

# Motofest

*Richard Higginson interviews James Noble*

**MotoFest** (<https://coventrymotofest.com>) is a free motorsport festival that takes place across the city of Coventry, including a 1.5 mile motorsport circuit, live music, heritage displays and of course food. In 2016 Coventry welcomed 125,000 people and over 1000 motors to the event. It was started on the back of an idea from James Noble, a leader at Jubilee Church in Coventry. We interview him here.

## **James, why your particular interest in the motor industry?**

My mum taught me the names of cars when I was very small and I became a keen amateur engineer, building bicycles as a teenager and progressing to car restoration as soon as I was old enough. I think I perplexed my father who is a keen sailor!

After studying three-dimensional design and brief excursion in interior

and furniture design, I found myself managing a small East London garage and engineering business. In 2000 my wife Sarah, our three children and I moved to Coventry so I could complete an MA in automotive design. We joined Jubilee Church, then a three-year-old church plant. After completing my master's degree I joined Volkswagen Group where I held a number of positions,

finally working as a business development coach working with independent Volkswagen-approved businesses.

## **And then you left to work full-time for a church?**

Yes, I left my career in the motor industry to join the staff team at Jubilee over five years ago. I knew I had been involved in demonstrating



Motofest press launch showing representatives from the British Automobile Racing Club, Coventry Council and the Motofest organisers

and advancing God's Kingdom in my previous employment and to be honest was a little concerned that my move to working for the church would actually limit the opportunities for this. Early on in my church employment I heard about an initiative that was starting in the city called Coventry Champions. Its aim was to bring together business and community leaders to make Coventry a more vibrant place to live, work and do business in. Andrew Simpkins (who leads the eldership team here) and I decided to get involved in this, which led to my idea for MotoFest. It also provided the early introductions to the council and made what was frankly a bonkers idea actually happen!

### **How is Jubilee Church Coventry involved in Motofest?**

Jubilee Church has been behind Coventry MotoFest from the start. The church community as a whole has embraced the event and gets involved in many ways – from praying that Coventry is blessed through MotoFest to many individuals giving up their time to make it happen. The MotoFest core team is made up of a mixture of people from Jubilee Church together with event and motorsport professionals. Not only does Jubilee Church release some of my paid time to lead this team, it's also one of its sponsors.

### **Why is this something that you invest in so much as a church?**

MotoFest is not directly evangelistic – although amazingly a number of people have become Christians and joined Jubilee through relationships started at MotoFest. It's a celebration. In Jeremiah 29, the prophet instructs God's people to pray for the city and work for its prosperity. There have been times in the past when Coventry has been an incredibly prosperous city but over the past few years the city leaders have sought to renew the city again. Following the redevelopment of parts of the city centre, the city council

put out a call for large-scale events to attract visitors into the city centre. MotoFest is Jubilee Church's response to this call.

### **That's all very well, but is the motor industry something we can celebrate whole-heartedly? Don't motor vehicles contribute significantly to the pollution problems of planet earth? What about all the people who are killed every day in motor accidents?**

The motor industry like many other industries has contributed negatively to the environment. However it has also provided mobility and employment for millions over the last 100 years. I also feel that no activity we humans undertake is without risk in some way or other. MotoFest celebrates the social history of a city and an industry and this is done best when people can see that history in live moving sound, smell and vision. However our celebration of the past showcases an exciting sustainable future for personal transport. In 2016 we hosted the world launch of the first-ever electric rally car, a Renault, and 2017 will see demonstrations of the latest in electric vehicles from many other manufacturers.

### **Do you hold a service of worship at MotoFest? Are there any public prayers? Would everyone who attends this event know that Christians have been instrumental in it happening?**

We have previously closed the festival with a Joint Church celebration in Coventry Cathedral hosted by the Cathedral and Jubilee. This year MotoFest falls on Pentecost weekend and HOPE Coventry – a self-

help initiative supported by many churches of many denominations – will be holding a joint service from the Greyfriars Green Main Stage on Sunday morning. Our stages are run by Radio Plus which is a community station run by Christians and features a mixture of secular and Christian performers. Jubilee Church serves the event with a team of over 100 MotoFest Ambassadors from Jubilee and other churches who aim to help people visiting the event in a practical demonstration of Jesus' love. We don't want to tell people we are Christians, we want to show people we are.

I have a meeting with the Pentecost team in two weeks when I will find out if Chris Cocksworth, the Bishop of Coventry and former Principal of Ridley Hall, is involved.

### **What have you got planned for MotoFest in 2017?**

One of the most amazing things is the way that what we planned as a local event has in just three short years become a mainstream part of the national motorsport event calendar. We have just received the Motor Industry Public Affairs Association (MIPAA) Chairman's Award for MotoFest's outstanding contribution to motor industry public relations. It was a wonderful surprise for the team to have the mouthpiece of the motor industry recognise that we have done the industry good as well as our city. God has massively blessed the event and Coventry through it. I hope MotoFest will continue to grow and we will keep doing it as long as it actually benefits the city that we love.



James Noble

**Thank you very much, James. ☺**