



# **NASA UPDATE - November 2020**

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## **LOOKING BACK**

Let's start this month's update by looking back at some of the statistics of what you, the NASA members, managed to achieve in the most unusual year that has been 2020.

Having scheduled 271 individual race days at 35 different venues for the 2020 season, we ended up with 48 single day "practice" events receiving permits to run, of which 33 actually took place after the weather took a hand in the last few weeks of the season. Only 14 of the 35 venues were actually able to open, with a lot of clubs having to keep their gates closed, many of them out of respect for their landowners' wishes. We hope that the success of those who did run, completing their events safely, with no virus-related issues being reported at all, will help most of the other clubs to get up and running at the start of 2021. We did welcome one completely new venue, thanks to Down Autograss, while sadly one popular track, Leewood's "airport" track, was lost, hopefully to be replaced soon. The first club to open up, York, ended up running five meetings. Radford staged four events; Yorkshire Dales and Invicta Kent managed three each; Carlow, Bredon Hill, Down, Cambridge, Hereford, Southern League, Mallow and Scunthorpe got two days in and Cork and Nottingham each ran one event. Unfortunately, the complications introduced by devolved National governments meant that we didn't see any action at all in Wales or Scotland.

Clubs sold a total of 3,015 licences during the year which, considering that the first national lockdowns came before the season had got under way, is quite an encouraging figure – 729 down on the 2019 total of 3,744 but it could have been a lot worse. 2,322 of these were full racing licences, and 1,370 of these licence holders actually participated in events, including 223 out of the 321 licenced Juniors. This means that 59% of licenced drivers, and 69% of Juniors, managed to get out on track in the shortened season, which again is a reasonable result in the circumstances. Another figure to highlight is that the Junior licences included 88 drivers under 12 years old, in the first year of reducing the age limit to 10 years.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

Having wrapped up the season, one of the main items on the board's agenda is to do what we can to help clubs and members who have lost out in 2020. It's hard to generalise as every club's circumstances will be different – some will have incurred many of their usual costs with no income, others will have had more help from landowners and local authorities.

Top of our list is to try and get rebates on insurance costs. Our very supportive insurance brokers are working on this at the moment and although it's too early to make any promises, we hope to have positive news by the end of November. Our target is to be able to get a big enough rebate to enable us to give clubs credit for all



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cancelled events in 2020, these credits to be offset against 2021 event insurance charges.

More tricky is the question of individual members' licence costs. A large proportion of this goes to the clubs, so NASA can't make any blanket decisions that would affect individual clubs' incomes. The part that goes to NASA has to cover drivers' public liability and personal accident insurance costs, as well as providing NASA with its core income to cover regular running costs. We're negotiating for rebates on the personal accident insurance premiums, and obviously we've been able to cut our own operating costs significantly in 2020.

One big issue though is that the affiliation fees each year are billed out to clubs at the beginning of the year, based on their previous year's membership. Even if membership numbers recover, as we hope, in 2021, clubs will be paying NASA fees based on an average 20% drop in membership in 2020. That could help clubs, but makes a big dent in NASA's income. To an extent our reserves, built up over many years of careful cash management, can stand that, but there are also a lot of sums being done to identify costs that can be further trimmed.

### **RACING INTO 2021**

As for our 2021 plans, we can only repeat what we've already told you; NASA's committed to giving you all a season that is "as normal as possible". Predicting at this stage just how normal this will be is no easier than predicting what our day to day lives will be looking like by next March or April.

Work has been going on behind the scenes, of course. Risk assessments are being written with the aim of seeing aspects of the sport returning that were missed by many under 2020's restrictions (do we dare to use the "C" word?). We think that the work on this is around 75% complete so far, although of course once we have plans we think we're happy with, we'll then have a nerve-wracking few months trying to keep pace with government policies in our five nations, to make sure we hit the ground running as fast as we're allowed to when the season finally starts.

Restricting events to a nominal "practice" format for 2020 was the best solution for the circumstances at the time. That's both from the point of view of gaining approval to get up and running at all, and of not disadvantaging too much the significant proportion of our membership who weren't in a position to join in.

For the three and a half month season we managed in 2020 this approach worked, but it certainly wouldn't be acceptable for a full season, so the one thing we can definitely confirm for 2021 is that we'll be issuing permits for proper, competitive race meetings. Obviously we have to anticipate that these are likely to be subject to various restrictions. By the time the season starts we might have a better idea of



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whether those restrictions could be in place for most of the season, or whether we'll be able to lift them at an early stage.

