



# DRIVE IT!

## CASTLE HILLCLIMB

Speedscene's 'Swift Progress' columnist Steve Chaloner outlines his technique for tackling one of our most challenging Southwest hillclimbs

Castle hill climb is situated in beautiful countryside just north of the Cornish town of Lostwithiel and just over the hill from Restormel Castle. Access to the hill is excellent with the journey time from Exeter services on the M5 taking just over an hour via the A30 dual carriageway to Bodmin, where the venue is well signed along a short trip through the lanes.

Castle is blessed with a huge paddock situated in a gently sloping field where you can park your tow car, trailer and competition car all together and spread out a bit. Many competitors choose to camp at the venue, although there are no facilities apart from portaloos, but there is plenty of accommodation close by. I personally found the Best Western Restormel Lodge Hotel in Lostwithiel to be excellent value and with the hill only five minutes away I even had time for a full English breakfast.

There are two weekends of hillclimbs here during the year, the first taking place in mid-July and the second four weeks later in mid-August. All events are organised and run by the friendly and enthusiastic team from Camel Vale Motor Club.

The hill itself has a very good surface with plenty of grip. However when not being used for hillclimbing, the track is used to access a water treatment works and heavy use of this during the run up to an event can sometimes leave the surface a bit dusty. Although fairly short, at 820 yards, the hill packs in some interesting bends and rises some 350 feet from start

to finish.

I'll be describing here how I personally drive the hill in my Suzuki Swift; a somewhat underpowered front wheel drive hatchback. So if you plan on bringing a 650bhp Gould, Pilbeam or even a V10 GWR Predator to the hill next year, then the following may not be entirely relevant! My advice would be to look at the pictures and then go and have a chat with Basil Pitt, who currently holds the outright hill record. If Basil happens to read this, perhaps he'd like to comment how he drives the hill in his Gould-Judd (sorry Baz!).

The start line is situated part way through a right hand bend and I line up towards the left hand side, with the car pointing at the apex which is roughly where the 64 foot timing gear is situated on the right hand side of the track. If you can manage to avoid hitting this, the timekeepers will certainly appreciate it and the event will run a lot more smoothly. I should mention that the outside of this first bend has a raised kerb, but if you're in any danger of hitting that then I suggest you take up a more sedate sport (I believe crown green bowling is quite popular).

Once through the first right hander I change into second gear in the Swift and then head towards a slight right, which is followed immediately by a slight left over a brow. These bends can be straight-lined and are taken flat out in the Swift. Just over the brow the road then goes through another slight right followed by a fast left. I change into third just over the

brow, get as close to the black and white road marker on the apex of the slight right as I can and then do the same with the second of the three markers on the left hand bend. In the Swift I'm still flat out through these bends...

The next bend is one of those tricky ones that everyone seems to approach differently and which I'm never happy with, no matter what line I use to get around it. The driver's view through the bend is obscured by three large bale of silage on the right (hit these and you'll spend the winter trying to get rid of the smell), with the third one used to cover a cattle grid. My approach is usually to keep my foot in until the very last minute, then brake hard, change down to second and accelerate through the bend trying to stay as close to the silage bale as possible and treating it as the apex. However, if you go through too fast it's very easy to run wide on the exit where there is a very steep bank waiting to halt your progress. I've had a few close shaves here myself, but these have so far been limited to a very close look at the bank.

Once safely through the cattle grid bend there's then a fast right hand bend, a short straight and then another fast right hand bend. These are all taken flat in the Swift with third gear being taken between the two right-handers. The second of the two is tighter than the first and again I try to keep close to the road markers.

Now follows another short straight which leads into a very challenging bend which, for me,

is one of the most enjoyable on any hillclimb I've competed at. The bend is a very long, tight left hander which can be taken at surprisingly high speed if the right line is taken. It's very important not to turn in too early, as I did on my first visit to Castle. Because the bend is so long and the speed carried through so high, I rapidly ran out of road and had one of the closest examinations of a hedge-row since I gave up road rallying fifteen years ago. The bend has two lay-bys, one on the left on the entry to the bend and one on the right on the exit. I've found that the best approach is to stay over to the right hand side of the road (aim straight for the marshals' post - they love it, honest!) and then turn in just after the first left hand lay-by ends. I then hug the left hand side of the bend all the way round until it opens up again.

When the bend does open up there's a short straight followed by a fast right hand bend, again taken flat in the Swift. The finish line lies part-way around this bend. You then have a couple of hundred yards to slow down before turning around and then parking on the side of the road facing back down the hill. Great views across the Cornish countryside are provided free of charge.

Hopefully this feature will encourage a few more competitors to venture down to this great Cornish hill climb - everyone that does has a great time. You could even combine it with your annual holiday!



**1** The startline. First apex is by the 64 foot beam - careful!



**2** Stay away from the raised kerb



**3** Slight right...



**4** ...and slight left over brow, can be straightlined...



**5** ...and taken flat - in the Swift!



**6** Another slight right follows...



**7** ...and a fast left. Aim for the right-hand marker...



**8** ...and then for the second of the three left-hand markers



**9** Still flat in the Swift



**10** 'Cattle grid' right-hander is obscured by silage bales



**11** Brake late and change down, using right-hand bale as apex



**12** Don't run wide - there's an unforgiving bank!



**13** After the fast right-hander there's a short straight...



**14** ...third gear in the Swift before the next right-hander...



**15** ...which is tighter, but still flat - keep close to the right-hand markers



**16** Another short straight leads to a challenging left-hander



**17** Stay right and aim for the marshals' post, then turn in as the left-hand lay-by ends



**18** Hug the left-hand bank until it opens up...



**19** ...then run wide on to the short finish straight



**20** The finish is on a fast right-hander...



**21** ...again flat in the Swift



**22** You have plenty of time to slow down - even in a 600 bhp Gould!