

How club racing thrived during 2021

The pandemic led to huge uncertainty heading into the season but, with two-thirds of all English categories enjoying an increase in average entries, it proved to be a successful year

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Looking at the average grid size of a series is a crude way of measuring its success. There are many other factors that truly determine how well a category is doing, but the number of cars on the grid is certainly most quantifiable. And that's why Autosport has run this feature at the end of the past few seasons. When it was first published in November 2019, no one could have predicted what the following two years would bring. The global pandemic has led to uncertainty on so many levels and yet, despite COVID-19 continuing to have an impact on our way of life, club racing has proven remarkably resilient.

Yes, the start of the 2021 season had to be delayed but, once under way, grids were packed. Out of the 110 English series with comparable data (Scottish, Northern Irish and Irish classes are not included as it is

unfair to compare them when they have a smaller pool of drivers to draw from), 75 had an increase in average participants or stayed the same – a truly incredible 68%.

That does not mean the past year was a success across the board. A glance at the average grid size for each club reveals that many have gone down slightly, although a reason for this in some cases is that series were paired up to create large fields in 2020 when track time was at a premium. There were also five categories with an average of fewer than 10 starters. But, encouragingly, as clubs show realism, the majority of these struggling series are to be scrapped or undergo major changes next season.

In contrast, a brilliant 16 categories had average grids of over 35 cars. And we have to thank the club staff, officials, marshals and volunteers who pulled together in a world of ever-changing regulations to make such successes possible.



The VSCC was one of the many organisers to have large grids in 2021



750 Motor Club

The 750 Motor Club considers itself to be the 'home of affordable motorsport', and that message was proving more popular than ever this year. The club boasted the highest average grid size of all the major organisers at 27 cars, and it was no surprise that it topped the charts given that seven of its series typically had entries of 30 or more drivers.

The club's competitions manager Giles Groombridge believes there are a number of factors behind the large grids, but admits he did not know what to expect heading into the season amid the lingering uncertainty from the pandemic. "Nobody knew what the economic fallout of the pandemic was going to be or if there were going to be curveballs thrown by regulations and restrictions," he says. "It was hard to predict, but I think club motorsport benefited from people not being able to spend their money elsewhere."

"After the partial season of 2020, it was a really good year commercially and from a competitive perspective. We made an effort to keep our entry fees affordable and, with our calendar, we try and get the spacing of events

just right for the different championships. With the technical regulations, we keep things affordable and prevent excessive development, so I think they are key factors."

It was Club Enduro that led the way with an incredible average of 46 cars – the most of any championship that did not split into two grids. "You see it from budget stuff like Ka racing to Club Enduro that the longer-race format that gives people a bit more seat time is very popular," says Groombridge.

While Club Enduro continued its success from last year, taking a leap forward was Hot Hatch as its entries increased by a third after rule tweaks paid off. "We changed the class structure and did away with the old Class A, which was quite expensive to be competitive in, made Class B the new Class A and added a new Class B in the middle, targeting stuff like Clio 197s," explains Groombridge.

But the category to enjoy the largest increase in numbers was the Type R Trophy. This had struggled to get into double figures in its first two seasons, but its potential was realised this year when grids nearly trebled

to average 26 cars. It attracted 750MC aces Adam Shepherd and Lee Deegan alongside racing newcomers. "We did a foundation programme where people got a car and all their entry fees and race kit for a fixed price, which was really popular," adds Groombridge.

But there were a few series that did struggle a little in comparison. One of these was Bikesports, which was regularly in the mid-teens. "Bikesports has never been as large as some of our championships – generally sports-racer cars don't tend to be," reckons Groombridge. "We had fewer guest entries from the Radical championship, which quite often top up the Bikesports grid with people dovetailing both for a bit of testing or a bit of extra racing."

That aside, Groombridge is perfectly justified in describing 2021 as an "excellent year" for the 750MC, but that does not mean the club is resting on its laurels. It is continuing to evolve where necessary, such as adding a greater range of models to its Clio championship, to ensure that its 'affordable motorsport' remains popular.

Club Enduro led the 750MC's pack, averaging a stunning grid of 46 cars in 2021

SERIES	2021 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2020
Club Enduro	46	+12%
Roadsports	41	-5%
Hot Hatch	39	+34%
Toyota MR2**	38	0%
MX-5 Cup	35	-3%
Formula Vee	31	+19%
BMW Car Club Racing	30	+3%
Armed Forces Race Challenge	27	N/A
Locost	27	-7%
Sport Specials	27	+23%
116 Trophy	26	-4%
Type R Trophy	26	+189%
Classic Stock Hatch	23	+21%
Bernie's Sports Racing & V8s*	22	N/A
F1000	22	+5%
Alfa Romeo	21	+11%
CALM All Porsche Trophy*	21	N/A
Historic 750 Formula	21	+5%
Clio 182	20	+5%
Ma7da	20	+25%
750 Formula	19	+36%
Bikesports	18	-18%
Sports 1000	16	+23%
CLUB AVERAGE	27	+13%

Note *Shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually **Split over two or more different grids