We'll be planning for every scenario that we can think of, but it's always possible that events will overtake us and we'll have to react quickly – with a board working as a team with united objectives, we'll be ready to change plans as we go along.

We're determined that all members will be able to participate at the level they want to in 2021. For a large number, that will just involve enjoying whatever track time their local clubs can offer them and their families. But there'll be others looking for meaningful competition. Ideally that will involve Nationals, BAS, UKAC and AIAS, but if there are still obstacles to bigger events we'll be looking for alternatives at club, league or regional level – maybe even encouraging a return to the old style regional open meetings. There'll be a lot of different ideas discussed over this winter, within the board but also involving as much as possible your league representatives, who are in the best position to pick up ideas from their members.

## **WHO RUNS NASA?**

We, the NASA Directors, wouldn't normally reply directly to social media comments about NASA – we respect everyone's right to comment freely about our sport and we have to recognise that, in the modern age, conversations which once would have been private and quickly forgotten are now plastered on the internet for all to read. Currently though, we're seeing comments that are really quite misleading about the way our sport is governed, yet are being presented as though they come from a position of some knowledge, which could be damaging if nothing's done to correct them.

For example, we're told that newly elected directors can't make any difference to the sport as they're outvoted on the board by the existing directors. It doesn't quite work like that, or at least it hasn't so far. What normally happens is that directors joining the board already have enough experience of working at club and league level that they realise that they're joining a team. They bring fresh ideas and enthusiasm to the team, those ideas are accepted and absorbed and they become part of the decision making process. Very few items on the board's agenda actually come to a disputed vote within the board. After discussion, however long it takes, the directors normally come to a mutually agreed decision, which is accepted without any personal agendas over-riding what the board believes to be in the interests of the sport.

We're told that certain directors wouldn't work with certain new candidates for the board. Nobody has actually asked those directors that! We're a diverse bunch on the board, with different backgrounds and interests both inside and outside Autograss. The one thing we have in common is a love and commitment to this sport, so we'll work with anyone who shares that and wants to be part of the team.



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It's been suggested that voting in the various "Walsall committees" (which are unlikely to be tied just to physical Walsall meetings in future), whether of the league chairmen, scrutineers, marshals or safety officers, can be used to over-ride and dictate to the board in their day to day running of the company.

There was a serious misunderstanding there, in that only the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and any Extraordinary General Meetings (EGMs) are official company meetings. The other meetings during the year are discussion forums which, depending on how actively they're supported, are very useful in providing feedback to advise and steer the Board.

The constitution of NASA is a democratic one from the bottom up, in that club members elect their own committees, who elect league committees, who send representatives to the national committees. Members at all levels can have influence, provided that they want to get involved. There's a significant number that don't get involved and just want to race and help out at local club level, which is fine. They're valued members whose interests we have to look after, and many of them will value stability over progress, which we must respect.

Any member can then stand for election as a director. Normally, anyone taking that step has already been involved at national committee level and will have demonstrated their commitment to advancing the sport. Occasionally we get a candidate who's only really been involved as a competitor – the system allows this so that we're not excluding candidates who may have special talents to benefit the board. This works as long as everyone realises they're applying to join a team that takes collective responsibility for its work. So far, the voting members have proved fairly astute in filtering out those who wish to contribute to the team from those who are promoting their own desire for power or influence. We haven't had many who have been elected with a desire to "Trump" the existing board!

The board will always respect and consider advice that comes up from clubs and leagues. Immediate change won't always result, as the long term stability of the sport is a major consideration, and sometimes the sport's not ready for a particular change, or sometimes more background work or research is required. But nothing is ignored.

One example of how the system works is that, a couple of years ago, discussion of a regular recurring topic within Cambridge club led their members to believe that the time was ripe to reduce the entry age for juniors. The club Chairman took the suggestion to his League Committee, and the League Chairman took it to his National Committee. They put the idea to the Board, who agreed with them, and then put in the detailed work to ensure it could be safely implemented in a way that wouldn't create more risk in the eyes of the insurers. So, within a few months, ordinary members had achieved a major change in the sport.



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The nineteen "league representatives" (who are usually league chairmen, but don't need to be) are the legal "owners" of NASA, albeit effectively as trustees for all their members. The individuals who created NASA as a company, back in 1984 when the informal structure that built up over the previous ten years was no longer working, also had voting rights, but a few years ago it was agreed that those who were no longer actively involved would give up those rights, leaving the one "honorary member" we have now (Barbara Harper).

