

# **THOSE MAGNIFICENT SLRs!**

by Lorne Goldman for the [Morgan Wire](#) and [eMog](#)

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## **The Orebi Gann SLR (red)**



In 2006, I put two good friends together for a significant Morgan exchange. Bill Fink (the Isis Imports legend) was looking for a worthy home for the first Morgan SLR. Simon Orebi Gann, the UK collector and racer came to my mind instantly. The introductions were made, and over the following few months they too became friends and the SLR sailed for England.

Over the last three years, the car went through a meticulous and painstaking restoration to prepare it for the track. No expense was spared. It was entrusted to Brett Syndercombe and the team at Brands Hatch Morgan. My wife Audrey and I stopped by each Spring and Fall to track its progress. What we saw each visit increased our excitement level!

The SLR was completed late last year and sent home to Simon and Kate Orebi Gann for road-testing before race track experience and final refinements at the start of the racing season in Spring 2009.

While mogging about England in April, we received an email from Simon that brought me right to attention. "Would you like to crew the car at its first official outing at Silverstone at HSCC International Trophy Meeting" for May 9-10, 2009. A stunned "YES!" was my response. Travel plans were tossed, new ones

quickly made, and Friday night found us lodged north of Silverstone ready for the next day, the practice session.



Saturday, May 9, 2009  
PRACTICE SESSION:  
The next morning was splendid. Sunny, cool with a light breeze. We arrived at Silverstone to meet the team. Simon was there with his co-pilot, Rick Bourne. Rick's reputation precedes him. He is

the founder of Brands Hatch Morgan, one of the two co-founders (with Rob Wells) of Librands, the famous Morgan performance supplier. Rick is a brilliant engineer, designer and a talent on any track behind any wheel.... a legendary guru to the sixties era of Morgans, having restored and raced both XOY and TOK (the Morgan LeMans winner) in a multi-faceted past.

Along with Simon and Rick, the team roster is made up of myself, my wife Audrey, dear Andy Downes as team manager and, of course, Kate Orebi Gann, who runs the Morgan Challenge Race Series. Saturday was practice runs at Silverstone, allowing Andy and Kate to be at Oulton Park, participating in the Morgan Challenge.

Working on the car allows me a chance to examine it closely. The sublime body shell is moulded over and around the Morgan ladder frame. For the greatest weight saving possible, the aluminium was made as thin as possible. This makes the shell delicate, and care must be taken not to use the body as brace to enter or exit the cab, as it will quickly wear a palm print into the metal. The Morgan flexing frame creates sufficient stress at a number of points to require added thickness to avoid cracking. The end result justifies everything about the construction. The lines are as perfect as one can get with an unrivalled weight saving.



*N.B. The first SLR was built on a Triumph chassis, not a Morgan one..a design project by Sprintzel Lawrence Racing (aka Chris Lawrence, pilot of the TOK 259 the LeMans winner and father of today's Aero*

8). After the Triumph chassis, a total of three Morgan SLRs were built. The first is now owned by Simon Orebi Gann and the others are owned by Keith Ahlers and John Emberson, also noted Morgan racers.

By chance, the SLR was paddocked next to a 1960s light blue Corvette Coupe, a car shape the SLR has often been compared to. There is nothing one can take away from that "Vette". It is undoubtedly the most lovely of that line ever built. However, it is the SLR that draws all passers-by like bees to honey. Motor magazine reporters and photographers approach in a steady stream, examine the car with discrete interest and then



exclaim when they see the old Morgan wings in front. Excited requests for interviews are instantly made and spontaneously given. Reporters who have heard of the SLR legend are surprised to have the opportunity to see one in the flesh. Those who were unaware of their existence are astounded at how far advanced the car's styling and aerodynamics obviously are. This Morgan is unlike any Morgan they have ever seen.

However, the team must concentrate on the car and preparation. The practice runs will start soon! Time must be spent finding the best adjustment for the drivers' FIA racing harness. The two drivers must switch mid-race, and that will require unbuckling the first driver, getting him out of the SLR without causing damage, getting the second driver into the car and fitting him in as quickly as possible, making sure that it is done correctly and securely. An error will require the driver to abandon the track to have it corrected and time and race position will be lost. Drivers cannot help much in this process as their helmets make it impossible for them to see the straps or the main buckle. It is for the crew to manage the transfer smoothly and quickly. Over the hour, we bring our original 2 minute time for the manoeuvre to well under one minute. We are working well but will that continue during the race?!!

