

Shelsley Walsh - Sunday May 14th 2006

It was a damp and very foggy greeting to those competitors who travelled to Shelsley Walsh (a round of the combined Midland Speed and Nottingham Sports Car Club championships event.)

Arriving at 7:15am, I unloaded the Fiesta, and then attempted to park the tow car and trailer in the field over the road. But there had been a full meeting the day before, and with heavy rain overnight, the entrance to the trailer park resembled a bog. I carefully picked my line through ruts and parked up. I didn't expect to get out again though, not with another 100 cars with trailers navigating the same piece of field. Especially if it rained during the day.



After signing on and passing scrutineering, I elected to go out in batches 2 and 5. I like to get things over and done with hence the

early batches. The down side is if it is a damp track, you end up drying it out for others. Some go later in the morning, but everyone expected the rain to make another appearance, so I thought what the heck, let's just get it over and done with.



The first practice runs started at 9:30, and as I queued in the 2nd batch, proceedings were soon halted by Red flags, when an Alfa Sud promptly rolled at the Top S. I'd been warned that Shelsley could be a *bit tricky* in the damp, but hadn't banked on someone demonstrating quite how slippery it was. Thank you. 30 minutes later, several gallons of fuel and even more gallons of water had been doused on the track, together with some sand for good measure, and when I arrived at the bottom S, I tried to get my foot down to see how much grip there was, and the Fiesta veered to the right. I saw the tyre mark in the grass bank that the Alfa had left, rushing towards me. So I backed off the throttle and the front end came back, and I then tip toed around the Top S and potted along

the final straight. 48 seconds! How slow? Just shows how bad it was.

There were stoppages galore all morning, and my 2nd practice run was like chalk and cheese compared to the grip levels earlier. It was clear the track was drying, and the weather seemed to be improving, so with a bit more determination I reckon I could probably get close to my PB from last July, which was a high 36s. If it remained dry of course.



After a short lunch, competitive runs commenced at 2pm, and it was clear that the track had practically fully dried out. In the 2nd batch, I made a fantastic start, though I had the back end step out at Kennel, whoops, and I lifted at Crossing, and built up some real momentum on the approach to the bottom S, the fastest I'd ever approached it. I still took both the Bottom S and Top S with caution, but it was clear that the grip was as good as it would ever be. I recorded a

37.7second run, which was a second slower than my PB from last year, but I reckoned I could beat it.

I had a quick chat with the Mini drivers in Mod Prod, and it was clear that they were going quicker than me, in the low 37's, and many in the 36's. But they were saying that it wasn't a grippy track due to the overnight rain. But I reckoned that as I'd driven all this way, my entry fees were not going to go to waste. I was going to really make an effort to go quicker than ever.



So, to my second and final run of the day. I made another excellent start, sailed through Kennel, still lifted a tad at Crossing, and shot up to Bottom S, braking later than ever, then hard on the gas in to Top S, and then up in to 3rd gear and my foot planted firmly to the floor heading down the finishing straight, I recorded 36.45s. Fantastic. I'd beaten my PB from a hotter day last July, by 0.15s.

All that was left to do was drive the Fiesta in to the trailer park and load up her back on to the trailer. Fortunately, the field had dried out, so getting her loaded back on the trailer, and escaping the field wasn't the challenge I'd predicted.



I'm really happy with the Fiesta now. The new brakes are amazing; and the delivery of power is superb from the Zetec engine. The car is responsive, it handles, it stops and boy does it go well round corners. Time to start enjoying the fruits of all the investment in time and effort over the last few months. The video recorder packed up early in the day though, so I need to have another think about recording my footage on something a bit more reliable. But that's a minor problem.

My next outing is at MIRA in a fortnight, and then Cadwell in another three weeks. I can't wait.

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<u>Date</u>	<u>Venue</u>
May 14th	Shelsley Walsh hillclimb
May 28th	MIRA sprint (Closed to public)
June 17th	Cadwell Park sprint
July 1st	Shelsley Walsh hillclimb
July 16th	Curborough two lap sprint
August 13th	Barkston Heath sprint
September 17th	Cadwell Park sprint