

DRIVE IT

COLERNE SPRINT



Airfield courses, despite the increasing use of race circuits, have long been the mainstay of sprinting. Here Chevron-Rover V8 driver RUSS WARD guides us round one of the best. Bristol MC's long established Colerne sprint was where Ward secured one of the most significant wins of a long career - outright victory at the venue's 1994 British Sprint round

Several years ago, together with Ian Hall, Dick Mayo and Dave Cutcliffe, I was involved with the change of layout at Colerne. We had to slow the place down somewhat, which I think that in a lot of ways spoilt it a little. From what used to be an extremely fast course with tremendously demanding corners, it now is not unlike the Hungaroring with no ultimate challenge. But even in revised form, the popular airfield sprint course near Bath still has quick corners and a couple of places that still do offer a real challenge, particularly towards the end.

I can only comment, of course, on how I see and drive the course in my Chevron-Rover V8 which has nearly 350 lb ft of torque. So perhaps to compare this with, say, a 500 single seater is a bit pointless, but I'll do the best I can.

As you can see from the startline it's a long, long way to the first right hander (turn 1 on the diagram). I'm sitting at a slight angle, aiming towards the left hand side of the first corner. Even in the Chevron I take all four gears before braking just before the 100 yard marker. The main problem is that on cold tyres the car tends to really understeer. Everybody seems to have the same problem. The car will drift out wide, so go into this 90 degree bend with the sort of speed that you know that you can carry out of it without prodigious amounts of understeer. I come down two gears in the Chevron, aim for that left hand marker and chop across the corner, just clipping the marker on the right hand side as I enter into the corner.

I let the car go right out to the left and take third gear as I accelerate up towards the next, quite tightish, right hander (2). Because the Chevron's got a lot of torque I'm able to leave it in third gear and accelerate through that corner and the following

right/left swerves (3&4) - it makes the car easier to drive if you can get away without another change. Coming out of the final part, start to flick the car to the left and pile on as much power as you can, right down that long straight which runs parallel with the start area.

You're now heading for the part of Colerne which starts to become quite tricky. Not as challenging as it once was, the next right hander (5) was tightened up when we redesigned the course. On the approach, you cut in across the corner after braking very heavily, but pretty late, and down one gear only. Aim for the apex marked by that big cone on the right hand side and just power your way through the corner with as much throttle and speed as you can carry. Let the car drift right out to the left, then come back over to the right for the next left hander (6), still carrying quite a speed before turning quite hard left. Clip that first marker and again let the car drift out, and out, then start to turn it back in for the first of Colerne's big challenges.

This is the long, long left hander (7) that tightens towards the end as you go back across the runway. Don't try to take the runway tight to the inside or out too far to the right. I use the middle of the track because you need to come back in hard to the left where the absolute priority is to brake in a straight line for the very tight right hander (8) that follows. It is very, very difficult to get this section of the course right and it's so important to carry as much speed as you possibly can through this long left hander.

As you near the 100 yard marker you're still on a curve and you must still carry throttle through here. You've gone over the main runway again, over the white lines, and as you start to aim for the apex of the right hander, which is tight to the

inside of the corner, you must have the car pointing in a straight line when you brake. I come down to second gear in the Chevron and just drive through it, using as much adhesion as I can possibly get out of tyres which have been working hard now so there's generally a lot more grip than you had in the first corner. Let the car run wide to the outside and really hammer down towards the next long, right hand corner (9) as hard as you can.

Braking points are irrelevant on this final bend at Colerne - you've got to be really brave here. Accept the fact that you're going to be taking a right hander but don't try and chop an early apex. Use the track, it's very, very wide and just carry as much speed as you can. The more the merrier! I'm using third gear through here - at somewhere I would guess (no electronics or gizmos on the Chevron) between 110 and 115 mph and just hanging on as the car dances about, especially over the change of surface towards the exit of the corner. It really is slopping about all over the place, and it will (hopefully!) clip the apex markers on the inside just as you're starting to think 'I can't hang on to this any more'. You just ease and squeeze, the car will run wide to the outside, you can see the finish line coming up ahead and you just aim for it. Get the car there as quickly as possible and, equally quickly, you have to think about braking for the return road to the paddock.

Colerne is a real adrenaline pumping circuit, it really gets you going. I've had a lot of satisfaction here over the years and the challenge is still there - I still like to have a go at the place. It's beaten me a few times, but I can still say I have beaten it on the odd occasion. 1994 seems a long time ago now...



1
It's a long way from the startline to turn 1



2
Down two gears, aim for the first left hand marker and chop across, clipping the big right hand marker



3
The car will tend to understeer - let it go right out to the left and take third gear



7
...and accelerate hard through them



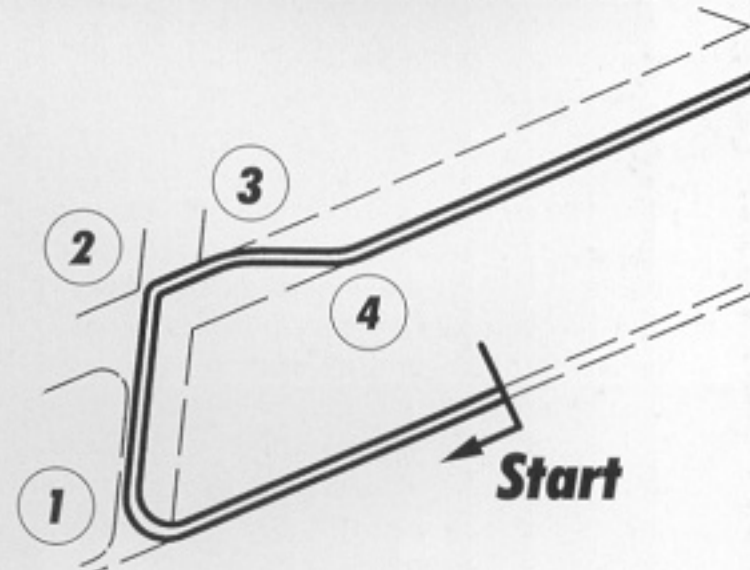
8
Flick the car to the left and pile on as much power as you can down the long straight



9
But now as you head for turn 5...



12
Let the car drift out to the left...



15
The entry to the long left hander, turn 7



16
Don't try to take it too tight...



17
...use the middle of the track



21
Down to second (in the Chevron) and drive through. Should be more grip with warmer tyres



22
Let the car run wide and really hammer down to the right hander at turn 9



23
Braking points are irrelevant - you've got to be really brave