The speakers call the car to the track. Rick is to take the helm for the first part of the thirty minute practice run, Simon for the second half. The car is started, warmed up smoothly and is off to the track entry. I rush trackside with Simon and Audrey goes to seek a high perch for herself, the stop watch and her camera!

*N.B. The Orebi Gann SLR was raced successfully for many decades. It was painted red by Sir Aubrey Brocklebank after he and the car were singed in a fuel leak which caught fire at Silverstone in 1975.*

The motor sounds great! But the times are less than hoped after the earlier tests, albeit at another track. There is not much time to dwell on this now as the 15 minute mark approaches and the car comes into the pit for a

driver swap. That goes well, popping Rick out the car and securing Simon into it. Aside from a few seconds lost in misunderstanding, we have the SLR back on the course in under a minute.



Simon drives the car to the end of the practice session without incident. A post-run analysis of the car's performance quickly occurs. Both drivers feel something is wrong in the rear handling ...something that neither experienced in previous tests. A deep investigation is warranted before the race next morning on Sunday.

The car is gone over with expert eyes. An anomaly is spotted. The axle saddle plate on the rear right is touching the chassis. That issue is addressed and clearance created at the guilty spot, but the day is done and there is no way of knowing whether this is a

cure until the car is back on the track at speed, and that can only happen during the race itself!

The team heads for dinner and bed, wondering what the next day will bring. Splendid racing weather is forecast.

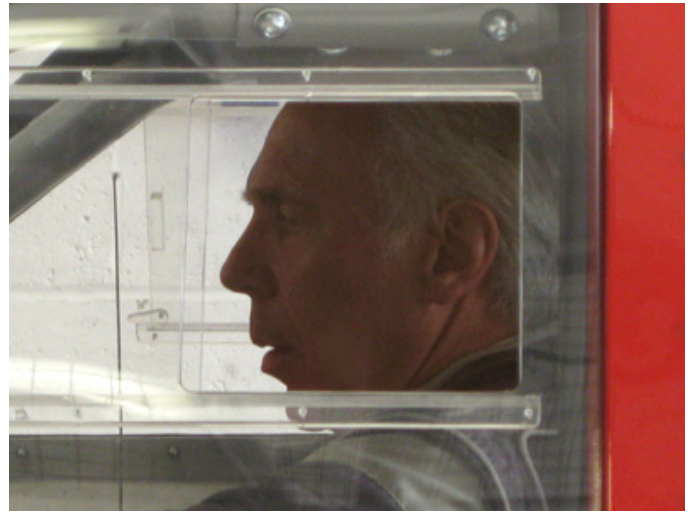
*N.B. In 1976, the car was purchased and brought to the US by Bill Fink, the owner of the US Morgan Main Agent, Isis Imports. Bill raced it at Monterey for 29 years.*

Sunday, May 10, 2009 RACE DAY: The sun is out! Kate and Andy have driven down from Oulton Park and the team is complete. It is good to see them both! Kate has one of those magical personalities that can calm a tense crowd simply by joining it. I have had the pleasure of pit-crewing for Andy Downes before. He knows his stuff, having been a team manager for years. He quickly details what he expects from each of us.

Outside of trackside support and swap assistance, racers need a constant feed of information when running. This is key to help them position their car and their skills, vital to their strategy. This information must be conveyed by the team to their pilot. Additionally, the flow of data assures the driver that they are part of a team and the team is behind them. Lap times, time remaining, laps remaining until swap and time behind the class leader are there at each lap. This data is timed by different stop watches, calculated with times and estimates placed on the Pit Board. Kate, Audrey and Andy handle the various stop watches and Andy makes the calculations and delivers the information for the me to place on the pit board. Andy would signal the cars expect ETA for that lap and I hold out the board for the split seconds as our man roars past. I will handle the

driver swap with Andy's assistance and Audrey would free-lance with her camera after that change-over.

We reversed driver order. Simon would drive first. This is more than a tradition. The race rules for these classics require that the entrant's owner be behind the wheel during no less than 50% of the one hour time. We make sure he is secure, warm the engine and wait for the race call. It comes and Simon drives off with the hopes of the five of us with him.



