

# CLUB RACING'S UNDERDOGS

*Whether it's a team, a driver or a series, here's Autosport's pick of the unsung heroes that battled the odds in 2018*

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## MGB CV8 CHAMPIONSHIP

Many would have questioned the ongoing viability of a 40-year-old multi-class championship with just 15 cars on the grid for its 2017 finale at Snetterton but, 12 months on, more than twice as many entered the concluding MG Car Club BCV8 Championship round at the same venue.

Thanks to the sterling work of long-time coordinator Pam McCarthy – mother of 2017 champion Russell – and with added promotional impetus from established competitor James Wheeler, grids surged from an average of 17 cars in '17 to 27 for the '18 season. With the cars dating from the 1960s and '70s the category benefits from a historic bounce, and the roaring full-race V8-powered machinery in the top class makes it one of the most spectacular championships around. The memorable decider – which had five contenders with a realistic chance of the title – was run in changing conditions, and McCarthy did enough to retain his title.



JONES



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## TEAM CUPRA

The Birkett Six Hour Relay race is an eclectic, run-what-ya-brung affair and, while the handicap prize is the coveted main award, there has been increasing competition for scratch-race honours.

Unsurprisingly, rear-wheel-drive cars have dominated down the years, and a saloon-car-based team hadn't come out on top since the race became a Silverstone Grand Prix circuit fixture in 2010, Radicals winning more often than not.

But the stars aligned for the 68th running in 2018. TCR machinery provided a rapid, robust and reliable basis for Team Cupra, with TCR UK regulars Stewart Lines and Carl Swift being joined by multiple club-racing champion brothers Shayne and Lee Deegan in a trio of SEATs.

Although Radical teams, and a squad of Sakers, set the pace initially, as conditions turned wetter the front-wheel-drive cars gained the advantage, and Lines held off Wade Eastwood's SR3 on a thrilling final lap to win by half a second.

**WARREN GILBERT'S MARCOS**

It's one of the most recognisable cars in UK motorsport, with its lime-green livery and thunderous Corvette seven-litre V8. And despite it being more than 20 years old, the outdated Marcos Mantis run by Topcats Racing continues to challenge for class wins against newer machinery.

"It's got no traction control, no anti-lock, no flat-shift, no paddles, and no electric diffs," says Topcats owner Warren Gilbert of a car that was acquired in 1997.

"It's got a sequential box but you still have to pull it back and forwards on a lever. Apart from the power-steering, that's it."

Despite the lack of driver aids, the car – which has competed in more than 500 races and is dubbed 'Big Green' – finished third overall in last season's GT Cup Championship with Gilbert, Mick Mercer and Jon Harrison at the wheel.



JEP

**CHRISTOPHER 'CHIPPY' WESEMAEL**

Christopher 'Chippy' Wesemael stunned on his car-racing debut, immediately taking pole in the high-quality RGB Sports 1000 Championship's 2018 season opener at Donington Park. He couldn't capitalise, as the meeting got snowed off, but it heralded a strong first part of the year in which he was always fast and bagged several poles, although could not convert them into victory.

Poor reliability was part of the problem, particularly fuel issues that took time to resolve. But Mittell MC-53 driver Wesemael admits "rookie mistakes" also cost him, such as stalling on the grid at Croft because he wasn't familiar with the starting procedure.

Yet with accumulated experience, as he adapted from karting, his pace eventually paid off, first with a crushing Silverstone win, then a double victory in Snetterton's finale. It allowed him to pinch second in the table – "Something that seemed mathematically impossible, wasn't," he concludes. He's now plotting a 2019 title challenge.



STYLES

**MORGAN LEWIS**



STYLES

A 16-year old with next to no experience of any driving making their racing debut in an ultra-competitive series, while juggling GCSE studies, would have already been an achievement.

Yet Morgan Lewis did all this with the added challenge of having talipes – more commonly known as club foot. Following in the path of her father Jonathan, who has extensive racing involvement, Lewis's motorsport ambitions were undimmed and last year she took part in two Mini Se7en rounds in a car with specially adapted pedals, seat, steering column, rollcage and gearstick. "I can't heel-and-toe like everyone can," she explains. "I call it a Riverdance [on the pedals]."

She twice brought the car home safely on her Snetterton debut, even though in race one she faced a new challenge of wet conditions, and repeated the performance at Thruxton, taking a best result of 16th.

**BENN TILLEY**

Jumping from Historic Sports Car Club Historic Formula Ford 1600 – in which he landed regular podium finishes in 2016-17 – to Classic FF1600 brought the deserved breakthrough for Benn Tilley last year against stiff competition.

The Lincolnshire lad, who turned 19 in October, dominated the Pre-'82 championship with nine wins from 14 races in Mandie Hadfield's Merlyn Mk20, his success mirroring father Stuart's Pre-'74 title in 1992.

"Part of the reason for switching was cost," says 2017 FJunior standout Tilley. "Fewer rounds meant less cost, but it was still hugely competitive. Particularly against Rick Morris; at 71 he is a very tough cookie to crumble."

Lifelong racing nuts Benn and father Stuart spent their shoestring budget wisely, preparing the car themselves. Tilley Sr also helped ex-BRM apprentice Paul Fisher keep the engine sharp.

Their quandary is how to progress in 2019. "There are options," says Tilley, "but sponsors – absolutely vital to us – want TV coverage!"



STYLES