These twenty people "own" NASA, and with ownership comes "control". This control is expressed by their right to appoint their choice of directors to run the company on their behalf. We sometimes hear the view that "the directors run the company, the members run the sport". That's not entirely realistic as the company's there to run the sport.

This means that the directors take on a lot of responsibility, and potentially liability, for NASA's policies and actions. In theory, things could be restructured to give the chairmen much more involvement in the day to day decision making. But would this be what they want? As league chairmen, most of these individuals have a strong commitment to managing their own leagues and resolving local issues. Would it be fair to burden them all with extra responsibilities at national level as well?

Or does it work better for them to appoint directors they trust to do that job for them? The experience of the last 36 years might suggest that this is indeed the best way, provided of course that there's still a supply of people coming up through the system who are willing to take on those directors' responsibilities.

### **THE PRICE OF PROGRESS**

Another hot topic on social media at the moment is the mechanics of running NASA and the sport of Autograss, and whether we're making use of all the technological advances that could potentially be adopted. We're certainly not opposed to progress in our sport. We just have to consider its impact on all sectors of our membership.

Let's think of some examples.

We're fairly unique in organised motorsport in not having any booking in system for the vast majority of events. NASA members can travel to any event they fancy, turn up unannounced and be welcomed with open arms. They can decide on Sunday morning which way to go, or whether to go out at all. They can get a call while en route to say that a meeting's rained off, turn round and head for another club that will make every allowance for them being late.

That's had to change at the moment due to the Covid-19 restrictions, track and trace requirements, etc, so we've had to insist on everyone booking in for events, paying in advance, and paying attention to deadlines. In some ways that's been welcome.



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Clubs know how many entries to expect, on site admin is massively reduced, and NASA can check entries and sort out any eligibility or licence issues before the event.

But when the crisis is over, do you want to carry on doing that week in week out? We're genuinely looking for feedback – is the new convenience worth sacrificing the old flexibility for?

The technology's more or less there now to have an integrated on line membership and event system. One of our directors is also a director of another (much smaller) Motorsport UK affiliated club and has used them as "guinea pigs" to trial a system that could possibly be rolled out, with a few tweaks, to NASA.

All members complete their own details on the membership website and, once these have been verified, receive an email with a link to pay their annual fee. Of course, for NASA it would be much more complicated as members join through 50 different clubs who all need to set individual fees to cover their own varied costs. But maybe members could still pay their clubs and then the club secretary could be the one to add them to the online system.

Members can log in to view and update their own records, and club officials can download an up to date database whenever they need it. The system can send automated emails to all members, or certain classes of members. The facility's there to add bookings for individual events to the system.

But then we look at NASA's experience to date with an online database – the tagging register. This is in theory a lot more basic, with one person maintaining the database on spreadsheet, while members have a website link to submit updates. But what proportion of our membership do you think manages to remember to update us when they buy or sell or scrap a car? The experience tells us that NASA's membership isn't quite ready to go online yet – we don't dismiss the idea, but we look at all aspects.

The system we've looked at generates an automated membership card – members can print their own, or just keep it on their phones. For an extra £3 or so per member, we could have a plastic credit card size licence posted to every member. That would include a QR code that could be scanned at meetings instead of signing on. Wouldn't that be great?

But then what about the member who's forgotten to tell us he's changed class? If you're a Class 1 driver who's been shopping on Saturday and come home with a Class 8, all you have to remember on Sunday is to put the right car on your trailer and join the right signing on queue when you arrive. But in the automated future, the computer might say no!



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What will happen when you lose your licence? At the moment, we don't encourage this, but the club secretary can put in a quick call to the NASA licence secretary, get a number and you can still sign on and race, and you'll normally get a new licence in the post a couple of days later. But while everyone's signing themselves in with a swipe of their licence, the queue will come to a halt while the driver who's lost his licence tries to remember the password to retrieve his details.

The manual systems that NASA's developed over the past 50 years or so rely very much on 20<sup>th</sup> century technology – which still works for nearly everyone, nearly all of the time. If we advance into the 21<sup>st</sup> century too quickly for even say 10 per cent of our members, we'll need so many manual overrides to the systems that any efficiency gains are lost.

So, how much does everyone value the freedom and flexibility that NASA's "old fashioned" systems allow? Is this something you'd only appreciate once you've lost it?

