



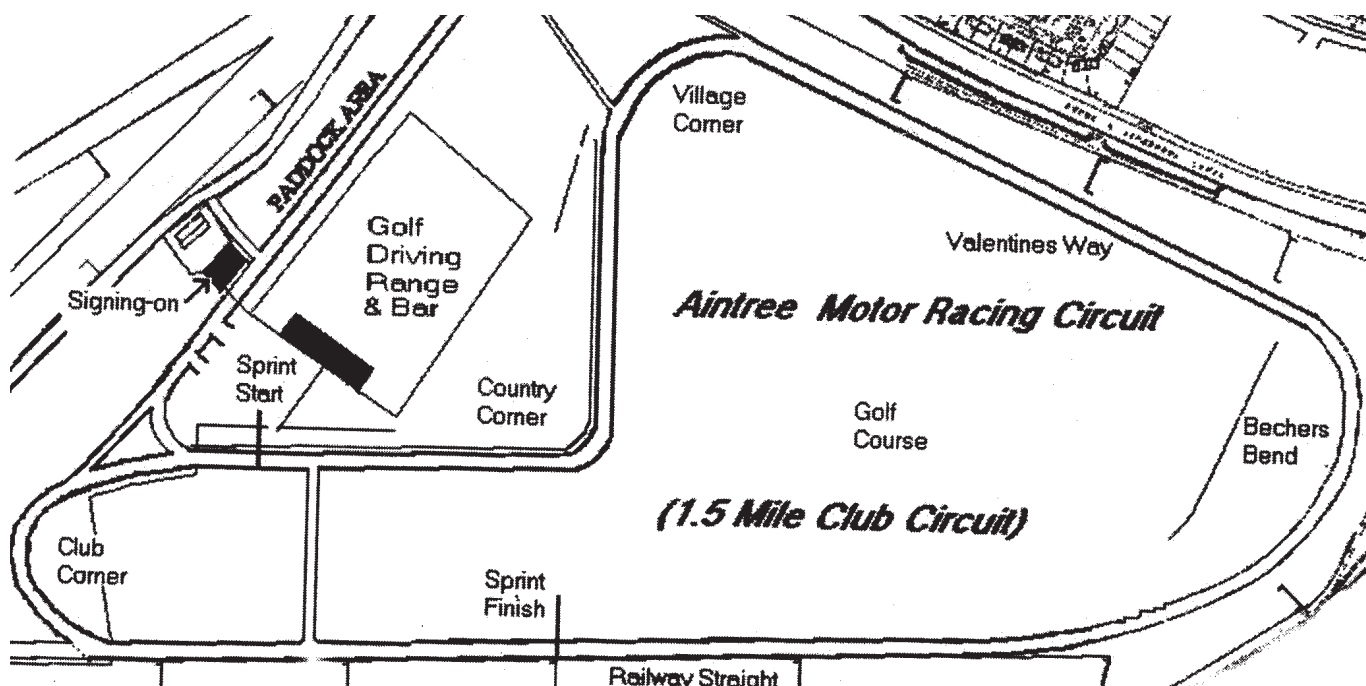
Drive



In the first of a new series of 'Drive-it', Gary Thomas draws on his experience and success to pilot us successfully round Aintree.

-it - Aintree

Drive-it - Aintree



Aintree holds special memories for me as it was the scene of my very first competitive speed event, driving our family Mazda MX5. I left Aintree after that first event, struck by how friendly all of the officials and marshals were and they have always been the same, each time I have returned there. Aintree was also the venue where I clinched two of my Midland Speed Championships.

My initial thoughts, after my first event there, were that there wasn't much of a challenge in a relatively simple layout, consisting of only three corners. I have since, however, realised that there is, indeed, a very real challenge to this track, once you are close to the limit!

In many ways, Aintree can be compared with Shelsley Walsh, in that both have relatively few corners, have real motor sporting history attached to them and require concentration and courage to drive quickly. Aintree was the venue of the British Grand Prix in the 50's and 60's, is of course the home of the Grand National steeplechase and the infield serves as a golf course for the rest of the time – a true multi use venue!

The sprint course is on the club circuit, which is also used by the Liverpool Motor Club for very well run track days. I always walk the track, either before practice or at lunchtime. I spotted a bolt incorporated into the tarmac the last time I was at Aintree, see if you can



find it! Although the paddock is not marked in number order, the regular paddock announcements help to bring all competitors to the queue promptly. There is a well marked tyre warming area before the start, which is on the right hand side of the very wide track. Drivers used to hillclimbs and venues such as Curbourough, will instantly notice how very wide Aintree is by comparison. The track surface offers good levels of grip, even in the wet. The start has the timekeepers on the right and the commentary booth on the left, often occupied by Steve Wilkinson, making up facts about those who fail to

submit a commentary sheet!

