

## Hagley and District LCC – Loton Park Hillclimb report (Midland Speed Championships round)

Sunday 31st August 2003

### An encouraging end to the season

Spurred on by my performance at Harewood, I returned to Loton Park keen to beat my PB from the previous visit in May. There was certainly some unfinished business, particularly after I clouted the car on the trailer last time I was here, damaging the front spoiler whilst loading the car up to come home. It was payback time.

At signing on I had a surprise when a trophy was passed to me. I'd finished 1<sup>st</sup> in class at my previous visit. Better pay closer attention to the results on the day in the future.

Then when I returned to the car and handed all the paperwork and the trophy over to the wife, we spotted that my Fiesta was on the front cover of the programme. How cool is that? I hadn't even noticed, as I was so taken-aback with the trophy.

After a quick check of tyre pressures, and a bacon sarnie, the first practice run for most competitors was squeezed in (just) before the 10:30 curfew. The village church at Alberbury is just 200 yards from the paddock, and there is a total ban on running of engines when the church service is underway. So it was quite fraught in the paddock, as everyone tried to get a practice run in before the red flags came out to signify the temporary halt in proceedings. In their haste, lots of drivers discovered that the dry track was actually quite greasy. Those who walked the course in the morning soon spotted tyre marks going off in all directions, and speaking earlier with the Chief Scrutineer, the previous days proceedings were delayed

by many cars leaving the track. One individual was noted to have got it wrong 6 times during the day. Maybe they should have walked the circuit too. Another competitor had an off at Triangle and rearranged the tyre wall after their steering wheel came off, caused by a broken weld on the quick release boss they'd 'tack welded' to the column!

I set off on my 1<sup>st</sup> practice run at 10:20, and immediately discovered that the front wheels were making their own mind up about which direction the car should be travelling in. I aborted at Triangle, and used the 1-hour break to check the front suspension. Yet again, the bolts that locate the tie bars to the track control arms had worked loose, a repeat of the problem at MIRA and Harewood. The odd thing was that the Loctited nuts weren't loose. The tie bars are made from a very poor grade of steel which was compressing when I tightened the bolts, allowing the bottom ball joint and track control arm on the offside front to move quite freely after a couple of miles of fatigue. So I re-tightened both bolts, and then checked the other side to see if they'd also worked loose, which they hadn't. The tie-bars are going in the scrap metal bin over the winter. Another project for the coming months.

Second practice run was much better. I pushed very hard, still learning the track (only my 4<sup>th</sup> ever lap of the hill) and I recorded a time 0.15 slower than my PB in May. The Fiesta was now handling much better. On my 1<sup>st</sup> timed run, I pushed harder still keeping the power on for longer bursts up the undulating hill, and knocked 7/10ths off my PB, to record a 67.72. Still not content with my time, I realised that most of the seconds to be gained here were at the top of the hill, approaching a corner called Fallow. It's a blind crest, followed by a 90 left, with plenty of run off area. I'd been lifting off before the brow, as I still hadn't learnt where the best place to start braking was. I had a chat with another competitor (Tara Collinson), and he said that the technique for Fallow was to lift

after the brow, only dab the breaks, and throw the car in to the corner. "There's bags of run off area". So that's what I did. It was my last run of the season, and I wanted to see just how much quicker I could get up the hill. While queuing for the start a Metro in front boiled over and dropped water all over the paddock road, which we had to carefully navigate to try to keep the tyres dry. Then a big effort followed to warm the tyres with a huge wheel spin, and we're now being staged on the start line. The motorbike-engined silhouette Hillman Imp ahead of me has just shot up the hill, and I can already see him approaching Triangle to my left. My turn next, the lights turn to green, and I'm off. Right, push back in the seat, concentrate on those gear changes, lets see if we can go any quicker. I really tried very hard, keeping the throttle pushed to the floor for longer than I'd normally dare, modulating the throttle where I'd normally just lift and brake, being careful not to carry too much speed in to the corners, and when Fallow came up on me I didn't lift until I'd cleared the brow, then a quick downshift from 4<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup>, fling it round the corner, up to the final bend, fling it round, still pushing hard, and I crossed the line in 4<sup>th</sup> gear at over 70mph. I felt that I'd gone quicker, and it was only when I checked the time that I discovered I'd knocked 1.3seconds off my 1<sup>st</sup> timed run. Wow, a 66.44s run. Now that's a lot better, only 7 seconds slower than the Imp. That's the only problem with Sports Libre, some of the cars that I'm up against are really exotic, but that doesn't stop me from having fun, and I know that next year I can go quicker still, getting closer to the times of the space framed cars. I've beaten a few kit cars in my class this year, the YKC kit car at Harewood I beat by over a second. So the signs are very encouraging. My Fiesta celebrates her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in 2004, and there's plenty of life left in the old girl yet. She'll be shaming much newer cars over the next 12 months.

We're definitely on the front cover of Retro Cars magazine this month (Oct 2003 ed.) and although CCC Magazine is no more, the October issue did go to the printers, so my Fiesta is also featured in what is going to be the last ever copy of the publication that has been on the shelves since 1968. And I've just completed another shoot out at Bruntingthorpe, with Fast Ford magazine this time, where I recorded a standing quarter in 14.72s(95mph) and a 0-60 in 6.2 seconds. (I also witnessed a Mk3 Fiesta record a record braking top speed of 178 MPH which is sheer lunacy!)

The performance of my Fiesta has been more than adequate for my 'learning' year. I've not had any major offs, or breakages, and I've identified several areas where I can make improvements in the car. Plans for the off season now are to re-design the tie bars on the front suspension, get the brakes working properly, squeeze a bit more power out of the engine, and changing the final drive ratio to give me taller gearing. I'd like to get some lighter wheels and some slick tyres too, but it depends on what's left in my budget.

What a great season! Roll on next year.

1<sup>st</sup> practice: Aborted

2<sup>nd</sup> practice: 68.4s

1<sup>st</sup> timed: 67.72s

2<sup>nd</sup> timed: 66.44s

Result: 3<sup>rd</sup> in class (Sports Libre 1400-2000cc)

Overall championship result: 1<sup>st</sup> in class 4 (Sports Libre)

Graham Blackwell

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2003 Midland Speed Championships

3 Sisters (April 6<sup>th</sup>) – 4<sup>th</sup> in class

Curborough (April 27<sup>th</sup>) – 2<sup>nd</sup> in class

Loton Park (May 10<sup>th</sup>) – 1<sup>st</sup> in class

MIRA (May 24<sup>th</sup>) – 1<sup>st</sup> in class

Aintree (June 28<sup>th</sup>) – 2<sup>nd</sup> in class

Harewood (July 13<sup>th</sup>) – 2<sup>nd</sup> in class

Curborough (July 20<sup>th</sup>) – 1<sup>st</sup> in class

3 Sisters (August 10<sup>th</sup>) – 2<sup>nd</sup> in class

Harewood (August 24<sup>th</sup>) – 2<sup>nd</sup> in class

Loton Park (August 31<sup>st</sup>) – 3<sup>rd</sup> in class