If we take the plunge and commit to a technological fix for systems that aren't actually broken, we could go down two routes. What we've been discussing here is adopting an existing off-the-shelf membership software solution, of which there are a few available. This wouldn't do everything we wanted it to do, but it would be reliable and relatively cheap. Or we could commission a developer to write a bespoke app for us. Regrettably, we might not have the experience to filter out those app developers who are better at selling themselves than creating solutions that actually work. We've all seen what happened when the NHS invested millions in starting from scratch rather than adapting existing systems.

Our minds aren't closed, but we don't have all the answers yet, and we'll need to have nearly all the answers before committing to changes that will affect every member. In the meantime, we just thank the dedicated volunteers who have devoted years of their lives to looking after NASA's membership, and know we can continue to rely on them.

## **CHANGES FOR 2021**

As you'd expect after the year we've had, there are very few rule changes in the pipeline for 2021, other than the possibility of temporary Covid-19 related restrictions. With the experience gained this year, we're planning that all rules, guidelines and changes will be published as official bulletins on the NASA website, to remove any doubts as to their status.

We are expecting one change to the track construction regulations, which will involve specifying in more detail the type of Heras fencing allowed to be used trackside – this is going to be necessary as a result of a legal claim made against one of our clubs by a spectator, arising from an incident back in 2019.



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## **JUNIOR APPRECIATION**

### ***Thanks to Nick Apps for this contribution:***

2020 saw the age drop from 12 to 10 for the Juniors, but you wouldn't have known it looking at the driving standards. Granted it was a season of testing, but plenty of laps and experience is never a bad thing when joining a new style of motorsport, and in some cases their first form. Clubs all had their different methods of introducing the younger members to the sport, but it didn't take long for them to get up to speed and by the end of the year they were really starting to show promise and push the pace. The more experienced older Juniors had no problem welcoming the younger members and sharing tips, integrating them into the sport with great maturity. We look forward to seeing how these young and experienced members continue to grow, and also welcome the next batch of Juniors for the 2021 season.

## **DISCIPLINARY REPORT**

Unfortunately, at one of the final events of the 2020 season, we received reports of a breach of one of NASA's most fundamental rules. A driver took part in the Radford event on October 18 who wasn't booked in to race, wasn't signed on for the car he drove, and was found not to hold a 2020 NASA licence. In such a case we would hold both the unlicensed driver, and the licensed driver of the car who allowed the breach to take place, equally at fault. As a result, and subject to appeal, both Marcus Lewis (LUD96) and Liam Bird have been suspended from holding a NASA competition licence for a period of five years.

## **NASA AGM**

The NASA AGM will be going ahead as planned on Sunday 29 November. As a result of the national lockdowns currently in place in all five nations covered by NASA, this will take place as an online meeting, in the same way that regular directors' meetings have been held over Zoom throughout this year. Unfortunately, this means that we'll need to limit the numbers attending online, so invitations will only be sent to the voting "full members", the board and the candidates for election to the board. We'll advise all members of the outcome of the meeting after it's been completed.

The main business will be electing one third of the board of directors – under company law one third of the board needs to stand down each year. This year the three directors due to "retire by rotation" are Margaret Allen, Barbara Harper and Ray Wyeth, all of whom are standing for re-election. There have also been two new candidates nominated, Chris Allanson and Simon Farrar. As we currently have what we've deemed to be a full complement of eleven directors, the five candidates will be competing for the three vacant positions and the three to score the highest positive votes from the twenty "full members" will be appointed.



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Many of you will have heard that some of the full members have also given NASA notice to hold an Extraordinary General Meeting at which they intend to propose to remove one of the existing directors from his position. The Board's views on this have already been explained to the full members. There's a statutory time limit for holding this meeting, which means that we'd originally planned to hold it on the same day as the AGM, but the nature of the proposal at this meeting, and the company law governing this, means that we don't have agreement to hold this meeting online. Therefore, the EGM's been postponed due to the lockdown and will be held as soon as a suitable venue is available, and sufficient members are permitted to travel. We'll keep everyone informed on this.

## **NASA PAPERWORK 2021**

Apart from the formal meetings, we've always used the AGM as an opportunity to distribute all the boxes of stationery that clubs will need at the beginning of next season (licence forms, signing on sheets, permit applications, track plans, etc, etc). This year everything's going to have to be distributed by post; we're also aware that some clubs will have used up all this year's stocks and others will have plenty left over. Therefore, all club secretaries can expect to receive an email about this, and we'd like all clubs to let us know what they actually need, before we incur any unnecessary postage costs.

