dales and Radford, will instead host the Nationals in 2021. The All Ireland Series, the BAS and the UKAC committees have also, with NASA's agreement, postponed their complete 2020 schedules to 2021.

At the same time we've agreed that, when we can start re-issuing permits to race in 2020, we'll restrict these to one-day Sunday events only, provisionally with no camping allowed. This is intended to have two effects; firstly to maximise the number of dates available for clubs to put on locally focused events which we hope will be accessible to as many members as possible. Secondly there are several points in our Covid-19 related risk assessments that will be easier for clubs to manage in the context of one day meetings.



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We've currently drawn up and are discussing an exhaustive list of aspects of running a race meeting that we might need to change to be compliant with government guidelines and our Covid-19 risk assessments. We'll hang on as long as possible before we publish these. Firstly because they're a work-in-progress, evolving along with the Government guidance and interpretations of that guidance. We live in hope that some of the more onerous requirements might disappear before we have to lay the rules down to clubs!

The second reason we're delaying this is that, in their present form, the list of procedures might frighten off clubs! We know that there are a few clubs that, for different but equally valid reasons, have already said they won't be able to put on meetings this year. We're hoping that as many of the others as possible will keep their options open until the point when we'll make it as easy as possible for them to get up and running again.

We'll also need to get clearance from our insurers for any changes from our normal rules, and they'll have to actively approve all our risk plans so that we can return to action knowing we're fully covered.

Our aim though is, as soon as we believe Government guidelines allow, to put procedures in place to enable, and encourage, clubs to get up and running as quickly as their members are comfortable with.

WHAT CAN MEMBERS DO TO HELP?

We've had offers of help from a few directions, from the league chairmen, and notably from the co-ordinators of a new Facebook group which we're sure a lot of you have been following - "Grassing 2020 - The Positive Population". We like the name as it also reflects the NASA Board's approach!

This group's done a lot of work setting up template documents that they've offered to the Board to make our job easier as we move towards facilitating a return to action. All of this has been helpful and we're extremely grateful for the effort. We'll admit that a lot of what they've come up with has duplicated work that we already had in progress – but that's hardly surprising when we all have an eye on the same Government and Motorsport UK guidance, and we all have the same objective.

Don't however assume that what's been published on Facebook will reflect exactly the approach that NASA will take. It's all good reading as an illustration of what we MIGHT be required to do, but what we WILL need is at present a constantly moving target. Being positive, we believe that as guidance changes over the coming weeks, it should make our task easier!



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Obviously members, club and league officials, have the traditional route of feeding their opinions to be board via the League Chairmen's Committee. Although the Chairmen (and the other NASA committees) haven't met since February, your National Chairman Graham Bennett is keeping us in touch with his committee's concerns, and anything your league reports via Graham will be on the board's agenda.

At the same time, all the directors are contactable by any member (our numbers and email addresses are all in the NASA fixture books and on the NASA website) and we're always interested in any ideas members want to put to us.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The first thing to happen will be that you'll start to see other motorsport events going ahead and some of you will be asking, if they can race, why can't we yet?

Beside the practice days and track days we've already discussed, it's likely that the first competitive event will be a tarmac oval/circuit meeting, behind closed doors, for the Rolling Thunder Show's classes at Lydden Hill at the end of June. This will be possible because the RTS, since losing their home track at Arena Essex, have survived by buying three hours of track time at Lydden on days when the circuit's being used for other things. This "race meeting" will be an add-on to Lydden's own bike track day, run under the same very severe restrictions and not requiring a specific permit.

Most other oval track promotions are in a similar position as us, waiting for restrictions on social gatherings to be lifted, in their case because most types of event are unsustainable without some sort of spectator attendance. Some are continuing to run practice days, charging drivers enough to at least cover the cost of opening the gates. One exception may be Spedeworth, who uniquely have their own subscription TV channel, making "closed doors" racing a possibility – a mid-July meeting at Aldershot has now been planned on this basis.

Circuit racing will start in July with all meetings behind closed doors and no confirmation yet on whether competitors can stay overnight. The Motorsport UK guidance is being rigidly enforced, but costs to drivers don't seem to have increased too much as the average club circuit meeting was already funded on a track hire basis, with all costs passed on to competitors.

Motorsport UK have issued permits for "Club Sport" events such as Autocross in late July and August, but these events could still be affected by "social gathering" restrictions. Rallying in the UK will initially be combined to closed door single venue events with no co-drivers allowed, while Ireland hopes for a late August resumption of rallies.



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We'll be doing all we can to ensure that it's possible to add Autograss to this list as soon as the guidelines allow. We're currently contacting clubs to learn more about their individual positions and we've already heard that an encouraging number of clubs are keen to get going.

QUESTIONS YOU'VE BEEN ASKING

There have been a few questions directed to us by clubs, which we're sure will be cropping up again and again. These are things we're sure you're all asking, although it's not always proving easy to give the answers you want. A lot depends on what happens between now and the end of the year, and on that we're keeping positive!

If a club decides not to race this year, will there be any rebates or relief from their insurance costs?

It's unlikely that we'll be able to answer this until the end of the year, when we know what proportion of our race programme we've been able to achieve. We've been in regular touch with our insurance brokers, who as ever have been sympathetic and supportive. They've been receiving regular updates on the numbers of cancelled meetings to date and we're sure they'll do their best for us. However, it's just too early to predict what this may be.

If a club, or individual members, don't race this year, will licences roll over to 2021?

A key consideration here is that only a proportion of the cost of your membership comes to NASA; a major part of it is your club membership subscription. We'd be reluctant to promise anything that could potentially damage clubs' chances to retain enough income to survive the year. NASA also, of course, has ongoing expenses to meet. However, we'll be better placed to take a view on this when we have a more complete picture of the year.

Any other questions?

We're sure many of you will have other things you want to ask us. Just feel free to contact any of us direct, or email the whole board via diane.tomkinson@national-autograss.co.uk, or go through your league chairman. We'll do our best to answer, and if we don't have the answers at the moment we'll explain why!

Keep safe and positive everyone, and we hope to see many of you at the tracks before too long!