

# DRIVE IT AINTREE

*Top sprinter STEVE LIPTROTT takes us round the deceptively tricky Aintree course*



**S**ituated only a mile from the northern end of the M57, Liverpool's Aintree Circuit must be one of the most easily accessible venues available to the sprinting community.

To most people, of course, Aintree is first and foremost the home of the Grand National. But to many motorsport enthusiasts that grew up in the fifties and sixties it will be remembered as the biennial home of the British Grand Prix, featuring such stars as Juan Fangio, Stirling Moss and even our own Tony Marsh.

Aintree's Club Circuit, which hosts today's sprint events, uses only a part of the original Grand Prix course. The problem of closing the Melling Road at Anchor and Melling Crossings, plus the deteriorating condition of much of the original full-length course, has long since put a stop to the use of what must have been a brilliant circuit. But what's left is not bad either; three demanding, satisfying high speed corners giving room to feel the car drifting and twitching under you. Like the old, full-length affair, the Club Circuit is contained within the Grand National racecourse and itself contains a nine hole golf course, giving some wide run-off areas - but steer clear of those jumps!

At first sight, those long straights and sweeping corners look a little daunting to drivers of smaller cars, but since the final straight has been shortened this is not necessarily so.

I've been competing here since the early nineties, first in roadgoing cars, through ModProd up to my current 2-litre Ralt-BDG. The differences between the driving styles in these three classes are not all that great, but in the early days I probably didn't really know what I was doing, so I'll give you the course as I drive it today in the Ralt.

Let me first explain my theory on the gearing I use: First - 68mph (the only one, so

I have no choice). Second - 102mph (very tall, but ideal for Country Corner as it avoids a downchange). Third - 133mph (again tall, but great through Village and into Bechers). Fourth - 146mph (the tallest I have, though I might use a 142mph depending on wind direction).

Now for the run.

Off the line (watch this as it's slightly downhill) I drop the clutch at 6000rpm, feed the power on up to maximum revs once traction is achieved and take second. Up to maximum revs again, sometimes even hitting the limiter (after a really good start) to avoid having to take third, I stay well over to the right before dabbing the brakes for the late turn-in to the fairly tight 90 left at Country Corner.

Stay off the left kerb - and in the wet, even the flat concrete edging - and squeeze the power on as you drift out to the right. Flat through second and into third, pull over to the left prior to the right-hander at Village. Stay in third and only feather the throttle for a late turn-in where the armco barrier finishes on the left. Village is slightly banked and great when you get it right. Stay as close as you can to the right-hand kerb, giving it as much power as you dare without pushing of the track to the left. If you touch the grass, you're off - and those Grand National fences are solid under the brush (which isn't there on race days, neither are the white railings or the golfers).

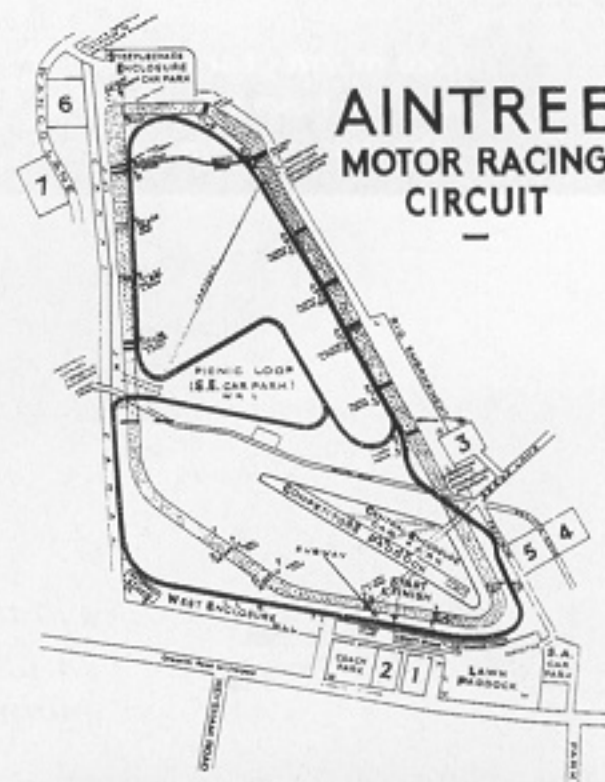
Down Valentine's straight and if there's a tailwind the acceleration feels fabulous. Into fourth and hang on for Bechers, a real treat of a corner. Staying well over to the left, leave the braking as late as you dare and slip it down into a very tall third. There's a dip in the track right before the very early apex, though you have no choice these days but to run through it.

