

## The Bluffer's Guide to Short-Oval Racing



**Confused by the short-ovals? Andrew Charman has been round the block to unlock the secrets of the sport...**

PHOTOGRAPHY: MATTHEW BALL

**T**he future is oval" goes the catch phrase at Britain's only US-style track, the 1.5-mile Rockingham Motor Speedway near Corby. But there's a large swathe of the British motorsport community who might contend this, arguing that the past and very much the present have been oval too. We are of course talking short-oval racing, the quarter-mile tracks of which there are many dotted around these Isles of ours, attracting big crowds, both at weekends and on weekday evenings, and hosting a wide variety of formulae.

In fact, the variety is so wide that a first-time

spectator or entrant to the short-oval scene can quickly become very confused. What's super and what's hot? When is a Rod not a Stock? These are just a small proportion of the variety of series on show at these events. This feature should strip away some of the mystery of the short-oval scene and show why it is, for many, the home of cheap but exciting motorsport.

Now, we can't cover everything – a prime reason for there not being a single structure for UK short-oval racing is that it does not have a single organising body, along the lines of the Motor Sports Association in circuit racing. As well as the major promoters, the likes of Spedeworth

in the South and Incarace in the Midlands, most tracks run their own specific classes. To cover everything would take a book, which would soon be rendered out-of-date by what is an ever-changing feast. We've also been forced to restrict ourselves to the purpose-built ovals – there's a whole extra element on the grass tracks worthy of a feature on their own.

So, not all the quarter-mile classes are here, but we can give an overview of the variety on offer, split into two sections – those in which you can deliberately hit your rivals, and those in which you cannot. We can also offer one piece of advice: go see some short-oval action!

### NATIONAL HOT RODS

The elite of tin-top oval racing, the quarter-mile version of the British Touring Car Championship. They look like superminis but that is where the resemblance ends – underneath their shells are highly-developed, bespoke race machines with spaceframe chassis, kevlar panels, highly modified engines of up to two-litres, race suspension and a price tag well in excess of £20,000. Popular body shapes include the Peugeot 206, Vauxhall Corsa, Citroen Saxo and even the VW Corrado. There is also a variation of the National Hot Rods called Outlaw Hot Rods, so similar in fact that National cars sometimes race in the Outlaws.



### 2.0 HOT RODS

This is Spedeworth's own formula, designed to provide a stepping stone to the national class and with good racing along the way. It started out as a 1600cc formula in 1986, using the then Ford Kent engine. Development is allowed but not to the level of National Hot Rods. In spite of this the action is no less intense. Probably the most popular car is the ubiquitous Toyota Starlet.



### HOT FORDS

A non-contact series organised by Incarace that does exactly as the title suggests. It's for front-wheel drive Ford Fiestas, Escorts or Orion models, with engines of up to 1600cc OHV or CVH. Fuel injection isn't allowed but converting an injected engine to carbs is. Permitted mods are minimal, keeping costs down. With plenty of potential cars out there grids tend to be large. Most races for this formula are Midlands-based.





## INCARODS

Another Incarace formula, this is effectively the rest-of-the-world answer to Hot Rods. Any four-cylinder non-Ford hatch, coupé or saloon is allowed, but not vans or estates. A single carb is mandatory but race-engined machines such as Mini Coopers are banned. Racing is strictly non-contact and, again, the strict rules and cheap costs produces big grids.



## LIGHTNING RODS

A step up from the basic Hot Rods and Incarods, Lightning Rods keeps Ford's Sierra alive, it or its Sapphire saloon sibling the only shells permitted. The cars must be rear-wheel drive using the Ford two-litre Pinto engine with only some machining and a new cam allowed. They are quite swift and being a non-contact formula the racing is clean as well.



## STOCK RODS

A good entry point for the aspiring National Hot Rod competitor, Stock Rods are 1300cc or 1400cc superminis, racing together with few modifications permitted. Organisers provide a list of eligible cars, currently headed by such staples as the Toyota Starlet, Ford Fiesta and Peugeot 206 but also including the Nissan Micra, Fiat Uno and Vauxhall Tigra. Whichever car you choose you must use its engine, so you can't drop a Ford lump into a Starlet. It's a formula in which you can be competitive without spending huge amounts of money.



## SUPERRODS

Some of the largest and most modern looking tin-tops on the short-oval scene, but again a cost-conscious formula. They are saloons or coupés at least 12-feet long, powered by 2.8-, 2.9- or three-litre Ford V6 engines and only rear-wheel drive models are allowed, although you can convert a front-wheel drive car to a rear-wheel drive specification. Both steel and spaceframe shells with kevlar panels are allowed and the cars sit on proper slick tyres. Super Rods race in several series around the country's various short-oval arenas and always provide fast, non-contact action.



