

DRIVE IT - HAREWOOD HILLCLIMB



In the second of a new series, Yorkshireman PETER HERBERT describes his technique for tackling his home hill

Westfield hillclimber and BMW circuit racer, former rallyman Peter Herbert's competition career has encompassed many facets of the sport. A well-known scribe on the club scene, his recent book '750 Racer' looks set to become a classic do-it-yourself manual of budget motorsport. Here he lays bare the secrets of BARC(Yorks) popular course at Stockton Farm, that first saw the light of day, in shortened form, back in 1962.

Allow me to say it before you do. Who is this no-hoper from the cheap end of the paddock dispensing advice on how to drive one of the country's premier hillclimbs?

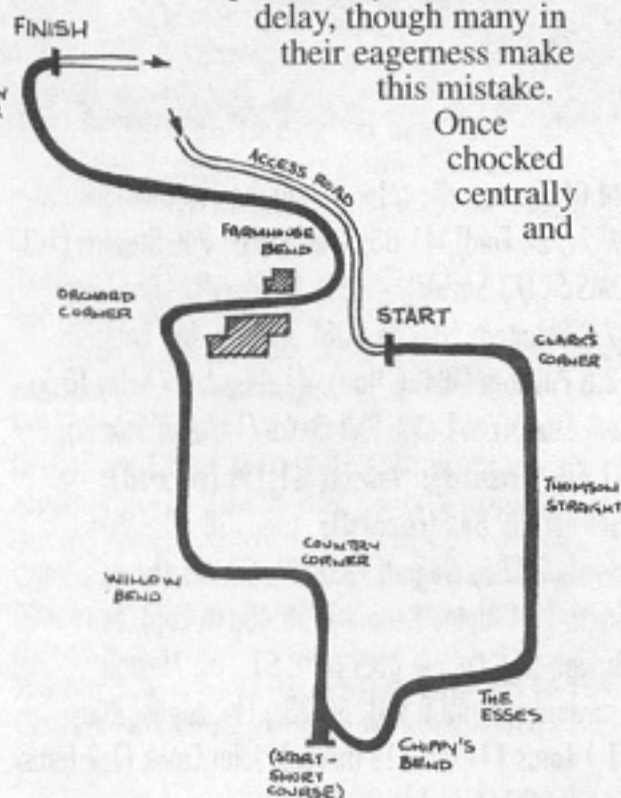
Well quite simply I'm a motorsport nut who enjoys dressing up as a racing driver, hanging out with like-minded individuals and being surrounded by racing cars in wonderful places. What I'm about to impart is how to tackle the 1448.5 metre Yorkshire course, the longest on the British mainland, at the wheel of my Modified Production Class A/150 bhp/1380cc/Ford pushrod powered/four speed gearbox/live rear axled/Avon slick shod Westfield SE.

My technique works for me and may be of interest to those visiting Stockton Farm for the first time, particularly in similarly conventional cars. However should Roy Lane consider what follows to be a load of old cobblers, I wouldn't disagree...

Descending to the startline from the hilltop paddock via the well surfaced access road, I warm up the brakes with my left foot, then wait outside the tyre warming area until the car ahead begins its run. I see no point in indulging in burn-outs until the last moment as the rubber will be allowed to cool,

particularly if there is a delay, though many in their eagerness make this mistake.

Once chocked centrally and



Harewood's hallowed startline and the run to Clark's. Note the surface change.



The long pull through Clark's, hug the right kerb



Thompson straight. Even a 1400cc Westfield feels quick down here



The Esses braking area, with lots of safe run-off for the brain-dead.



Right/left at the Esses. Neatness is rewarded.



The entrance to Chippy's. Keep off the high, right kerb!



Increase the power smoothly to take you neatly through Chippy's. Watch out for standing water in the wet.



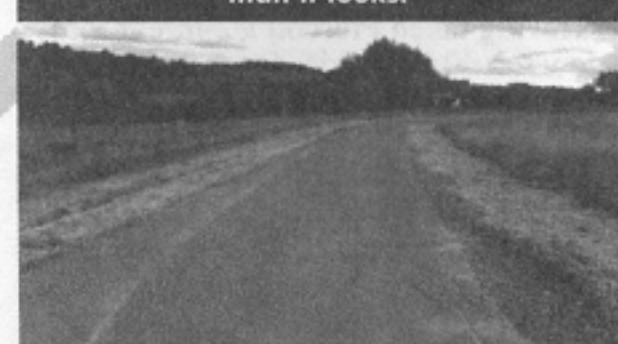
Hard on the power and move right up the rise to Country.



As the car settles on the brow, brake hard then turn in to Country.



The approach to Willow. A bend quicker than it looks.



Balance car on throttle through Willow, then flat up to Orchard.



Tricky, blind approach to Orchard - Keep right - cut across to clip left kerb - brake straight - turn in right.



Distinctive Harewood scenery on the run up to Farmhouse Bend



aligned with the timing beam, green light to the left, I go through my ritual. Scan the oil and water gauges, a last tug on the harness shoulder straps, flip down the visor, into first gear and carefully build up the revs to four and a half. The start pad is concrete and has different frictional properties to the tarmac that follows, but it is not known as a transmission breaker - even though I once broke two radius arms during a kamikaze mission to catch Carl Talbot's radical class record-holding Seven.

