

Midland Automobile Club – Curborough Sprint (Round of the Midland Speed Championship)

Sunday 25th April 2004

Closest finish yet

Back to more familiar ground with the first visit of the year to Curborough, and I was hoping for my first totally dry event to actually see what difference the new suspension set-up would give me. Chris Taylor at Rutland Performance Vehicles (07905 920480) had assured me that the handling problems had been cured with the new front and rear suspension components, however as the previous event at Three Sisters was mostly wet, I hadn't had much chance to test the car. Modifications to the car for this event simply comprised of removing the handbrake mechanism (cable, levers etc) to save some weight, and spray the insides of the front wheels with PTFE spray to act as a release agent for the brake dust from the Carbon/Ferro pads.

After arriving at Curborough and parking up in the paddock, it soon became clear that the Fiat 500 in my class was a tad more radical than I first thought. Featuring a space framed chassis and a rear mounted 1300cc A Series engine, and running 13" rims with slicks all round, I soon realised that the day wouldn't be as straight forwards as I had hoped.

Non-appearances from Tara Collinson (His Mini Cooper-S still scattered to the four corners of the globe from what I've heard), and Fred Currell (in his new single seater), it was down to Steve Brown to make a very early attempt on the prestigious Wooden Spoon award, with a monumental 'off' on his first practice run. We'd walked the course together in the morning, and I could see a glint of mischief in his eyes. We'd been told how 'green' the track was, but this didn't deter Steve, who promptly under-steered off after the first left hand bend, and planted his Kawasaki powered Westie in to the tyre wall in front of the copse. After the halt in proceedings to recover his broken car, Steve stuck around to watch the first timed runs in the

afternoon, consoling himself that the car wasn't that badly damaged after all, and rumour has it that the car is due for an inspection in the next few days with a view to straightening the chassis out and replacing some of the broken components.

My first practice run was abysmal (40.07). I shot round fairly quickly, then did my usual 3rd to 2nd gear down shift on the finishing straight (instead of selecting 4th), and yet again (Thanks Mr Ford) the Zetec engine just shrugged off the 8000+RPM buzz that I woke it up with, though I'm not sure quite how many more times it'll put it with this kind of abuse. I was really shaken by this. I duly convinced myself that I just couldn't 'do Curborough'. It was a ragged run, I hadn't really settled, the car seemed all over the place. I even remember braking round the first left hander (probably Steve's fault). But I duly composed myself for the 2nd practice run, and took my time, and low and behold, I broke my PB from 2003 (39.39s) with a 38.53s run. Wow, nearly a second quicker than last years best run, and I hadn't really pushed the car. Sure, I'd gone a bit quicker than on my first practice run, but the run was a really smooth one, and I finally felt that the Fiesta was going where I pointed it, not something I had been accustomed to. For this event I'd stiffened the rear ARB, and decided to run 21.5psi all round, and it felt like I'd found a good balance. The Fiesta was three wheeling in to the Mole Hill, which is a characteristic we were after, to make the most of the -ve camber on the new rear axle.

For my 1st timed run in the afternoon, I could start to really push the car. The weather was good, it was a warm day (21C), so warm in fact that I had to keep dropping the tyre pressures due to them climbing from the high ambient temperatures. I concentrated on carrying yet more speed through the first corner, keep off the brakes until the Mole Hill, push harder, but keep it smooth, and things really started to pay off. I posted a 37.61s run, which was real surprise. To record a sub 38s run was an amazing feeling. The Fiat 500 recorded a time ½ a second quicker, so all of a sudden I'm up against a similar level of performance, something to push me yet harder. Even though he was on slicks and I was still on road tyres (Yokohama A032's), I knew I still had something in reserve, and we'd both remarked on how close it was in our class. So for the second timed

run, I really went for it. The back of the car felt a little loose through the first turn, as I lifted off a bit too much before attacking the left-right in to the complex, but apart from that the run was perfect, and I recorded a time of 37.29s. The Fiat went round in 37.28s, so I'd missed equalling his quickest time by 1/10th of a second. It was so close. If only I'd bought the new wheels and slicks I'd planned earlier in the month (now I can justify the expense!)

So overall, I improved my PB by 2.1 seconds over last year's quickest time (and it wasn't like I hadn't been trying last year!) so the new suspension has definitely improved the handling of the car. I've been told the quickest time a Mk1 Fiesta has ever gone round Curborough is 36.99s, which I know I can beat on my next trip in June (so long as its another dry day) and I wont rest until I have broken the 37s barrier. This is going to be quite a year; with new PB's (hopefully) at all the tracks we visit.

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Future events:

- Loton Park, May 22nd 2004
- MIRA, May 29th 2004
- Curborough, June 6th 2004
- Aintree, June 26th 2004
- Harewood, July 11th 2004
- Curborough, July 18th 2004
- 3 Sisters, August 14th 2004
- Harewood, August 29th 2004
- Loton, September 19th 2004



Three wheeling around The Mole Hill



Funky Fiat 500



Steve Brown's Kawasaki Westfield (before his off)



My quickest run of 37.29s (83 MPH across the line)



Both the Sports Libre cars together in the paddock