We'll be continuing our programme of creating online versions of as many of NASA's forms as possible, so again club and league secretaries can expect to receive links to the updated versions of these.

## **WINTER SHOWS**

Although we've had no official advice of this, you won't be surprised to hear that we've concluded that the Autosport International show at the NEC almost certainly won't be going ahead in January 2021.

The Motorsport with Attitude show, in which NASA have been involved for the last two years at Peterborough, had a January 2021 date confirmed, but with a change of venue to a new exhibition centre in Farnborough, Hampshire. We've just been advised, again with no surprise, that the January date won't be possible, but a new date has been suggested at the end of March – a week before the Easter weekend when many clubs traditionally kick off the season. We'll await further information from the show organisers before letting you know whether NASA will be represented. We'd certainly like to be involved in what could well be the only pre-season motorsport show held next year, despite the new venue being somewhat outside our normal catchment areas, but the decision's likely to depend on any deal offered, as NASA's funds will be fully committed to supporting clubs and members in getting racing back under way.



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## MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS

We referred earlier in this newsletter to the total numbers of licences issued in 2020. The board, and the league chairmen, receive regular breakdowns of the number of licences, so some of you will have seen this information in previous years, passed on at league and club meetings. As many of you won't have been able to attend meetings of late (we know a few clubs and leagues are managing to hold online meetings, but by no means all) we thought you'd still be interested in the statistics.

2020 licences by league	Men's full	Ladies' full	Juniors	Mechanics	Members	2020 total	2019 total	% change
Southern Ireland League	141	34	45	87	15	<b>322</b>	370	-13%
West Midland League	139	33	33	13	25	<b>243</b>	311	-22%
North Western League	139	30	31	26	8	<b>234</b>	257	-9%
CGTRO League	101	20	17	21	51	<b>210</b>	287	-27%
North Yorkshire League	121	31	20	22	14	<b>208</b>	245	-15%
MAP League	94	21	10	24	24	<b>173</b>	228	-24%
East Midlands League	93	19	20	23	14	<b>169</b>	213	-21%
Kent League	100	21	16	8	19	<b>164</b>	248	-34%
South Wales League	82	25	23	18	14	<b>162</b>	213	-24%
Southern League	74	12	18	25	21	<b>150</b>	158	-5%
East Anglian League	77	14	13	16	30	<b>150</b>	167	-10%
The Dales League	92	19	15	13	7	<b>146</b>	192	-24%
Wiltshire League	72	20	10	16	21	<b>139</b>	165	-16%
Shropshire League	74	16	9	14	18	<b>131</b>	160	-18%
Gloucestershire League	74	16	15	9	8	<b>122</b>	138	-12%
Yorkshire League	53	10	10	7	16	<b>96</b>	123	-22%
Northern Ireland League	53	5	9	5	10	<b>82</b>	99	-17%
Scottish League	34	5	6	19	5	<b>69</b>	85	-19%
Fenland League	32	5	1	3	4	<b>45</b>	61	-26%
Essex League	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	-100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,645</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>3,015</b>	<b>3,750</b>	<b>-20%</b>

You may also be interested in the long term trend of NASA license holders. The Board's been given statistics going back to 1989, so just looking at the total numbers of licences, these are:

Year	Total licences						
<b>1989</b>	5,618	<b>1997</b>	4,653	<b>2005</b>	4,845	<b>2013</b>	4,488
<b>1990</b>	6,002	<b>1998</b>	4,814	<b>2006</b>	4,807	<b>2014</b>	4,511
<b>1991</b>	6,247	<b>1999</b>	4,814	<b>2007</b>	5,016	<b>2015</b>	4,306
<b>1992</b>	6,584	<b>2000</b>	4,579	<b>2008</b>	4,933	<b>2016</b>	4,246
<b>1993</b>	6,370	<b>2001</b>	3,900	<b>2009</b>	5,008	<b>2017</b>	4,169
<b>1994</b>	5,695	<b>2002</b>	4,450	<b>2010</b>	4,779	<b>2018</b>	3,855
<b>1995</b>	5,394	<b>2003</b>	4,558	<b>2011</b>	4,717	<b>2019</b>	3,750
<b>1996</b>	5,009	<b>2004</b>	4,778	<b>2012</b>	4,696	<b>2020</b>	3,032