

Midland Speed Championship – Trackrod MC 'Harewood BBQ Hillclimb'

Sunday 11th July 2004

Not exactly BBQ weather

A cold and wind swept Harewood Hill welcomed competitors to the annual Trackrod MC BBQ Hillclimb. Last years photographs show that it was a real scorcher, sunny, not even a breeze, and ideal conditions for getting some warmth in to the track surface. But this year the run of rain and cloud threatened to continue, and it was around 10C cooler than last year, meaning my new slicks were going to make a difference, but not the quantum leap I was hoping for.

There were loads of delays during practice with drivers falling off. I lined up having warmed the front tyres, only to have to wait 10 minutes before being allowed to start, which does nothing for your blood pressure. On my first run it was apparent the new tyres were not giving me as much grip as I had hoped. When I reached the top of the hill I was less than happy, as the car was all over the place on the corners. But it was their first ever use, and I had been warned about new slicks and their apparent lack of grip, until the release agent had been scrubbed off.

The second practice run, again in cold dry conditions, I started pushing the car a bit harder in to the corners, to see how she would handle. No problems with handling this time. The Michelin's started working and I recorded a new PB by the time I reached the top of the hill, without really trying either. Les Proctor had by now withdrawn his OMS race car, due to an engine problem, so I'd inherited 1st in class. My only competition in the Midland Speed Championship, Bernard Armitage, had opted to run his Escort in a different class on the day, so I still kept an eye on his times. Not that it mattered. As Les had withdrawn, I was going to come 1st or 2nd behind Bernard, and that meant I'd either gain or drop 0.5 points to him in the championship.

My first competitive run saw me knock even more time off my PB. The tyres were really starting to work properly now, and I could find bags more grip off the line and in to the corners. I recorded a 68.75s run, and Bernard a 66.11. Which was most surprising. Considering the length of the course, and how over the shorter Shelsley track the previous weekend, he'd gone 4.1 seconds quicker than me, I'd expected the Escort to have been 6-7 seconds quicker, not 2 ½.

The second competitive run in the afternoon was again delayed, and a problem with the timing equipment had crept in too, probably from all the overnight rain. And on the horizon we could see a very dark cloud moving towards the hill, so the pressure was on to get round before it arrived. I tried a bit too hard on my last run, but still went quicker, though only by 0.16 seconds, to record a new PB of 68.59s, finishing 49th out of 110 starters. Bernard broke the 65 seconds barrier, but as we'd finished 1-2 in the class, I only dropped 0.5 points on him, leaving me 9 points behind in the championship, with several events left to go. And we haven't started dropping scores yet, as only the best 8 count. I'm now wondering if I've enough events left to do to reel him back in again.

I'm very pleased with the new tyres and the lighter wheels (20Kg weight saving). Playing the on-board video back from the last run, I can see where I could have made up more time. I missed the apex completely on one corner, and should have short shifted in to fourth after the first corner, instead of taking the engine to the rev limiter in 3rd. I'm sure at my next visit it'll all come together, and I'll improve my PB by another second or so. Then I need to work out what I need to do to the Fiesta to repeat the process next year. More power maybe? With that in mind, I'm going to collect enough signatures on my license to upgrade to Speed 'A', as I'm not allowed to drive a Sports Libre car over 2000cc with my current National 'B' license. So if the engine capacity were raised from 1998cc to 2001cc I wouldn't be allowed to drive the car. How daft is that?

Mike Simpson suffered a broken drive shaft in the morning, Steve Miles visited the grass and jokes about sponsorship from Briggs and Stratton were made as he removed all the grass from his under tray. An all nighter rebuilding the gear box paid off though, as Steve

finished 7th overall in his Van Diemen. It was neighbour Steve Browns first visit to the hill with his Westfield, it was obvious he was having fun learning the course. On his second practice he carried too much speed in to a corner and drove off the circuit. And on his first timed run the throttle stuck open as he climbed the final hill, making the right turn at the top pretty exciting and a very quick run. Other regulars also had good and bad runs. Dyr Ardash recorded a new PB of 69.49s in the embarrassingly quick standard 106 Gti. And another no show from Fred Currell after wrecking his single seater the weekend before. Hopefully he'll bring the old Quattro out sooner rather than later.

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Next event:
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