

BTCC's Fresh Face In The Paddock: Robb Holland (Part 2)



13 Oct, 2012
by **Alex Goldschmidt**

Now Part 2 reveals a generous side to the Denver native, as charity work that racers do, always helps to give back to those, plus also his views on the coverage of certain race series in the USA, plus a pretty good response on a possible overseas round, if there was a hypothetical possibility that TOCA, along with Alan Gow, may try to help broaden the international appeal of the BTCC for the future. Well, we can dream, can't we? In many ways, Robb has always had a love for the BTCC, a bit like a first racing love. But in many respects, for his major sponsors finding the WTCC to be a bigger global platform for them, but this is alongside the interest in Robb racing in the UK.

"There is a possibility that I do both next year. The schedules collide on two or three occasions, so there is no reason that I can't do 7 WTCC race weekends and a full campaign in the BTCC next season, or vice versa. So, once again, you don't always have your fate in your own hands, you have to follow the sponsors and just see what pans out."

As with a lot of drivers that help to inspire others, Robb does, to his credit, some great charity work for Racers Who Care, as early in September, he paid a visit to those children at the Children's Hospital in Colorado. And on the photos on his Facebook page, you could just see the smiles and the faces of these children light up, when he walked into the wards, with his race helmet under his arm.



Robb with a smiling fan at the Children's Hospital of Colorado, as part of his work for Racers Who Care. (Image via Facebook.com)

I asked Robb how he got involved, and what the basic premise of the charity is: "Judy Straw, who is a phenomenal woman, and head of Riders Who Care, uses the high-natured profile of race car drivers to help inspire kids. But it's not just hospital visits, but schools visits too, talking to groups of children.

"When I grew up, race car drivers were people who I looked up to, as a cool profession. So to use this to inspire kids, whether it is to help them feel better, or to want to do better things in life, is what the mission of Racers Who Care really is."

"Judy seems to know my travel schedule, as it seems to mysteriously appear in her inbox, but for some strange reason, she does. She's always setting things up for me to go and do. For me, it is important, as what I get to do for a career is fantastic, which a lot of people would love to do. So, my responsibility, as I see it, is to help give back somehow. Judy and I are definitely on the same line here."

But Robb also helps out the Youth Urban Racing School in Philadelphia, which uses motorsport to help teach science, mathematics, engineering and technology to intercity kids. He says it gives them inspiration to look up to someone like him, who is in the motorsport business full-time: "Hopefully, this inspires them to do better in school,

which will lead to bigger and better things in their life."

This, is a great way for projects like this to help inspire the youth of today, who will be the future talent in motorsport, be it from

being behind the wheel, in the pits as part of the crew, engineers and developers, as Robb explained: "There are so many roles for these kids, and lots of possibilities now. Especially as they have a better idea of the picture, having spoken to me, showing that things can be done, and they can still get into motorsport."

Turning now to the exposure that the BTCC has received on the other side of the pond, it was quite interesting to find out how the USA gets their coverage of a lot of racing that we seem to have a lot more of. A lot of us Brits may have a slightly blinkered view, to a degree, on this matter, but what Robb told me was quite eye opening, especially as when it came to the topic of the understanding of just how popular the BTCC really is, when it came to international coverage.

"It's never as popular as Indycar and Nascar, but it's for the die-hard motorsport fan. The BTCC is held in high esteem here, especially due to the Super Touring era back in the 90s, as US fans enjoy that type of racing. But when an American goes over there, it really goes over the top, just in terms of the interest there is now stateside. Whereas it used to be a case of fans trying to catch races every once in a while, but now with me racing there, they've all gone: 'Now there's an American there, let's watch it to see how he does!'"

"What has really amazed me, is just the amount of support that I've gotten from the British fans, and the fact a lot of them have asked as to when I'm coming back over, as they can't wait to see me back behind the wheel, and that's just great."

