



# DRIVE IT!

## BARBON MANOR

The current 1400 ModProd record holder in his Westfield-BDH SE, Peter Herbert describes his technique for ascending the short but tricky Cumbrian hill

Peter Herbert made his speed hillclimbing debut in 1989 at Harewood, deep in his native Yorkshire, at the wheel of a very standard Peugeot 205 GTi before progressing to a Westfield SE the following season. With development by the inimitable Russ Cockburn ever since and now powered by a Cosworth BDH screamer, it has become one of the quickest car-engined Class A contenders in the country.

1997 Harewood Champion, third overall and class winner in the 1998 Leaders Championship, and class winner in the 1999 Midland Championship, Peter holds class records at Barbon, Llerghy Frissell Moar, and Brighton Speed Trials. He's also a former Gurston and Harewood record holder; and has competed internationally in the FIA European Hillclimb Championship with a BMW M3.

Also with experience of Britain's golden age of road rallying at the helm of an RS2000, plus circuit racing in a series of BMWs, Peter has shared his motor sport obsession with readers of 'Autosport', 'Ingear', the BARC's 'Yorkshire Times' and other club magazines. He is of course Speedscene's Continental Correspondent - not to mention the author of that favourite of the remainder bookshops, '750 Racer'.

A Chartered Town Planner by profession, his other job is as an instructor at the Harewood Speed Hillclimb Driving School.

More than seven years have passed since I first shared with you my approach to driving Barbon. Since that time the course has changed little, the only modification of real note being the installation of a low kerb and narrow concrete verge between track and barrier around the outside of Lafone hairpin.

When I originally wrote *Drive It - Barbon*, Carl Talbot was the Class A record holder. Shortly afterwards I relieved him of the responsibility and have held it by the skin of my teeth ever since. So it can be reasonably argued that I learned from my own advice, which may hold good for others, particularly if new to this wonderful little hill.

I say little because at just 890 yards Barbon is one of the shortest on the British Championship calendar. But it is set in wonderful Cumbrian countryside, run by friendly - if slightly eccentric - people, and despite having only three corners it offers a unique uphill challenge. Membership of Westmorland Motor Club should be seriously considered, as for six quid a year there is a ten pound (yes!) discount off each entry fee and eligibility for club awards. Even Gordon Brown would see that as sound fiscal sense.

The key to a quick time is the maintenance of momentum. This is of course true of all hillclimbs as power fights to overcome weight and gradient. But at Barbon it is particularly so as a flow can be maintained from the start almost to the finish with little interruption. Basically what we have is a slow corner into a short straight, then a fast corner into a long straight. A very tricky hairpin then arrives before an uphill finish. Think of it as a staircase with no landings until the top.

My perspective is from the driving seat of a 185bhp, 1380cc Cosworth BDH engined Westfield SE, but the approach should hold good for a Mini or a Pilbeam, with appropriate adaptations of course.

Sitting on the startline, we watch the light turn to green and we're off through the gentle right-hander that follows. The grip from the line is remarkable good considering that this is the private drive to a country house and used only twice a year for car competition and once for motor cycles. As ever, the rule is to sit on the rubber that has been laid down if it's dry, and straddle it if it's raining. Rubber sticks to rubber when warm, but repels it if wet.

Violent meteorological mood swings are not unknown in this part of Cumbria. How else would the Lake District immediately to the west have come about? And well do I remember the 1997 May meeting, squatting in the

stripped out interior of Ben Butterfield's immaculate Mini at the top of the hill, following a particularly scary ascent on slicks during a cloudburst, and watching my open cockpit steadily fill with hailstones. The event was abandoned shortly afterwards...

A good start, free from excessive wheelspin and snaking, but without getting bogged down, is essential for a competitive time. For on such a short course it will form a significant part of your run.

On arrival at Crabtree, the first left-hander, it's necessary to turn into this deceptively long corner late and from the far right hand side of the track. This allows an early application of power for the straight that follows. Turn in early and you remain in the curve with steering lock applied longer, with no chance of getting seriously onto the gas.

