

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

Saturday 29th May 2004

All change

This was to be the first drive since April the 24th, and there'd been a fair few changes to the car since the last outing. Both the M10 rod ends, inboard on the new track control arms, were found to have bent from the stresses exerted on them over the kerbs at Curborough. And unfortunately I spotted the problem too late in the week to do anything about it, so I had to withdraw my entry from the Loton Park round on May 22nd. A shame we couldn't go, but at least I received a mention in Motorsport News, even if it was for all the wrong reasons.

During the layoff, I fitted the new B&M remote shifter kit (part number #45096), which I'd bought over the web from the American www.summitracing.com web site earlier in the year.

If you've ever driven a Fiesta, then you're more than familiar with the vague gear change. The B&M shifter kit fixes this, by replacing the upper section of the remote gear changer with a CNC'd chunk of aluminium, and a stainless steel gear lever with alloy knob, which not only reduces the throw by 35%, but also eliminates all of the slop found in the standard Ford changer. It's only a ½ hour task to swap the bits over, and another 15 minutes to re-align the gear linkage. Hopefully it'll prove a worthwhile modification, and one that should save me valuable tenths of seconds throughout the season.

The second mod was of course to replace the M10 rod ends with M14 items, which meant stripping the car down and taking the suspension parts over to Chris at RPV for modification. Whilst the suspension was off the car, Chris also

machined some new hub pins from EN24 steel, to give me a bit more peace of mind when slinging the car round. We'd lowered the roll centre of the car by using long pins and spherical bearings in place of the Ford bottom ball joints, so their strength really is quite critical.

The third and final mod was to improve the stopping power of the car. I've changed the brake pedal so that there is 40% more hydraulic fluid pressure from the same pedal effort. I meant to modify the pedal to move the linkage point by 20mm, and when I compared the pedal off the car with the spare hanging on the garage door, I noticed that there was a difference in the two designs. It turns out that the XR2 pedal already provides more leverage than the 1300 Ghia pedal, something I only discovered when I compared both pedals side by side. The linkage hole on the XR2 pedal is 20mm closer to the fulcrum point than the 1300 pedal. Few people knew about this, and I kicked myself when I noticed the difference. So I swapped the pedals over. That must be the cheapest performance increasing mod ever!

So, arriving at MIRA early on Saturday morning (07:30), we hoped to have the car offloaded and warmed up so I could drive a few laps around the paddock to check the gear linkage alignment. Instead we were held for 40 minutes in the front car park, and released en-mass, just as the rain clouds decided to arrive. Nice.

Once unloaded I still managed to drive the car sedately for a few laps of the paddock, and the gear selector felt extremely positive, with a solid clunk as you changed gear. Very similar to driving an Mk2 Escort, where the lever comes straight out the top of the box, certainly nothing like the old changer I was used to. The alignment felt OK, I could get all the gears, so it was down to the first run for me to find out if the new linkage had made an improvement.

1st practice was in the pouring rain, and the visibility was very poor, with the wipers on, and the windscreen steaming up. Still, I managed to get round without breaking anything. The forecast said the rain was going to clear in the morning, and sure enough, at around 11am the rain clouds cleared, and the Sun made an appearance.

On the 2nd practice run, though the track was very wet, there was definitely a dry line appearing on some stretches, so I went faster and improved by 6 seconds. Following a long break for lunch, by the time we ventured out for the 1st timed run in the afternoon, the track had totally dried out, and I was having to let air out of the tyres again to keep the pressures level. I really tried very hard on the first competitive run. Snatching 4th and 5th gears after the first corner, it was a case of keeping my foot flat to the floor in to and through the long left hander leading to the control tower. I crossed the speed trap before the tower at 101 MPH, recording 57.84 seconds for the lap, 2.46 seconds faster than my PB from 2003. Not bad.

On the 2nd and final timed run, I was determined to have a higher exit speed out of the 1st corner so I pushed all the way round in 3rd then again 4th and 5th gear, with my foot welded to the floor all the way around the left-hander, I recorded an even faster time through the speed trap of 105 MPH, and reduced my PB to 57.13 seconds. That's an overall improvement of 3.17 seconds over last years best time in similar conditions.

I came 3rd in class, behind a shared Mallock U2. And 52nd overall (out of 108 cars), which means I beat over 50% of the field.

The next step is definitely to use slick tyres, and I aim to have a set fitted before the Aintree event at the end of June. Before then, I have an entry at Curborough on the 6th of June, where

I'll be wringing the last few seconds out of the car on road tyres, to see if I can squeeze my PB in to the 36's.

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Future events:

Curborough, June 6th 2004
Aintree, June 26th 2004
Shelsley Walsh, July 3rd 2004
Harewood, July 11th 2004
Curborough, July 18th 2004
3 Sisters, August 14th 2004
Harewood, August 29th 2004
Wiscombe Park, September 5th 2004
Loton, September 19th 2004



The improved track control arms, fitted with M14 rod ends.