

Picture: Allan Rhodes, not for resale



Ilan Patton at the wheel



Le Bleu in action at the Gotherington circuit

Plenty of va va vroom

Meetings at Prescott Speed Hill Climb are always special but as **DANIEL POUNTNEY** found out, one in particular has a certain je ne sais quoi

VIVA Le France – the annual celebration of Gallic motoring flair is coming back to Gotherington next weekend.

Prescott Speed Hill Climb's La Vie En Bleu event is one of the highlights on the motorsport calendar for car lovers across the country.

The reason for its national popularity is due to a combination of factors – history, location, reputation, entertainment and a record for world firsts.

Ilan Patton has been general manager for six years but has been visiting the hill for more than 40.

When he studied as an architect in Cheltenham in the Sixties, he rode his bicycle to Prescott one day to watch a meeting and fell in love with it.

He became a regular at the track visiting every year until he finally took over at the helm.

"What we do here is grass roots motorsport," he says.

"It's proper racing but without the pressure of sponsorship and financing that comes with circuit racing."

The track hosts the opening round of the British Hill Climb Championship every spring but at all of the other meetings of the season, which runs

until October, clubs compete against each other in non-championship races.

The La Vie En Bleu meeting is no different in that some incredibly talented drivers will be racing each other up the 1,127-yards of the winding hill.

But the event has got something extra too.

"Prescott is a strange place for motorsport really because it has a garden party atmosphere," Ian says.

"That is especially true with la Vie En Bleu – it's a real family event with top quality racing as well as all kinds of entertainment.

"Nobody else does it quite as well." On the Saturday, classic British cars such as MGs and TVRs will be competing.

There will also be Ferraris and Ginettas taking to the track.

Then on the Sunday the site is given over to all things French so visitors can enjoy an awesome display of Renaults, Citroens and Peugeots.

"There will be everything from Edwardian motors to modern racing cars," Ian says.

As well as the racing, visitors can enjoy the Parisienne 1920s Renault bus, live music, food from the

creperie and a parachute display by the RAF Falcons.

It was the mid-1930s when the Prescott estate was put up for sale by the Gloucestershire Dairy Co. Writer and Vintage Sports Car Club member Tom Rolt spotted its potential as a hill climb course but the project was too ambitious for the fledgling club.

Instead the idea was passed to the more established Bugatti Owners' Club.

They bought the estate and held their first meeting there in 1938.

Racing has continued ever since.

The track is set in 60 acres of glorious Cotswolds countryside.

It rises over 200-feet via short straights, fast and slow corners and a breathtaking hairpin.

The fastest modern racing cars complete the course in under 40 seconds.

The course record could be under threat at La Vie En Bleu though as the world's fastest production car is coming.

"One of the highlights this year is sure to be our world exclusive appearance of three Bugatti Veyrons," Ian says.

"We have the standard Veyron which costs around £850,000 and is pretty amazing.

"We also have the Pur Sang model which had a polished alloy body. Only five of them were made and it is a stunning thing to look at.

"Then we have the Super Sport – the only one in Europe – and it's going to compete on the track."

The Super Sport is the holder of the world land speed record for fastest production car.

Lent to the event by an anonymous businessman, the 267mph machine will be driven up the hill by professional racing driver John Morrison.

"It's something that car lovers will not want to miss," Ian says.

"But with classic cars and the new Morgan three-wheeler on display, wing walkers, music and some great food, you don't need to be a motorsport lover to enjoy La Vie En Bleu and that's the magical thing about it."

■ For more information and details about other meetings at the Gotherington track, visit www.prescott-hillclimb.com



The Bugatti Veyron Super Sport is the star attraction