Crabtree is blind on entry with a grass bank to the left and a stout Armco barrier to the right. Front tyres will be cold on rear wheel drive cars, so understeer will be an issue. But by compromising entry speed slightly, and turning in late, the exit will be in vision earlier, the car will be straighter sooner, and power can be applied decisively.

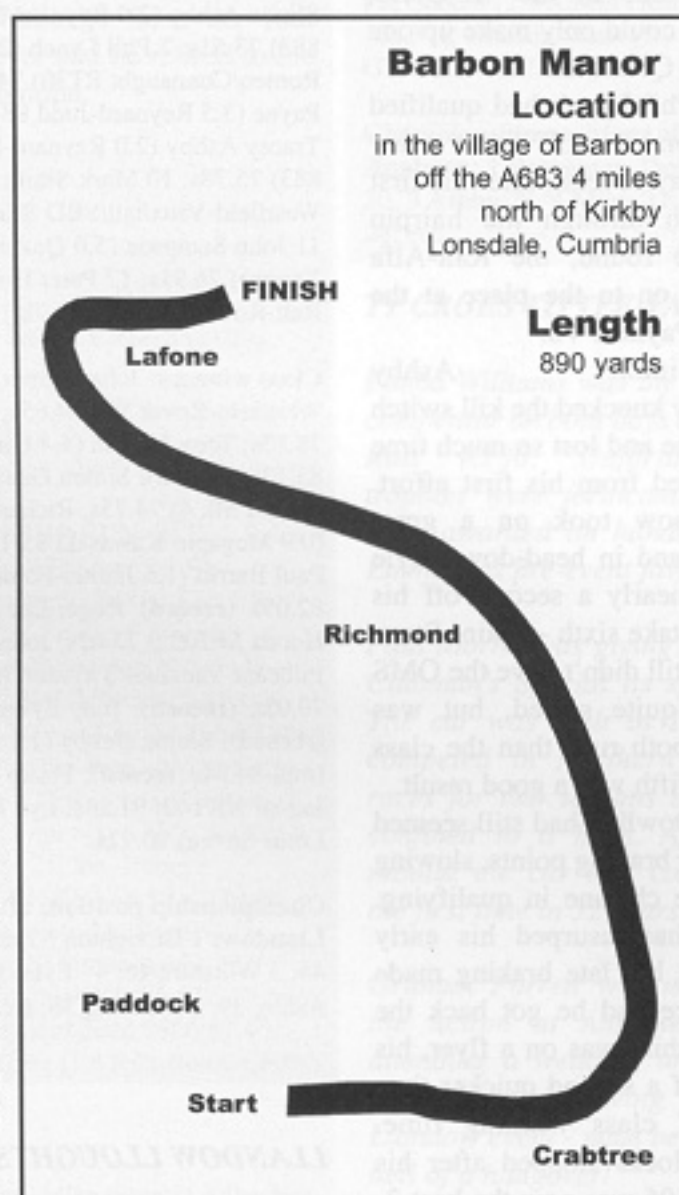
This is not to say that you should enter the bend slowly, for even at this early stage of the climb it's essential to carry speed through the turn. But not at the expense of a clean, full power exit onto the straight that follows.

Many have fallen victim to Crabtree Understeer, some terminally, and the loud clang of a significant motorcar/Armco interface can often be heard from as far away as Lafone.

The short, undulating straight leads to what the rallying fraternity might term 'a flat left maybe'. In other words it could be taken flat out, or it could end in tears. At Barbon, stout oak trees abound. These will certainly make your eyes water if messed with.

I've never taken Richmond flat out, although Peter Harper once told me that he managed it in a Clubman's Mallock and I'm sure others, particularly with the benefit of aerodynamic downforce, do too. What is certain is that to get a good launch up the long uphill straight that follows, it's critical to get through this long curve as rapidly as possible.

Initially Richmond appears tighter than it really is. However, once turned into the bend, it opens out immediately. The trick is to approach from the right-hand side of the track, turn in reasonably late but without risking





running wide onto the grass, and then get back on the power through the remainder of the turn. In my view anyone new to the course should treat Richmond with great respect - and I still lift for it.

In 1999 Rob Welch probably didn't lift, a tank-slapper followed, and when a rear wheel touched the wet grass it was curtains for the SPA/Pilbeam-Judd, which proceeded to destroy itself as it spun across the boulder-strewn undulating parkland to the physical and financial discomfort of its driver.

