

# My Somerset Life

## A diary by Brian Snellgrove

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# What makes a county show worth going to? – Dorset County Show, Dorchester

Today Sunday was the day for visiting Dorset county show which is an event held once a year for two days over a weekend, near to Dorchester.

## An unexpected Aladdin's Cave

On the main road down for some reason I decided to turn off into a garden centre and an establishment that described itself as a trading post. It consisted of three elements, a coffee bar, and bric a bac shop with an amazing history, and then finally a small garden centre. The coffee bar was open from 10am to 4 p.m. Seven days a week. Congratulations whoever you are in running this social service. . It was like being in an old fashioned store in the 1960's or 70's. Very sentimental. even emotionally moving I could say.



We arrived about ten forty five in the morning. The road that my GPS told me to go down was blocked because it had been made into a one way road. We had to go through the town of

Dorchester and basically followed the traffic. Signage was non-existent. I suppose they wanted to save some money and not pay the AA to do what they're best at which is signing events. There are of course good at doing a lot of other things as well but this is one of them.

I don't think you want to see many more pictures of prize winning vegetables though there will be some. Rather, I would rather reflect on what makes a show value for money and whether we considered the £23 per head we spent on this show value for money. First, some images.

## Some pictorial features of the show



cars as far as the eyes could see.



VERY large food and art judging tent





Talk about being over the top. These pieces were made of iron and were quite weighty if I were to play a game I would need some time to get used to the pieces so they don't get in the way of my mental processes in actually playing the game



Looks like Marzipan



Some child has a wonderful imagination

We went into the craft tent and I found an exhibition of bowls carved out of various softwood and hardwood. The owner of the stand had a South African accent. Whenever I hear about someone from South Africa I get sentimental as my time there was so good and we are talking about 20 years ago now. I tried to guess how long he had been away from South Africa based on his accent. I wrongly guessed five years. In fact he came in the year 2000 partly to escape from the declining economic circumstances. He had spent nine years in Germany and then come to the UK so well done whoever you are for surviving.

I had a long chat with his wife who originated from Zimbabwe and we both agreed that this type of work would not sell so well in a place where people did not expect to spend £200 or £300 on what was ineffectual work of art and I thought he should sell them in art galleries where the artistic quality would be more appreciated and valued accordingly.



This is a lot of fun. You can place your dogs – or children – in this oversize chair and see how they react. People were getting the idea and doing it without invitation.



If this does not tickle the eye then nothing will

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playing merry jazz music and were for some reason dressed in pink.



These delightful young ladies were singing songs from the 1950s and 1960s. They had really good voices and sung together in joyous harmony. I could have listened to them for a long time but was getting a little bit tired





I have never seen corn on the cob being judged before so this was definitely a first for me. I could not tell the difference between any of them but I'm sure the practice eye can spot many differences.



A very clever and eye-catching feature. Well done the designer and I hope you make a good living, people



To me this was my first time to get up close and personal with such a vast machine. Evidently it is not the biggest and it's function is to harvest grain. I don't know how they move it from one field to another but evidently this six meter wide cutter is transferred on a separate trailer. We thought that a group of farmers would have to buy it and share it but no, the sales rep told us that this would be for one farmer and that the price was £450,000

We asked about the three wheels instead of the normal big wheels and we were told that it was because of needing to adapt to various types of ground. We left suitably impressed

## **So what makes value for money?**

I should first of all describe what the Show contains. There are two or three rings for entertainment and for horse jumping and so on. There are about 120 stalls devoted to selling be it food or items of interest or utility. There was a big section devoted to displaying farm machinery. All types of animals were on show and prizes were awarded for excellence as you would expect..

We stayed for three and a half hours. At the end of that time I'd had enough. On my phone I have a blue tooth checker and in

the crowds I had 415 phones within range, all broadcasting and trying to reach the stations never mind the downloads so that makes me tired I'm afraid. I wish it were my imagination.

## **These are the main features of the show**

1. facilities there were many public toilets and many large green containers for throw-away rubbish 9/10

2. entertainment – there was a drag race where vehicles had to be pulled along by sheer brute force, there were four very nice young ladies singing songs from the 50s and 60s, I will give this 8/10

3. horse riding competition – to a high standard and the commentator tried to explain the rules 8/10

4. animal judging – we had goats, alpacas, sheep, pigs, you name it all done to professional standard. 9/10

5. the presence of large farm vehicles, pictured below, with helpful staff to explain how they worked 9/10

6. signage – even though you can buy a program you still need signs pointing in the right direction because it is easy to get lost and disorientated in such a large show. There were few signs 4/10

7. food – there needs to be enough for variety at a reasonable price to provide for people's basic needs while they are in the show. Basically the sellers have a monopoly because there is no practical way of finding food in nearby Dorchester. You cannot force people to come and supply for example health food but all in all there were enough firms supplying food to get you through the day and it seemed to be of reasonable quality.