Now you wish you'd not slowed quite so much as the corner opens out and you drift

round the final section. Taking fourth, stay in the centre of the track as there's another slight dip just before the exit of Bechers. Now you hang on flat out, because if there was a tailwind up Valentines it's a headwind now. All you can do is watch Alan Smith's timing display agonisingly adding on the seconds until you finally break the beam at the finishing line, halfway down the long Railway Straight.

It's a very satisfying circuit when you get it right - one of these days I may get somewhere close!

Aintree Sprints are run by the Liverpool Motor Club, who also run the occasional track day using the full Club Circuit. Their members have a wealth of experience of sprinting and if you are looking for a well run event (the Club won the HSA's prestigious Les Edmunds Memorial Trophy for their running of Aintree's 1999 British Sprint round), you won't be disappointed here!



**The way it was - Aintree Grand Prix circuit in the '50s and '60s**





**1**

*Drop the clutch at 6000rpm, feed in the power and then floor it*



**2**

*Into second gear, stay over to the right*



**3**

*Dab the brakes for Country Corner and feather the throttle in a very tall second gear*



**7**

*Get as close as you can to the kerb, start applying power from the apex*



**8**

*As much power as you dare, but stay on the black stuff as the car will push to the left (those fences are solid under the brush)*



**10**

*Take fourth gear on what is now the longest straight on the Aintree sprint course*



**11**

*Stay over to the left for Bechers and leave your braking as late as possible. I take third here, though some stay in top*



**13**

*Bechers opens after the apex so floor it*



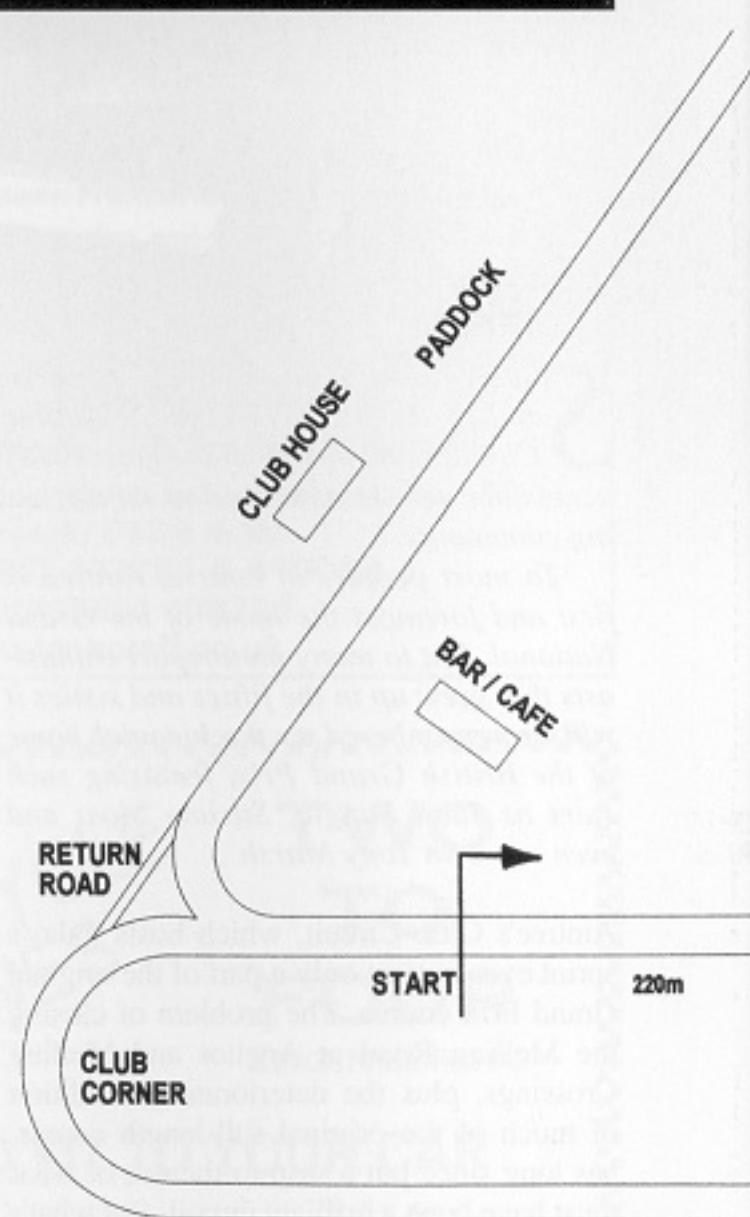
**14**

*Back into fourth, foot hard down*



**15**

*Stay in the middle and hang on - there's another dip before the exit but try and drift wide to go round it*







