

Longton Car Club – 3 Sisters Sprint (Rounds of the Midland Speed & Nottingham Sports Car Club Speed Championship's)

Sunday 4th April 2004

A rainy start to the 2004 season

The first outing of the New Year meant a visit to the 3 Sisters track in Ashton in Makerfield, near Wigan, on Sunday the 4th of April.

Over the winter I'd commissioned new suspension for the Fiesta, and so the front track control arms and tie bars have been replaced with oval tubular steel, connected to the chassis with rod ends, and spherical bearings to replace the bottom ball joints. This modification saves weight, and means that I now have a caster angle of 3.5°, camber of 1.75°, and 0° toe-in at the front, with the option of further adjustment should I need to make any changes in the future.

The rear axle has also been modified. We've basically sliced it in two, and welded flanges on to the two ends. Two spacers have been machined which are then bolted back in between the two axles. The two spacers both have a flat side, and a side with a 1.5° angle machined in to them. So when everything is reassembled, the rear wheels are both set to have 1.5° of negative camber. We've also ended up with 1mm of toe-out on both rear wheels, which for the time being, we're experimenting with to see if there are any untoward side effects. The rear track is also wider now, by approx 10mm, which again helps with stability round corners. New 450lb rear springs and a new rear anti-roll bar completes the 2004 suspension package. The roll bar is again made from tubular steel, and gives from 4x to 8x the stiffness of the previous

factory fitted item, which should eliminate body roll and make the car much more predictable round the twisty bits.

I've also installed two new Piper BP270BH camshafts in to the 2.0 Zetec engine. I really took my time over fitting them, I've had some bad experiences with cams in the past, but because I did my research, (and wrote a new page for the website) they're both timed in perfectly on verniers, and I now have another 15BHP on tap, which gives a total of around 190BHP. Very healthy for a front wheel drive car that weighs 756KG (approx. 240 BHP/tonne)

So the first event of the year also turned out to be the shakedown of the car and the new suspension. Therefore I was pretty nervous on the first practice lap, and weaved around listening out for strange noises. But there were none, and the car was extremely stable in a straight line, and turned in to corners much better than before. Almost go-kart like really. The second practice lap was much quicker, and despite the cold conditions I was only 6/10ths off my previous best from last year. Gaining confidence all the time, I lined up before lunch for my 1st timed competitive run, and as luck would have it, the heavens opened half way round, and I crossed the line in what I thought would have been a fast time. But, to my dismay, there was a fault with the organiser's timing system, and I didn't record a time.

By now it was too late to record a quick lap, due to the rain soaked track, and so we broke for lunch and prepared for another run as the proceedings re-commenced at 3PM. I zoomed round and recorded a fairly average time, given the wet conditions, and lined up again for my 2nd competitive lap later in the afternoon. Another shower intervened, and again the track was too damp to go quickly, so once back safely in to the pits, we started packing up to go home.

However, an official ran across and informed us that the times for our class had been scrubbed after a drivers meeting had been held (which they didn't invite me to), and those present had voted to scrap all the times following anomalies with the timing system during the day. A run off for classes' 4A and 4B would decide the results. Luckily he told us before we'd loaded the Fiesta back on the trailer. So I changed back in to my race suit, jumped in the car, and zoomed round to record 1st in class 4B. And I also won the award for the best-prepared car (for the 2nd year running) so I now have a start to the crystal ware collection.

Overall, the organisation was spoilt by the bad weather, and the 3 Sisters track is extremely slippery when wet, so there was little chance of breaking any records once the April showers set in. Next event is Curborough on the 25th of April, and if the rain stays away, I should be able to break the 39 seconds barrier for the first time. The car handles much better than before, and I just need to prove that it can go quicker, to justify the investment in time and effort I put in over the winter. There's now so much power that she's forever breaking traction in the wet, which makes for a fun drive, but it isn't conducive to quick times. Maybe its time for new tyres?

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Next event: Curborough, April 25th 2004

2004 Midland Speed Championship

3 Sisters, April 4th 2004: 1st in Class 4B.

2004 Nottingham Sports Car Club Speed Championship

3 Sisters, April 4th 2004: 1st in Class 4B.



All ready for the first practice lap.



Phil Short rounds the final corner in his rapid 1400 Mini