



# Interview

## John Grant, Chairman, Motor Sports Association

*The New Year heralds a major change at the top of the Motor Sports Association (MSA) as John Grant takes over as Chairman of UK motor sport's national governing body. Since the announcement of his appointment midway through 2002, Grant has been actively involved in familiarising himself with the MSA's many roles and responsibilities through his initial role as MSA Vice-Chairman. Grant brings with him extensive motor sport experience both as an enthusiastic competitor in historic sportscar racing – he won the 2002 Orwell Supersports Cup – as well as in a management role having overseen Jaguar's victorious Group C and IMSA racing programmes during the early 1990s when a senior executive in the Ford Motor Company.*

**How much time have you already been dedicating to the MSA?**

Far more than I meant to, but being new to the governing body there's been a lot for me to get to grips with and a lot of people to get to know. What's more, it's proving to be rather addictive!

**How pro-active is your role as Chairman?**

I see my role mainly as handling external relationships with, for example, the FIA and Government, and in supporting Colin Hilton, particularly on strategic and broader business issues. It's very important that Colin, as Chief Executive, continues to have full responsibility for running the day-to-day business of the MSA and that we don't trip over each other. This means that I do intend to be 'hands on', but only in those areas where I have something to add.

**What have you learned so far?**

I've realised there are a lot of people who are passionate about our sport and who would love to see the MSA take the lead in initiating changes to make it easier and more enjoyable for more and more individuals to participate in motor sport as competitors, marshals, officials or just as spectators. We clearly have a number of issues to address, but I don't believe any of these are insurmountable. In the MSA, we have some very strong foundations and some world leading capabilities (for example in training and safety standards), and we need to build on these.

**What are the immediate challenges facing the MSA and what are your short-term objectives for the year ahead?**

First and foremost, we need to re-establish our reputation internationally – and particularly with the FIA, where I am determined that we should earn our way back onto the World Motor Sport Council. This may take time, but I think the progress that has already been made at last year's Grand Prix and the dramatic improvement in safety standards on the Rally GB are helpful steps in the right direction. Beyond that, motor sport is clearly facing something of an economic crisis in some areas; we need to do whatever it takes to help event and championship organisers, circuit owners and competitors to run motor sport in the most cost effective way. This means attacking proliferation and overlap of series (which has resulted in poor grids, poor competition and high vehicle depreciation) and ensuring regulations are sensible, whilst at the same time encouraging investment to ensure safety standards and infrastructure continue to improve.

Specific short-term objectives are to ensure the MSDG (Motorsport Strategy Development Group) quickly starts to produce some clear recommendations about where we should be heading. I know Alan Gow, who chairs this group, is keen to move fast and I expect to see some real progress over the next few months.

**What are your longer-term objectives for the MSA?**

From the MSA's perspective, the recently carried out Strategic Review pinpointed several priorities: the funding of motor sport and trickle down of funds to club level; infrastructure of the sport and the availability of skilled volunteers; the structure of championships; and development of talented young drivers.

Personally, I would like to see a more coherent, graduated structure for both racing and rallying (something the MSDG is addressing), encompassing not just events and types of vehicle but also quality of venues. At the top end, in my view, we need to have more harmonisation between national and international regulations and events to make it easier to compete at an international level. In rallying, for example, the increasingly prescriptive formula for WRC events like

the Wales Rally GB is distancing the professional end of the sport from the enthusiastic amateurs. To address this, I see the re-building of the British Rally Championship (through the new joint venture between ABIRO and the MSA's subsidiary company International Motor Sports) as very important. The next step will then be to raise one or two of these events to European Championship status.

We also need to do more to secure funding for the future development of motor sport. Although the MSA has sufficient financial reserves to cover a 'rainy day' situation such as foot and mouth or a short economic downturn, it is not generating enough income to provide 'seed corn' funding for new projects. This is where I see IMS having an important role to play, in developing our ability to build up our major events and national championships to a level where they can be promoted more commercially. Andrew Coe (Chief Executive of IMS) shares this vision and is strengthening his part of the organisation accordingly.

On the driver development front, I have been impressed at some of the manufacturer-supported programmes in countries such as France and Germany. We need to do more to support promising drivers in the UK and are starting to work with some of the vehicle manufacturers in the UK to develop similar initiatives.

**The number of MSA licence holders has remained static for the past decade; why is this and what can be done to encourage new growth?**  
We have had around 33,000 licence holders for many years, but there are a lot more than 33,000 people who are participating in motor sport at club level and in similar activities such as track days. To attract new players into the sport, we need to make it easier to graduate from leisure to competitive activity. In addition, I believe we – and the clubs – need to do more to promote awareness of the many low cost forms of motor sport such as autotests and production car trials. We need to dispel the image that you need a generous sponsor or a rich daddy to indulge in motor sport – it's just not true.

**There seems to be some speculation regarding the future of Interpublic and, in particular, its UK motor sport subsidiary Octagon Motorsports. What are the implications of this uncertainty?**

I understand that Interpublic has hinted recently that Octagon Motorsports may not form part of its long-term strategy. However, I must say that I've been impressed at the efforts Murray Smith and Michael Browning have been making over the last six months to strengthen the management of Octagon in the UK and to maintain their commitment to the development programme for Silverstone and their other circuits. My guess is that Interpublic will want to see Octagon well on the road to recovery before thinking about transferring ownership to somebody else.

**The MSA has been integral in setting up the Motorsport Strategy Development Group – what are your hopes and expectations for the MSDG?**

The MSDG really has a pivotal role in laying out a clear direction for motor sport in the UK. As this is very much a joint effort between the MSA and the MIA, representing both the 'sporting' and the 'industry' side of motorsport, it's got off to a good start and there is a lot of work going on with a number of sub-groups looking at some specific issues including the structure of racing and rallying, the development and training of drivers, funding of the sport and so forth. One of the problems of our sport is that there have been too many bright ideas and not a clear enough framework to fit them into. As a result, too many of these ideas have failed to come to fruition. What I hope the MSDG will do is provide the framework that has been missing, pick up on those ideas that have worked and bring together some new ideas from the many experts who have volunteered to be part of this initiative.

**What do you hope the DTI Motorsport Competitiveness Panel will achieve for British motor sport?**

The DTI Motorsport Competitiveness Panel has come just at the right time. Its main objective is to establish a joint Government/Industry/Sport action plan with a clear set of priorities to sustain and further develop what is already one of the UK's successes from both an industry and a sporting viewpoint. With strong representation on the Panel from both the MSA and the MIA, I am optimistic that the Panel's recommendations will help to secure financial support for the things we need to do to strengthen UK motor sport and to fight off challenges from other countries which envy the UK's world leading reputation.

**On a personal front, will you still be competing in 2003?**

Well, if I am to be a 'hands on' Chairman, I'll just have to carry on competing for a few more years yet!

**Editor's note:** High resolution images of John Grant available on request

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