THEY'RE OFF! Simon whips by the team well into the pack. Only one lap out and we clock him at more than 4 seconds faster than his fastest practice lap of the day before! This bodes very well if it continues. The sound of these cars is delicious and we are settling in to our tasks, the data is fed to Andy, Andy chews it and delivers it to me and the board goes out at the right times. We get smoother each lap, soon working quicker with body language than words. More importantly, Simon is holding his faster times. This is looking very good! Whatever was done the day before, is showing up in the times today. Click [HERE!](#)



In what seems no time at all, we are more than 30 minutes into the race and we signal Simon in. Rick, Andy and I prepare for the driver swap. In comes Simon! Unbuckled, out of the car, Rick in, five points on the harness secured in the correct sequence, tested and he too is OFF! A 46 second switch! We are doing great but no time to gloat, back to the track side, the watches, the board and more adrenaline.

Rick is also beating his best times of yesterday by 4-6 seconds! Bourne wants to be the fastest Morgan on the track and he sets about it with purposefulness. Though more than 40 seconds behind the lead mog, each lap eats away at that margin and each bite gets the team more excited.

At the beginning of the last lap, right in front of the team at the paddock, Rick flies by formidable Rob Welles (who is driving a beautifully tuned 60's Plus 4) and takes the Morgan lead. There is no easing up. Rick wants the Ferrari ahead as another scalp on his belt! Negotiating though the other cars, he closes in and takes Enzo's baby at the last turn. Masterful! There is much attention and respect for the car as it taxis in front of the paddock. Click [HERE!](#)

We are all one very happy bunch of people! Happy relief (and pride) shines on Simon's face, Rick looks like a pre-teen who just kicked the winning goal and Kate has the wondrous glow of a Cheshire cat.

## ***The Emberson SLR! (silver)***

*by Lorne Goldman*

The three Morgan SLRs gather legends like no other cars within the Morgan community, save TOK 258. Over the years they have changed hands and continents, back and forth,. It is wonderful to now see all the three back from where they started, in the United Kingdom, being racing on the tracks they know so well. This is the SLR that was the biggest mystery. Hopefully, this article will help lift some of the veil. Please send in your pictures and tales and (and corrections if any) and they shall be included!



The car was built by Chris Lawrence and John Sprinzel (Sprinzel Lawrence Racing) late in 1963. They built three SLRs on Morgan chassis and this was the second. (The first SLR was built on a Triumph chassis and

is five inches shorter). They were combined with a Lawrencetune engine. The lovely aerodynamic SLR bodies were fashioned in light aluminium originally by Charlie Williams of [Williams and Pritchard](#). As the project was developing with each car, all four SLRs were, in fact, slightly different from the start.

Many of the lessons learned with TOK 258 were expressed in the SLRs. After the TOK stub axles were found to be cracked after the LeMans win, bigger stub stub axles and wheel hubs were used on the the SLRs to prevent this. This and others of the SLR improvements were later incorporated into the Plus 8s.



This SLR is also distinctive as it is the only one unpainted boasting polished aluminium from the start. It was built for Pip Arnold & driven directly on completion from the shop to [Spa](#) to be raced by Chris Lawrence against the Porsche's Works racers. The story is that there was no time to paint the car so they paid a group of youngsters to polish the bare aluminium!

In 1969, the car was acquired by John Atkins and registered in the UK as TAE 253G. (John Atkins also owned 581 DOK, the first Morgan SLR.) Sometime in this period it was extensively repaired after a garage fire by Maurice Gomm, a prominent body builder and was restored with or by Rob Wells of Libramotive along with a then young mechanic, Brian Gateson. Brian Gateson now runs his own Morgan business (Techniques) & will be entrusted with the car. The other two Morgan SLRs are maintained by Brett Syndercombe at Brands Hatch Morgans.

N.B. An extra chassis was made at the

time of the repair by Maurice Gomm.

In 1981, this SLR was purchased by George Raterink, a noted vintage racer from Colorado, and the car was shipped to the USA. The next owner was a blessing for the car. A sales ad as spotted by chance by David "SuperDave" Bondon, the very well-known American moggie racer and Concours winner. Dave has a great habit. Whenever he is delayed at an airport, he browses the local ads searching for automobile beauties. This is how in he found the SLR in Denver 1983, still with its extra body. He restored it and went on with it to win a decade's worth of races and Concours awards.