One of my special moans, we are offered steak roll or a bap and although the meat is good the roll itself is of the

cheapest quality and I wouldn't give it to an animal. People do notice these things. The test for me is if you drop a roll and it bounces, it doesn't have much food value

8. A special mention for the food hall. There was not as great a variety as I have seen in the Bath and West Show, the Shepton Mallet show, or the Frome show but there was certainly sufficient. What I liked was that there was plenty of room in the hall to move. They did not focus on getting every last stall or stand-holder in. They also put a few tables and chairs in one corner which I did appreciate. People can come over funny and suddenly get tired and need to sit down. It's not a medical thing just a thing of age. 7/10

9. weather – not much you can do about that but we had an ideal day with temperatures of 24 degrees centigrade, not very much wind, so all was good here. There should always be covered provision in case of inclement weather. 9/10

10. parking- there was plenty of free parking in adjacent fields. I reckon there must have been about 1500 cars altogether and these were marshaled by presumably volunteers or locals press-ganged in (joke) to assist 10/10

11. Transport to the site – not much public transport but it is possible to walk fro, the centre of Dorchester 7/10

12. the condition of the ground. Again, there's not much that can be done about this once the site has been selected but it was friendly to disabled people 9/10

13. entrance conditions – there were six people taking money by credit card at the entrance gate and although we arrived at peak time there was not much of a queue at all, so we more or less went straight in. Just a quick flash of my credit card 9/10

14. plant and vegetable competitions – in this case there were many entries and there was a high standard. I guess that

with Dorchester adjacent there would be enough people with a certain minimum mental acuity to be able to make a contribution. 9/10

15. Availability of staff in case of need and for guidance – there were round the show several large maps showing where features were. There were helpers but the only criticism I have is the lack of uniform i.e instant recognizability 7/10

16. Quality of stands – one or two stood out as being a bit amateur-ish but most people know their business, have exhibited before, and are good at presenting themselves. People do notice if for example the person who is on the stand is reading a book, looking bored, or fiddling on his mobile phone. It is not an incentive to go and speak to such people 8/10

17. costs of food – my bête noire is expensive coffee and we saw at a stall near the entrance latte being sold for £4.50 which I refused to pay as you will recall from previous exercises. I found someone offering coffee for three pounds which I accepted. Other people felt the same way so we had to wait a little while but when it came it was good. I had previously bought a very good steak and cheese Cornish pastie type pie for five pounds and that put me right for most of the day

18. Quality of public address – there is nothing worse than an overloud loud speaker which they did have in the main ring during the drag racing type events and I had to cover my ears. But in the horse ring they had it exactly right because the lady announcer seem to be speaking normally into her microphone and everyone could hear it as clear as day 7/10 overall

19. sitting areas – some of us like to sit down or even need to sit down. There were sufficient chairs and benches for this to be able to happen though you had to act quickly if you

saw a spare place as there were many people came to sit down.  
8/10

20. The event was ideal for families. People with pushchairs and young lively children had no difficulty at all in going round and the really good weather did help a lot. 9/10

21. Quality of organization on the ground . The better the organization, the less you notice it. You can tell the quality of management through the attitude of the people working there and there was a reasonable amount of team spirit but I have seen better so I wonder if everyone was gathered together beforehand in a pre-battle plan meeting so to speak. 7/10

Main takeaway, get the AA to sign post in the area. I know they are expensive budget is worth it. Also do some internal signs. I know you think it's stating the blindingly obvious but to the stranger it would make a big difference

I did notice one thing and there is a certain prejudice of people from Dorset towards people of Somerset. I did get mocked in a friendly way so maybe it's the same way that London people laugh at people from Essex or Norfolk. I'm sure this goes back a long way and it did no one any harm

Would I return next year? I think probably once every couple of years. There are only a few weekends per year when such events happen and these are weekends from May until mid September, so you can be picky. 9/10

## **My Somerset Life by Brian Snellgrove**

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