## OVAL TRACK LEGENDS

Regulars at the bigger circuits are likely to know of the Legends, as these tiny cars race at such venues as Brands Hatch, Mallory Park and particularly, this year, Rockingham. The Oval Track version is like its long-circuit equivalent, based around 5/8 scale cars with glass fibre shells made to look like 1930s US saloons. Power comes from 1200cc Yamaha motorcycle engines. They race in a single championship on both hard-surfaced and shale tracks.



## MINISTOX

Got a youngster itching to go racing? Don't want to spend thousands on a kart? Ministox is the answer. Designed for racing by children over 11, they are basically standard one-litre Minis with extra protection, giving the youngsters plenty of training in short-oval racing before they move into the mainstream categories. There are two series in the UK, the difference is one allows mild contact. Norfolk-based Trackstar runs a similar series called Junior Rods, the cars here are 1000cc Fiestas or Novas.





## BRISCAF1 STOCK CARS

The kings of the single-seater scene, these are purpose-built cars with unlimited engines (most often Chevys of at least seven-litres), their bodies are dominated by massive wings atop the cockpit. They also boast big front and rear bumpers befitting a 'contact' formula – if someone slower holds you up, you can spin him out of the way. They have been running since 1954 in various series, but a national championship has only been held since 2002, drivers count their best 30 scores from 35 nominated rounds. There are also British and World Final meetings.



## BRISCAF2 STOCK CARS

Built along the same basic lines as the F1 stocks, the F2 cars boast heavier protection and are powered by two-litre engines. They are also significantly cheaper to run, which makes for some of the biggest short-oval grids and lots of action. A wide range of championships includes: National, European and World finals.



## V8 STOCK CARS

The name of these suggests a more radical version of the standard stock car but if you've read our feature in the March issue you'll know that, in fact, they were created in 1984 as a cheaper alternative to the F1 Stox. To add further complexity, the 'Northern' series uses Rover engines while its Southern Spedeworth-run counterpart boasts Chevrolet power. Both, however, greatly restrict what can be done to these motors, regulations on wheels and tyres also help to keep costs in check. They look and sound as good as F1s but are a little slower.



## SUPERSTOX

Spedeworth's stepping stone to BriSCA stock cars and also its oldest series – it was around the Superstox series that the promoter was founded in the early 1960s. This is a typical example of the confusing splits prevalent in short-oval racing as these single seaters are very similar to the BriSCA F2 Stock Cars, only using two-litre Ford Pinto engines.



## 1300 STOCK CARS

Created by Spedeworth in 1992, this is a no-nonsense, full-contact formula, using small, virtually standard hatchbacks with 1300cc engines and heavy strengthening for pushing and being pushed. They look very basic and almost thrown together compared to some of the more high profile rivals, but good racing is normally assured from these machines.





## REBEL RACERS

Launched in 1995 Rebels are very similar to Legends (see the non-contact section), the big difference being that Rebels lean on each other. With 5/8 scale glass fibre bodies, based on a 1937 American Ford Popular, the Rebels come out of a single factory, their 850cc Reliant engines are sealed, the suspension is tamper-proof and races are thus won purely on the ability of the individual drivers. There is a national championship but if you fancy dipping your toe into the competition waters you can hire a Rebel for a single meeting. You get three races for around £250!



## STREETSTOX/SALOON STOX

Effectively a step up from bangers. Any saloon or coupé with an engine of up to 1900cc is allowed (two-litres for saloon stox), as are some estates, but all cars must have all their original doors, boot etc in place. No strengthening of the body is allowed, apart from a little welding, while you can bore out the engine but nothing else. Both versions run on both ovals and figure-eight tracks, and while they are contact formulae the more aggressive moves seen in bangers are banned here. Unlike bangers, team entries are not allowed; to ensure there is no ganging-up on the opposition.



## BANGERS

Now, you might think that bangers is the most basic motor sport of all and perhaps not even a sport – the World Wrestling Entertainment of the racing world. You get a car, stick some form of driver protection in it and go out and smash it up. Wrong! Even in the banger world there are technical rules, though admittedly with an emphasis on safety (removing glass, the fuel tank etc).

Bangers race in their own wide variety of classes, a variety that changes a lot. There are obvious separations into various weights, but there can also be races for Ford Bangers, Team Bangers, Classic Bangers, and even manic ideas such as

hearses or vans. There are rookie banger classes with limited contact allowed, for those new to the sport, figure-of-eight races and the demolition derbies, which provide a smashing finish to many a short-oval meeting.

As for race craft, let me quote from the rule book: "Banger racing is a full-contact sport, drivers can race to win or attempt to win by stopping the opposition. The driver can push or spin any car towards the infield or fence, but should not be in contact with the front car if it hits the fence, this may be deemed to be a forceful fencing or follow in, both offenses carry a ban."