In 1995, the car was purchased by Larry Nelson, another American and in 1998 he sold it to Adrian van der Kroft, a European Morgan collector and fine racer. Adrian brought the car back to the UK and raced it there.

In November 2009, the car was purchased by John Emberson. John's Morgan experience began in 2000 when he was attracted to the Aero 8 while attending the 2000 Geneva Motor Show where the Aero was first unveiled. After speaking with Melvyn Rutter, a British

Morgan dealer, he was convinced to buy a Morgan trad, which he and his family promptly fell in love with! he bought a Morgan Roadster Lightweight in 2004 and entered the [Morgan Challenge](#) in 2006 racing every year since. In 2004, he acquired a Jim Tucker race-prepared 1961 Plus 4. In the Centenary year, he purchased one of the Limited Edition Aeromaxes with the SLR. He intends to co-pilot the SLR with Morgan notable, Bill Wykeham.

This legend has found a fine home. We wish John the very best of luck and fun!

## REUNION SILVERSTONE

All 3 Morgan SLRs turned up at Silverstone Raceway on Friday May 15th, 2010 set to make history. The three legendary cars, 1960s creations of Sprintzel Lawrence Racing (aka Chris Lawrence, pilot of the TOK 258 the LeMans winner) have long been considered the most beautiful of all Morgans, raced together for the first time in almost fifty years on Sunday, May 16th at 12:15. Simon Orebi Gann's beautiful Red (the first Morgan SLR), John Emberson newly acquired (the second Morgan SLR) and Keith Ahler's veteran Green (the third Morgan SLR) took off with many enthusiasts and a fine field of other competitors present.

The drama started early. The Emberson and Orebi Gann SLRs were both due to test on Friday. The former missed the first session but otherwise ran well. On the other hand, the other car stumbled



on three occasions, throwing a tappet adjustment suddenly, within a couple of laps of starting. As a result, it hardly ran all day. In the evening, the engine builder, co-pilot and Rick Bourne opened up the engine and noticed a bent rocker arm.

On Saturday, the day dawned well and all three cars went out for the qualifying session. The Emberson SLR (piloted by John Emberson and Bill Wykeham) qualified 9th and the Ahlers' SLR (piloted by the father and son team of Jack and Billy Bellinger) did even better, achieving 7th in a grid of 50 cars.

Sadly, the Orebi Gann SLR (piloted by Simon Orebi Gann and Rick Bourne) failed on the first lap with exactly the same symptom as the day before in testing, and the newly fitted rocker arm was once again found to have bent. With some very efficient and rapid mechanical work, the engine was patched up enough to get the car qualified, although the revs had to be kept within 4000 rpm. (As these engines generate most of their power from 4000 rpm + upwards, the performance prejudice was substantial and the car qualified in 39th place.) However, in true British racing spirit, overnight the engine was stripped down, a sticking valve diagnosed and unstuck, and the engine rebuilt on the spot. With crossed fingers it was rolled out on Sunday for the Race.

The one hour, two driver race began promptly the following morning. At the end of the first 20 minutes, the order was the Ahlers' car, then the Orebi Gann's followed by Emberson's. A Triumph broke a half shaft on the (fortunately slow) Brooklands left hander, and the car rolled. The safety car was used for 10 minutes while the marshals cleared driver (unhurt) and remains of car wreckage. At the end of the safety car period, the Ahlers car stayed out but the other two SLRs came in for a driver change. The Emberson car changeover was so slick that they emerged from the pits just ahead of the Orebi Gann car and looked like it might overtake the Bellingers!!

However, a couple of laps later, sadly the Emberson car pulled off with a blown head gasket. With the number of cars in the race, the clerk if the course decided not to operate the normal process of making the pace car pick up the leader car, which luck gave the Ahlers car near a lap gain. The Orebi Gann car managed to unlap itself and made up half the next lap when the chequered flag came out.





The result for class GT3 was:

1. Ahlers Morgan SLR
2. Austin Healey 3000
3. Orebi Gann Morgan SLR (with the fastest lap by 0.015 second showing how well matched the cars are)

A historical first was achieved: the three SLRs started the race. At any one point, it looked like any one of the cars could have been first. With no damage to the cars so all the drivers are awaiting eagerly for the next Special Race Day!