

Nottingham Sports Car Club – Curborough Sprint (Round of the NSCC Speed Championship)

Sunday 6th June 2004

D-Day ?

With a new PB (37.29s) set at my previous visit to Curborough in April (on road tyres), I was looking forward to the challenge of repeating my performance around the short but very challenging track. And as the only entrant in Sports Libre, there was no pressure. So what better way to spend a beautiful sunny Sunday in June?

My strategy was to start quicker than usual on the first practice run, and to increase my pace during the day. The two practice and the first timed runs were before lunch, and I was well on course for breaking my PB. I set a 39.11, then a 38.50, followed by a first competitive run of 37.75 before lunch. And then realised somehow I had to find another $\frac{3}{4}$ of a second to break in to the 36's. You tend to forget quite how unrefined your competition car is, when you only get to drive it once a fortnight, and then that's always at full speed. $\frac{3}{4}$ of a second felt like a week. Where on Earth was I going to find that? Of course this discipline is all about getting each corner right, and some laps you might get 75% of the lap right, and on others you might get a different 75% right. The one corner that was still eluding me was the last one, Fradley Hairpin.

As we re-walked the course at lunch, I remembered how Steve Miles (www.moleracing.com) had scribed in an article in the MSA magazine that it was a double apex bend. The consensus appears to be that the corner is best approached wide (from the Mole Hill), turning in and heading towards the tree/bush to the left of the marshals post straight ahead of you, and then, when you reach the small tarmac road on the outside of the bend before the marshals post, turn right again, aiming for the apex, whilst allowing the car to run wide on to the new strip of tarmac on the outside of the bend. This allows you to get on the gas sooner, and watching the fastest of the Road

Saloons after lunch, it appeared to be the most popular route out of the corner.

I warmed the tyres up on the start area, had a really good launch, and powered round faster than I'd ever been round before. The final corner came and went, and I was hard on the gas when I went for fourth gear, and instead, managed to select 2nd. The engine whipped round to 8700 rpm, and I hit the clutch and coasted across the line in 38.04 seconds. It would have been a new PB for sure (it's my equivalent of every fisherman's 'the one that got away' story). Sticking the car in 2nd gear is just as effective as stamping on the brakes, so I know I lost over a second through this mistake.

I was really annoyed with myself. Luckily the engine yet again survived the abuse (it probably won't be the last time this happens), and I cruised back to the pits to give everything the once over. The new gear shifter has made gear changes quicker, and more precise, but at high revs the engine must be pitching, thus causing misalignment problems with the shifter, something I'll have to work on for the next event.

Having survived that scare, for my 3rd and final timed run, I channelled my frustration, and tried even harder still, and powered my way round to record a 37.52 second run, which was only 0.23s slower than my PB, so I was quite happy, though the car did suffer from fuel starvation approaching the Mole Hill. Note to self: If the fuel pump is noisy, she's low on fuel.

Other drivers were also having a bad day, with the heat getting to everyone. Some choosing to stall on the line, some starting off in the wrong gear, one or two people spinning off, and similar stories of gear selection problems. We also had clutch failures (Steve Brown), suspension breakage (John Shipton), and a few other AFWO's. Steve Miles was attempting to break the 30s barrier, when he came to grief on his 2nd timed run, with a spin at Fradley (caught on video). His 3rd timed run saw a 30.34, and what's so strange about watching his Van Diemen is that it all looks and sounds so slow round the twisty bits. That must be the art of a quick lap, or maybe he's just sandbagging?

I was pleased to finish 35th overall, again beating more than half of the field, including all of the 1401-2000cc ModProds, all of whom were on slicks.

I've a few mods to make to the Fiesta before I reach the mid-season point, all of which are intended to make the car even faster and hopefully even more competitive. That's the plan anyway.

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Future events:

Aintree, June 26th 2004

Shelsley Walsh, July 3rd 2004

Retro Cars Show, Santa Pod, July 4th

Harewood, July 11th 2004

Curborough, July 18th 2004

3 Sisters, August 14th 2004

Harewood, August 29th 2004

Loton, September 19th 2004