"Hopefully this will help more US sponsors get on board and sponsor me, but maybe other drivers as well. I can't tell you just how many drivers have contacted me, and asked, 'we are really interested in the series. Can you tell us about the budgets, and how the drivers are? Is Jason Plato that much of an ass?'"

It is exactly true what the fans in the USA seem to do, when it come to forming opinions on drivers through the limited coverage they get on SPEED in the USA. Not to mention the fact that Robb had his welcome to the BTCC provided by Speedworks' Adam Morgan at Snetterton in his very first race. This ended up with the Civic itself going backwards onto the tyre wall. We even briefly talked about "that incident" between Jason and Aron Smith, where the 2-time BTCC champion wasn't quite happy about the driving standards of the young Irishman that weekend.



Robb racing at Snetterton (Image credit (c) Octane Photographic/Chris Enion)

But Robb says that it happens in racing all time, because some people can just sit there and hold grudges against their rivals: *"Adam and I shook hands afterwards. This was even though we were going for the same piece of track. It was not the way either of us wanted to end up, and it was unfortunate. But we moved on."*

"I haven't had the chance of racing against Jason myself, but hopefully when we get the updates, I'm sure we'll have that pleasure. But it just shows how it translates back in the USA. This is when there are guys who don't get the full 6 hours of coverage, as well as all the media coverage too. Everyone has formed his or her opinions, based in the little bit of coverage we have over here in the USA. It is interesting to see both sides of the coin."

As a lot of the touring cars series like WTCC and DTM actually go to other international circuits, the BTCC seems to have stayed away from this trend, I thought it would be rather interesting as to where Robb would pick for the teams to go racing.

There are a wide variety of circuits in the USA, like Infineon, Lime Rock, Road America and Sonoma to choose from, but Robb does highlight a few tracks that would more than likely suit the style of action-packed racing we have here in the BTCC.

He explained to me that Sonoma itself is a great venue, as it is in close vicinity to the local wine country, San Francisco and nearby international airports. It is a track that he has only been to 2 to 3 times previously, as he has struggled there before, due to a lack of experience and track time there.

The first he suggested was Mid-Ohio, where he holds the track record, and explains how the BTCC would fit in there: *"It's a great circuit, which would really highlight the nature of touring car racing. There are lots of places where it is difficult to pass, but good drivers will make those passes. It's also great for the spectators."*

"But Watkins Glen has changes in elevation, and great places for passing, and then not forgetting MoSport in Canada, which is a truly old-school track, that makes for interesting racing for the series. I disagree with WTCC in the fact that they use tracks that are between 4 and 4.5 kilometres in length, which stretches out the field too much, especially when you get a bad exit out of the corner."

"You can lose around 2 to 4 km/h on the straightaways, when then can put you out of position to battle for the next corner. These types of tracks are good for GT racing, however. I like shorter tracks are better for touring car racing, which gives us close battles."

"Lime Rock, which is very similar to Knockhill, has a lot of corners, and not so many straightaways. It's a track where passing is difficult, and more what touring car racing is all about, rather than overall speed. It makes for great action, with the drivers battling door handle to door handle, trying to make spectacular passes, or not, as the case may be. So those would be my top three or four choices."

AG: Thanks for taking the time to talk to us here at RichlandF1.com, Robb, and look forward to seeing you soon.

RB: *"No problem, Alex. Look forward to it."*

It was great to talk to Robb, and really interesting to find out how he is helping, through this varied career he has had in racing so far, the youth of today, to help inspire them in what they want to pursue in life, especially when it comes to motorsport.

If you're there next weekend at Brands Hatch, why not pop along and have a chat with the man himself, because if it all goes to plan, he'll be one of those we'll be cheering on in the BTCC next season as a fan favourite. He is a man to watch, and with his racing credentials and cheery demeanour, he will be very much in demand wherever he races.

I'd like to thank Robb for taking the time out of his busy schedule, now being the first of many interviewees that will help to bring in the new era here at Richland Racing, as it's full throttle, as we head towards 2013 and beyond....

