



The Wessex Grand Prix Carnival Circuit

A brief history

The Wessex Grand Prix Carnival Circuit, now in its 25th successful year, was the brainchild of Keith Berry of Frome Carnival Association and Gordon Stockman of Castle Cary Carnival Society.

Seeking to support and encourage local carnivals, Keith Berry had made approaches to Shaftesbury and Gillingham carnival committees in the early 1980s, with a proposal to form a new circuit of carnivals. Keith respected that each carnival town had its own character, and that this needed to be preserved. At this time, the formation of a circuit was regarded as no more than a pipedream.

In 1985, Keith Berry met Gordon Stockman whilst judging the Midsomer Norton carnival. Gordon was inspired by Keith's concept and together they arranged consultative meetings with local carnival committees. The circuit was conceived on a Formula 1 Racing principle, so that it would not affect existing local carnival town awards and judging. It would be a supplemental competition, over and above local competitions - to encourage clubs and carnivalites from each town going into the circuit to compete for another range of awards.

The circuit was set up with three basic categories classes of competition: Tableaux, Feature and Comic.

In 1986 the Wessex Grand Prix circuit was established with the carnivals of Frome, Shaftesbury, Gillingham, Castle Cary and Wincanton. All the circuit members pooled resources for publicity and sponsorship. Such was the success for the circuit that Mere carnival joined, followed by Warminster and Trowbridge shortly after. Sturminster Newton carnival also joined the circuit in the last decade.

Today, the Wessex Grand Prix is a thriving community, with its own Wessex Queen, regular meetings and a wide range of prizes and awards for entries ranging from large floats to individual walking masqueraders.

And, twenty five years on, Keith Berry and Gordon Stockman remain two of the Wessex Grand Prix's leading lights.