# Community spirit shines through despite arson scare at 1973 Cowley gala days



The spirit of community was alive and well in Cowley during the gala days held at the Pressed Steel Fisher car factory in 1973, where over 10,000 attendees revelled in a variety of entertaining events. This annual gathering, now in its 29th year, included competitions such as judo contests, horticultural exhibitions, sports races, a dog show, and a vibrant fire brigade display. One of the standout attractions was an 'It's a Knockout' competition, a lively spectacle that had captured the imagination of the British public.

Despite the enjoyment, the event was not without its challenges. Just hours before festivities were set to commence, a fire, suspected to be arson, engulfed a marquee, necessitating a hasty relocation of several scheduled activities to outdoor spaces. Peter Tull, the secretary of the Pressed Steel Fisher sports and social club, recounted the frantic scene as flames erupted, stating, “The first we saw was flames coming up through the marquee. Members rushed out with fire extinguishers, but it was too late to save it.” Fortunately, calm weather conditions helped prevent the blaze from spreading to nearby buildings.

'It's a Knockout' itself was a significant part of popular culture during the 1970s, renowned for its humorous and often chaotic contests. Since its debut in 1966, the show allowed teams representing various towns and cities to compete in ludicrous games, often clad in oversized foam suits. This format, adapted from the French series Intervilles, became synonymous with joyous absurdity, epitomised by its challenges where participants would navigate slippery surfaces while evading water cannons and custard pies. The show's ability to attract an audience of up to 19 million viewers speaks volumes about its popularity during that era. Indeed, it was often said that the show embodied "a competition to perform the pointless in the quickest possible time."

The gala days at the Pressed Steel Fisher factory showcased not only the camaraderie and spirit of competition but also reflected a broader tradition of community engagement and festivity within the UK. These events provided a means for locals to come together, celebrate their shared interests, and partake in the whimsical activities that defined an era of light-hearted entertainment. In a time when community ties were often tested, particularly in the industrial landscapes of Britain, such gatherings afforded a respite and an opportunity for connection amid various challenges.

As memories from the gala days fade into history, they remain a poignant reminder of a community’s resilience and capacity to find joy amidst adversity. The enduring legacy of events like these underlines the significance of cultural activities in fostering communal bonds and uplifting spirits in even the most trying of times.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25199141.thousands-enjoy-gala-days-oxfordshire-car-factory/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25199141.thousands-enjoy-gala-days-oxfordshire-car-factory/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25199141.thousands-enjoy-gala-days-oxfordshire-car-factory/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25199141.thousands-enjoy-gala-days-oxfordshire-car-factory/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It's_a_Knockout)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/anniversaries/august/its-a-knockout/), [[5]](https://www.britishclassiccomedy.co.uk/its-a-knockout), [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeux_sans_fronti%C3%A8res)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25199141.thousands-enjoy-gala-days-oxfordshire-car-factory/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.britishclassiccomedy.co.uk/its-a-knockout)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25199141.thousands-enjoy-gala-days-oxfordshire-car-factory/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25199141.thousands-enjoy-gala-days-oxfordshire-car-factory/?ref=rss)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25199141.thousands-enjoy-gala-days-oxfordshire-car-factory/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25199141.thousands-enjoy-gala-days-oxfordshire-car-factory/?ref=rss> - In 1973, over 10,000 people attended the 29th annual gala days at the Pressed Steel Fisher car factory in Cowley, Oxfordshire. The event featured various activities, including an 'It's a Knockout' competition, judo contests, horticultural and photographic shows, sports competitions, a dog show, and a fire brigade display. A fire, suspected to be arson, destroyed a marquee hours before the gala opened, leading to the relocation of some attractions outdoors. 'It's a Knockout' was a popular TV show in the 1970s, attracting up to 19 million viewers.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It's_a_Knockout> - It's a Knockout was a British television game show that aired from 1966 to 1988. Teams representing towns or cities competed in absurd games, often dressed in large foam rubber suits. The show was adapted from the French series Intervilles and was part of the international Jeux sans frontières franchise. It was one of the BBC's most popular shows in the 1970s, attracting up to 19 million viewers.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/anniversaries/august/its-a-knockout/> - It's a Knockout, the inter-town contest of skill and strength, began on 7 August 1966. The first series was between Lancashire and Yorkshire, with 8 towns competing for the Tip-Top-Town-Trophy. The signature tune - Bean Bag, played by Herb Alpert - set the tone for the games, which were played despite the British weather, and frequently featured water, grease, and silly costumes.
5. <https://www.britishclassiccomedy.co.uk/its-a-knockout> - It's a Knockout was a British television game show that aired from 1966 to 2001. Teams representing towns or cities competed in absurd games, often dressed in large foam rubber suits. The show was adapted from the French series Intervilles and was part of the international Jeux sans frontières franchise. It was one of the BBC's most popular shows in the 1970s, attracting up to 19 million viewers.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeux_sans_fronti%C3%A8res> - Jeux sans frontières ('Games Without Frontiers') was an international television competition organised by the European Broadcasting Union from 1965 to 1999. Broadcasters sent mixed teams that competed against each other in a series of games, usually funny physical games played in outlandish costumes. The show was created for the EBU by Guy Lux and Claude Savarit from the Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française (ORTF) as an international version of their own show Intervilles, which was first broadcast in 1962 in France.
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It's\_a\_Knockout\_(Australian\_game\_show)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It's_a_Knockout_(Australian_game_show)) - It's a Knockout was an Australian game show that was adapted from the original British version, which in turn was adapted from the French show, Intervilles. It originally ran from 17 April 1985 to 11 September 1987. It was later briefly revived on 27 November 2011 on Network Ten and hosted by HG Nelson and Brad McEwan with Charli Robinson. The show featured teams competing in absurd games, often dressed in large foam rubber suit).