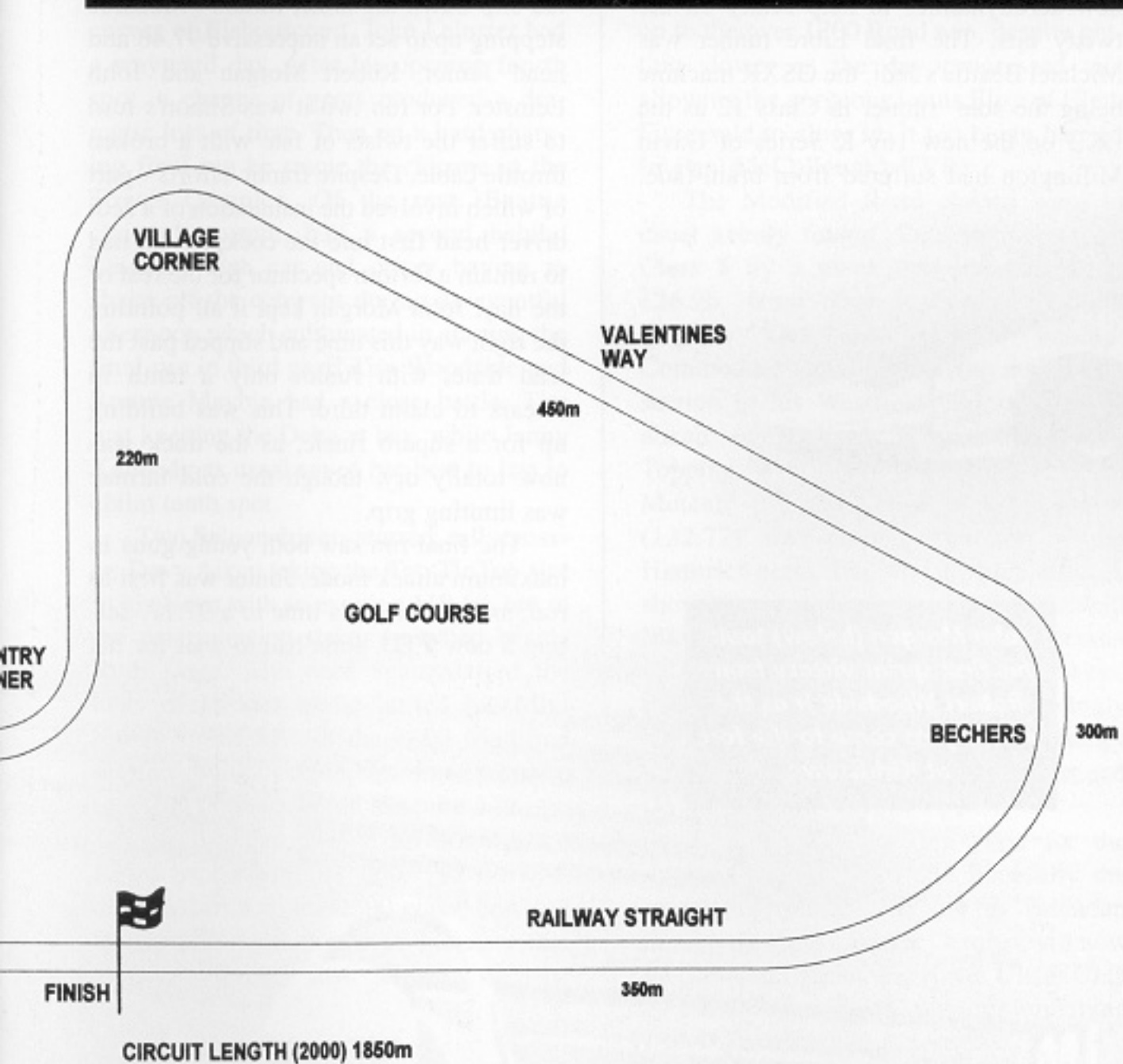
**4** Late turn in and stay off the kerb – and the concrete edging if it's wet. Feed the power in and drift over to the right



**5** Into third (again a tall gear), foot hard down and move over to the left for Village Corner



**6** Feather the throttle, still in third. No braking in a 2-litre, another late turn-in – from where the armco on the left finishes



**9** Valentine's straight – now floor it and hope for a tail wind



**12** The dip just prior to the apex unsettles the car, but stick with it and get the power down



**16** If you had a tail wind on Valentine's, you're heading into it now!



**17** Keep to the centre of the track, head down – it may add 1mph



**18** Over the line, which used to be 110 metres further on