The clutch is dropped, the rear wheels spin then bite and the car is launched along the short straight to Clark's Corner, a long open righthander named after Ferrari racing BARC(Yorks) 'cuddly chairman', Simon Clark. Approaching this important corner - and all corners leading on to long straights are important - I grab second, brake quite hard in a straight line, then turn in early and hug the low inside kerb, applying power as I go so that the downhill Thomson Straight, named after the late, great Jim who did so much to promote the hill, is entered with pedal to the metal.

Up into third, it's hard on the power for as long as I dare before braking and changing back to second for the fast approaching Esses. The braking area is a little bumpy, particularly for a live axled car, so be prepared for instability - though if things go wrong there is plenty of run-off. Last season Tony Mekwinski lost a rear wheel here and sailed into the scenery, but no harm came to the Escort's bodywork (not that anyone would have noticed...) and he went on to win the Harewood championship.

Now follows perhaps the least satisfying part of the course. An open right, a tighter left and a never ending right-hander known as Chippy's, in memory of long-time BARC(Yorks) stalwart Chippy Stross. A rhythm is required to reel these off with minimum time loss. My method is to turn into the first right early and apply firm power, lift and turn in early for the left while reapplying the power, lift then turn in later for Chippy's, staying off the high inside kerb and accelerating gently through. I try to avoid too much power here as it's all too easy to become impatient, floor it too early and be forced to back off when the tail slides. When it comes off, a long four-wheel drift is bloody marvellous, but my aim is to exit the bend wide on as much throttle as possible to attack the sharp rise that follows.

To gain time through this tricky complex is difficult, to lose it is easy. Tidiness is essential.

We are now back on the original short course, and what follows is classic hillclimbing without a Disney character with whiskers and large ears in sight.

Flat in second on the right of the track, I crest the rise and immediately brake very hard, sometimes to the extent of locking the wheels, for the 90 left at Country Corner. Off the brakes, turn in sharply and back on to full throttle as soon as possible. Again there is plenty of run-off if not all goes to plan. Once I ran wide on to the grass, spun back across the track and came to rest without harm in a hedge. Just as I was breathing a sigh of relief the Westfield's hot side exhaust set the hedge on fire.

Dab the brakes, turn in late and hold an arc through climbing Farmhouse Bend in middle of track



Hold line and increase power



Exit Farmhouse on to Quarry Straight with foot to the floor.



Daunting approach to Quarry Corner. Don't turn in too early and keep hammer down



Balance car on power against vicious camber then brake on short straight.



Quarry Corner's final twist. Cheap seats to the left.



A short straight leads to Willow Bend, a fast, open yet narrow righthander. With practice it's quick and must be treated as such for a good time despite an understandable urge to brake. So as the marshals duck behind their stout timber barrier and mutter a silent prayer I hold the car flat in second, lift a little, then feed the power back in through the bend to blast up the rising straight towards Orchard.

Orchard is a tricky little duo that requires the driver to take a blind, fast left and then a very sharp, uphill right. With so much to do, my approach is to hold second despite peaking, move to the right then cut across to the lefthand kerb while lifting slightly. Braking hard in a straight line I turn in sharply to the righthander with an early application of power. This is the only part of the course where I actually encourage the tail to slide a little, as the wheelspin keeps my diminutive screamer on cam.

Now begins the steepest part of the climb. Maintaining momentum is everything for a competitive time. From Orchard another straight, this time running between solid stone farm buildings, leads to the long, open, climbing lefthand Farmhouse Bend. I stay hard on the throttle in second for as long as possible, dab the brakes, then turn in quite late to describe a smooth arc through this key corner. My aim is to hold the steering wheel in a constant position while feeding in more power, emerging on to Quarry straight with foot flat on the floor. Too much acceleration too early means a tail wag, a lift, and time lost. Sensitivity to what the car is doing through here is vital.

Up the power-sapping Quarry Straight I give it death, changing up to third as I pass the old paddock exit road. The finish is fast approaching, but first one of hillclimbing's great challenges must be met - Quarry Bend.

Actually it's two bends; a fast right, a tiny straight and a tight right, the road climbing all the while. Nobody who, from the paddock's lofty heights, has observed the surprising length of time required to complete the distance between the Quarry Straight digital clock and the corner exit finish line can doubt the importance of this final section. A little commitment here can make all the difference between winning and coming second.

My way is to take the first part of the corner flat, or as near flat as I dare, hit the brakes and grab second in as straight a line as I can muster, turn into the final right and scrabble across the line. I've never got Quarry absolutely right, and I suspect few have. The important thing is to survive it and get across the finish beam even if the car is completely sideways or travelling backwards. Most of us have landed in the gravel trap at some time or other - ask Graham Priaux or, better still, Chris Seaman (whose signature features heavily in Quarry's visitors' book!).

Now all that remains is a generous slowing down straight and a return to the paddock. If I have put my Westfield where my mouth is the clock will have stopped on 62 point something - more often it won't have.... But there is always next time to aim for that elusive perfect run.