The long pull up to the final Lafone hairpin is a real test of grunt, and the Fleetwood Gould was clocked at over 136mph this year on the approach to this deceptive corner, which is most impressive on a track little wider than the car. Many a promising run has been thwarted by this long, tightening corner, and it's probably the reason why young Robert Kenrick, last May, failed to add another Class A record to the growing collection on his Welsh dresser when the Caterham tried to get away from him on Lafone's tricky entry.

What in fact we have here is a gradually tightening curve to the right that suddenly turns sharp right. So a brisk entry is fine so long as you are prepared for the road turning suddenly and sharply. In some ways it's not unlike Quarry at Harewood, but with less gradient. However, the big difference is that it's not possible to coast out of the corner in any old gear and cross the finish line on the strength of cornering speed alone, as there's a further uphill climb to the end which requires hard acceleration. Accordingly, entering Lafone, the driver is required to steer, brake, change down, and carry some speed onto the straight that follows.

In May the bold George Jepson took a novel approach by mounting the new concrete strip on the outside of the corner and rattling his Riley's bodywork along the length of the barrier before turning in. File in the 'not recommended' tray.

My technique is to lift as late as I dare before the track begins to curve, take a long, high arc through the first part of the corner, avoiding the pull of the camber that threatens to lure the car too early into the turn, then trail brake while still turning as soon as I catch sight of the white kerbing to the right on the inside of the corner. I then go from third to first, not an easy change on a non-sequential box, before turning hard into the final part of the bend. Once the car is reasonably straight, I floor it to the finish. A high first gear is a big help here, upsetting the car less on the down-change, and avoiding the need for an up-change before crossing the line.

And that, fellow sensation seekers, is all there is to it.

But hold hard, there now follow gentler pleasures. Beyond the finish line and just across a cattle grid is a wonderful rhododendron enclosed dell used as a holding area. Here times are printed out for drivers to inspect, and then it's a short walk back to Lafone from where much of the course can be viewed, and rivals jeered at.

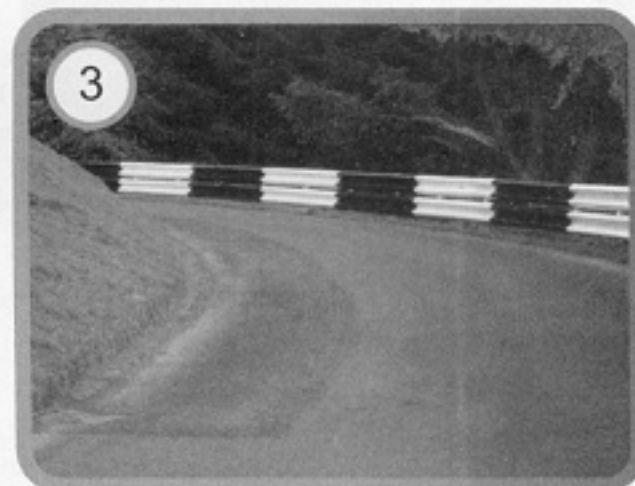
Finally, in front of a large, jubilant and adoring crowd, it's possible to coast back down Lord Shuttleworth's drive to the tranquillity of the paddock, and absorb at leisure the true splendour of this wonderful fellside venue.



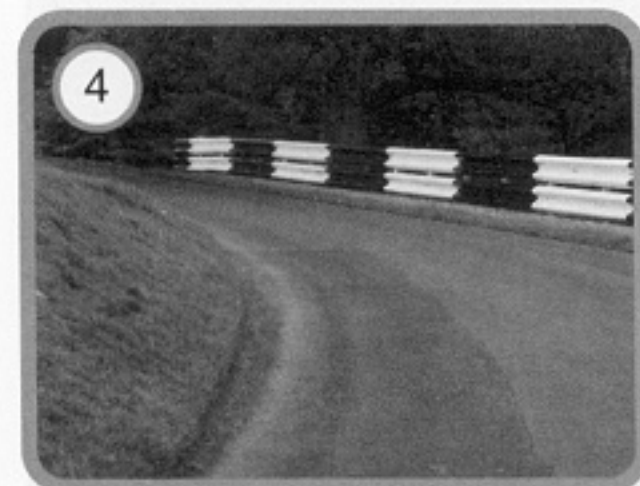
1 The grip from the line is remarkably good