Away from the start, stay on the right hand side of the track along the first 250 metre straight, which leads to Country Corner, a 90 degree left hander. Because of the barriers and slightly raised bank on the left, you can't see around this corner, which will often cause drivers to turn in too early. This will give a slow exit speed; which, at Aintree, is bad for a quick time. Every corner is vitally important in achieving the maximum possible speed along the long straights. In the Elise, I get up into third gear; although a higher second gear would be more suitable, before a light dab





on the brakes immediately before turning in. Country is a conventional 90 degree corner, with an apex 50-60% round it. Continue to take a smooth line, building speed, out to the very right hand edge of the track, before allowing the car to gradually go over to the left hand side on the approach to Village Corner.

Village is a long, slightly banked right-hander. The track on the inside of Village is a little uneven; where the tarmac meets the concrete edging, so don't get too close at the apex. I am still in third at this point. Concentrate on achieving a smooth gradual line, forming a single arc from turn

in, just beyond the end of the left hand Armco, to the exit; which should be at the far left of the track. I cannot stress too much, the importance of not touching the grass on the outside of the track at this point, as I have seen the result of a driver going off here and ending up rolling over one of the Grand National fences, after demolishing two rows of bales! As with the first corner, build speed through Village to get the highest speed along the 450 metre long Valentines Way. A good check on how well you have built speed, is how early you reach the correct revs to change up into the next gear. Stay on the

left hand side along Valentines Way and take a deep breath as you leave your braking until the last possible moment for the final corner, Bechers Bend.

My approach to Bechers is to dab the brakes, change down one gear and turn in. Then I'm straight back on to full power, steering into an early apex and working with the car, rather than fighting it, to ease it through the remainder of this very long bend and changing up well before the end of the bend, as it opens out onto the 600 metre long Railway Straight. Towards the end of Bechers, is the notorious bump in the centre of the track, which does unsettle

the car when driven over. Power down Railway Straight and over the finish where you will see your time displayed shortly after the line. As well as a good time display clock, Liverpool Motor Club also provides speed trap information in the results. This is a great help in confirming how well you have exited Bechers, although it may give the game away if you are sandbagging in practice!

Slow the car down for Club Corner, which acts as the return road back to the start for double drivers and also leads back to the paddock, where the results can be found in the Club House.

The Golf Centre is usually open for food and drinks and this is the venue for the prize giving at the end of the day.

I've already said how friendly everyone is at Aintree, but you will also find some of the most enthusiastic officials. Amongst these is Ron Hunt, who operates one of the quickest results services in the sport. You will usually find that he has put the results on the Liverpool Motor Club website within a day of the event, sometimes even on the evening of the event. Another of the hardworking and knowledgeable officials is Ian Trainer, who will often be guiding competitors cars at the top end of the paddock. Ian lives close to the circuit and is a fount of information on the history of Aintree and well worth speaking to.

I always enjoy Aintree and have had fierce battles with Dave Coveney, as we regularly fought over the roadgoing Lotus Elise record as well as Bobby Fryers, Mark Teale and more recently, Martyn Craske and Ian Butcher.





The Bert Hadley Memorial Championship - 2008

**The Pre-War Austin Seven Club
Motor Sport Section
www.pwa7c.co.uk**

Our 14th season attracted 37 drivers, including 4 newcomers and we completed 13 rounds at 11 sprint and hillclimb venues across the country.

The series is dedicated to the life and achievements of Herbert Lewis Hadley, who was involved with all the Austin work's competition cars throughout the 1930's as race engineer and lead driver in single-seaters and sports cars, post-war 'Bert' drove internationally for other works teams.

His only son, Clive L.Hadley was a great supporter of the Championship and took a keen interest in our drivers and their cars. Sadly we lost Clive in January 2007, his enthusiasm and friendship has been missed, but not forgotten.

The cars, which may be original sports models or look-a-likes or specials, recycled from old parts, all incorporate the main components and 1920's technology of the Austin Seven, produced at Longbridge from 1922 to 1939.

Once again, some spirited driving and keen, but friendly rivalry produced closely matched times.

Main awards

Bert Hadley Memorial Cup 1938 Gould Special (Championship winner)	Stewart Arklay
Murray Jamieson Trophy 1931 Single Seat Racing Special (Best in opposite class/ runner up)	Terry Griffin
Kay Petre Award 1930 Ulster Special (Best lady driver)	Carol Woods
'Newcomer's' Cup 1930 Partington Special	John Gasking
'Brooklands' Handicap Award 1935 Sports Special	Colin Danks
'Nil Desperandum' Award 1936 Speedex 750 Special	Rod Dainty

39 drivers registered, 37 entered and 13 qualified for Championship places by competing in at least 5 rounds.

Season 15 commences in April 2009, with Gurston Down Hill Climb.

Our thanks to all the host clubs, who without exception made us most welcome throughout the year.

**Championship enquiries should be directed to Clive Neale.
49, Duston Wildes, Duston, Northampton, NN5 6ND
Tel: 01604 584142
Mob: 07809 396048
Email: clive.neale@fabserve.co.uk**