## GRAND PRIX MIDGETS

One of the oldest short-oval formulae, traceable back to the 1930s and featured in the June 2005 issue. These are probably the most innovative cars on the quarter-mile scene, varying from simple front-engined single seaters to complex machines inspired by Sprint Cars in America and boasting offset engines and suspension. For years they have raced on hard surfaced tracks but now some drivers are again experimenting on shale, which is how the series began on speedway courses.



## GT SPORTS

Curious little cars that are new for this year. They seem to have escaped from a 'proper' race circuit, looking more like mini-Le Mans cars rather than short-oval circuit racers. They are low-cost open-top sports cars and the races between them are strictly non-contact (as you could probably guess from the photo). They are designed to offer similar appeal to the GP Midgets but at lower costs, this again makes for some exciting racing.



## BABY GRANDS

Another import from the USA and another "shrunk" formula, Baby Grands are 2/3 scale replicas of NASCAR Nextel Cup cars, powered by 1300cc Yamaha engines producing around 125bhp – they have the potential for an 160mph top speed! They've raced in the USA since 1996, but establishing them over here has proven a slow process.



## RELIANTS

Yes, the three-wheelers, in virtually standard condition. They race, they fall over in the corners, the glass fibre bodies shred but they land back on their wheels and carry on for more. Often they are the most hysterically entertaining races on the short-oval racing programme.



## RETRO RACERS

Like much of motor sport the short-oval scene is getting in on the historic boom, with races for older cars growing in popularity. Incarace, for example, has this year launched a series for Classic Hot rods.

## REVERSE GRIDS

One big difference between short-oval and normal circuit racing is that the fastest, most experienced drivers start at the back of the grid. This ensures that every race boasts frenetic action and that those who are new to the sport get a look in.

## GOOD DRIVER?

Look at their roof. The majority of short-oval championships use a grading system, generally with white or yellow roofs for the novices rising to red for the most experienced. Silver or gold additions usually indicate champions.





## WANT TO SEE SHORT-OVAL RACING?

Angmering, West Sussex (races Sundays)  
Arena Essex, Thurrock, close to junction 30, M25 (Sundays and Bank Holidays)  
Birmingham Wheels (Saturday evenings)  
Bristol Mendips Raceway (Sundays & Bank Holidays)  
Buxton, Derbyshire (Sundays, Bank Holiday Mondays)  
Eastbourne Arlington Stadium, Sussex (Wednesday Evenings, Bank Holidays)  
Great Yarmouth Stadium, Norfolk (Tuesday Evenings, Sundays)  
Hednesford Hills Raceway, Staffs (Sundays, Bank Holidays)  
Ipswich Stadium, Foxhall Heath (Saturday Evenings, Bank Holidays)  
Kings Lynn, Norfolk (Saturday evenings, shale track).  
Northampton International Raceway, Brafield (Sundays)  
Ringwood, Hants (Sundays, some Saturday evenings)  
Skegness Stadium, Lincs (Wednesday Nights, Sundays and Bank Holidays, shale track)  
Swaffham Raceway, Norfolk (Sundays)  
Warton, Camforth, Lancs (Sundays)  
Wimbledon Stadium, London (Sunday evenings)

For full contact details, fixtures and a list of smaller tracks we recommend the excellent [www.ukovalracing.info](http://www.ukovalracing.info) website.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

There's plenty on the internet for the short-oval fan – these are some of the better sites

[www.incarace.co.uk](http://www.incarace.co.uk)

Major promoter's site, lots of detail

[stockcar.co.uk](http://stockcar.co.uk)

Spedeworth International, another major promoter

[www.ukovalracing.info](http://www.ukovalracing.info)

Extensive news and feature site with loads of info and fixtures, together with contact details for tracks

[www.nationalhotrod.com](http://www.nationalhotrod.com)

The National Hot Rod series

[www.2litrehotrod.com](http://www.2litrehotrod.com)

Spedeworth's less expensive tin-tops

[www.brisca.com](http://www.brisca.com)

The biggest, baddest stock cars

[www.briscaf2.com](http://www.briscaf2.com)

Home of the F2 Stock Cars

[www.superstox.org.uk](http://www.superstox.org.uk)

Superstox formula site

[www.oval-legends.co.uk](http://www.oval-legends.co.uk) Small Yankee superstars

[www.rebelracing.co.uk](http://www.rebelracing.co.uk) Hire a Rebel and go racing

[www.gpmidgents.co.uk](http://www.gpmidgents.co.uk) Small and very clever

**THE SHORT-OVAL SCENE IS, FOR MANY, THE HOME OF CHEAP BUT EXCITING MOTORSPORT**