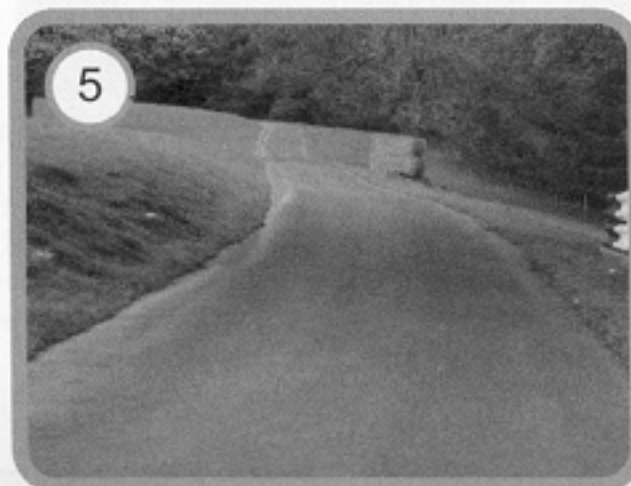
2 Turn into Crabtree late, and from the far right



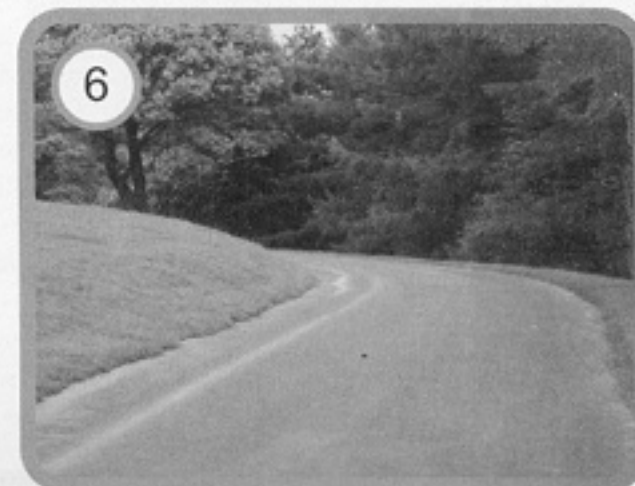
3 Crabtree is blind on entry ...



4 ... so turn in late and the exit is in vision earlier



5 The short, undulating straight leads to Richmond's 'flat left, maybe'



6 It initially appears tighter than it really is



7 Once turned in, it opens out ...

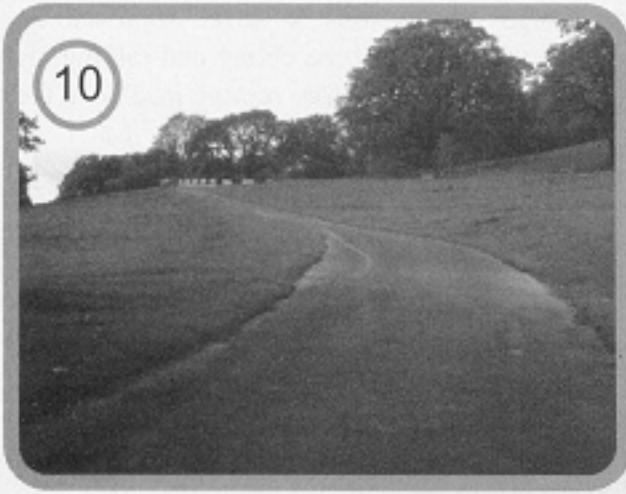


8 ... so get back on the power ...



9 ... but treat Richmond with respect!





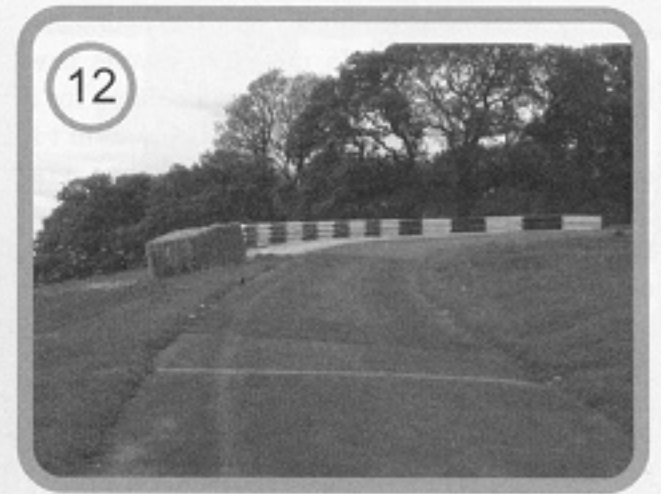
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The long pull to Lafone is a real test of grunt



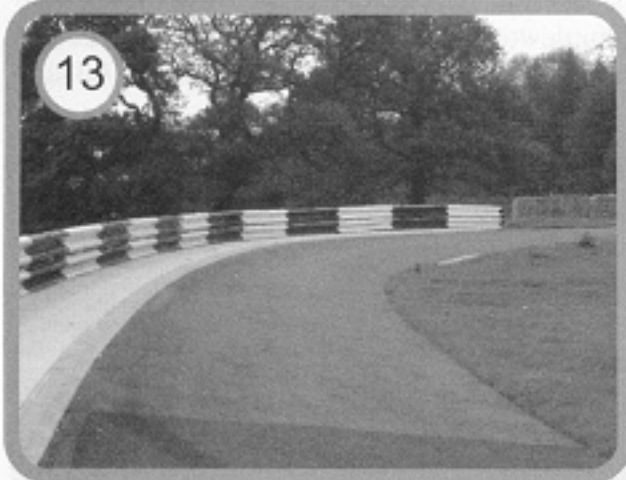
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The big cars reach over 136mph here



12

Lift as late as you dare for the hairpin before the track begins to curve



13

Avoid the pull of the camber



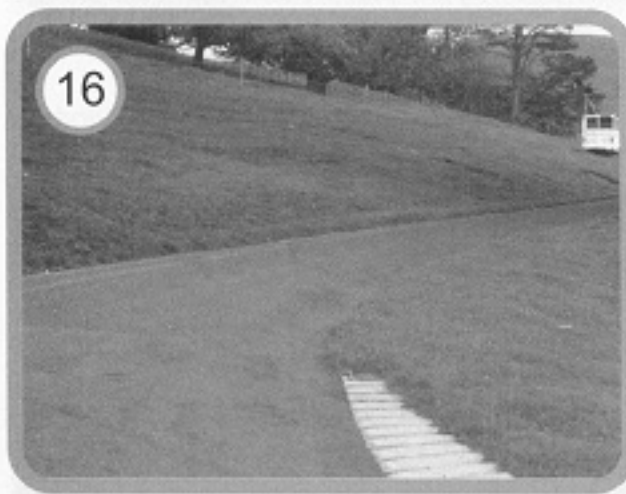
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I trail brake while still turning as soon as I see the white kerbing ...



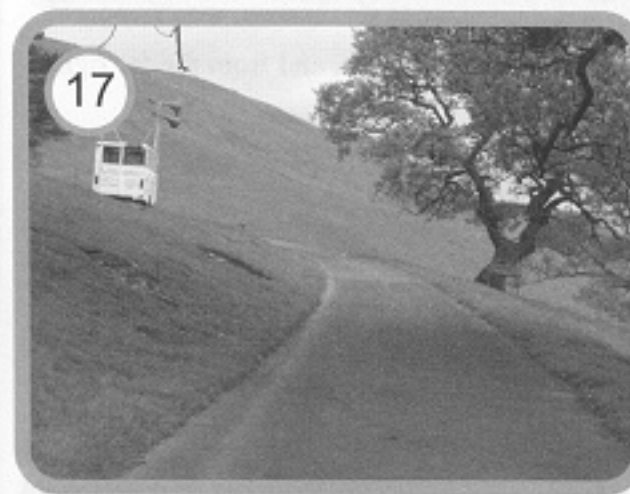
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... then go from third to first ...



16

... and turn in hard



17

Once the car is reasonably straight, floor it...



18

...to the finish