

DRIVE IT!

OLIVER'S MOUNT

Speedscene's Continental Correspondent Peter Herbert stays nearer home to describe his technique for tackling one of hillclimbing's best kept secrets



'Reports of my death', Mark Twain once wrote, 'have been exaggerated'.

The same might be said of Oliver's Mount hillclimb. For there are some, particularly those who live in the south of our island, who believe it to have stopped breathing years ago.

In truth the course is alive and well and while a little shorter than in its earlier days, when it played host to a round of the nationally-based Castrol/BARC Hillclimb Championship, the hill remains a fine place at which to compete under the stewardship of the enthusiastic Auto 66 Club and Clerk of the Course Peter Hillaby.

Allegedly named after Oliver Cromwell, who is said to have placed a gun battery there directed against the town's castle when commander of the Parliamentary armies, Oliver's Mount is a high wooded area rising above the South Bay of the Yorkshire coastal town of Scarborough. The daunting 2.43 mile long motorcycle racing circuit that wends its anticlockwise way around these slopes, rising and falling, opened shortly after the end of World War 2 in 1946. Part of that course was used for speed hillclimbing from the early sixties until the mid seventies.

The circuit was also, and indeed still is, occasionally used in the reverse direction as a rally

special stage. My first recollection of it is watching a mid-seventies RAC Rally there early on a cold, frosty, and foggy November morning. Well do I remember standing at Mountside Hairpin, straining my eyes and ears for a sign of the first approaching car. Then suddenly, Hellas blazing and exhaust barking, a yellow and black Euro Handler Opel Kadett GTE slid into view along Bottom Straight, pointing a full 45 degrees to its direction of travel and facing in completely the opposite direction to the entrance of the tight uphill bend. Then with a deft reverse flick, the car described a perfect arc through the corner and Walter Rohrl disappeared again into the murk.

I'm no 'Mountmeister' - indeed I'm still getting to grips with the place having first driven there in 2002 when, as the guest of Moulton neighbour and TVR Championship front runner Simon Cole, I shared his 4.6 litre 350i. Subsequently I've returned on just three occasions with my 1400cc Cosworth BDH powered Westfield, picking up the odd pot, and it's from this machine's perspective that I now share my approach to this rewarding 1076 metre hill.

The start is at the northern end of the circuit's paddock, which

contains a permanent club office, restaurant, and toilets. As there's a slight kink to the left on the way to the first corner, I position the car to the right to straighten things out. As ever, I sit on the rubber already put down if it's dry, and straddle it if it's wet.

Grip is quite good off the line so I wind on about five, drop the clutch, and shoot off in first and then second towards Farm Bends, a banked right-hander followed immediately by a second right that drops down to the circuit's start-finish straight. On the approach I brake late but lightly, turn in late, and carry as much speed as I dare around the first turn. I then grab first, turning in early to the second right-hander to avoid adverse camber induced understeer, and exit as straight as possible with right front wheel on the inside kerb.

The importance of a good exit, with an early application of full power, cannot be overstressed as what follows is an all-out charge down a short straight, through a fast right hander flanked by the race control building, along a short, marked out, starting grid straight and through a second right hand curve, which is followed by a sweeping left. This very fast sec-

tion ends with another short straight that leads to Mere Hairpin.

I take all of this flat in the Westfield, going up through the box into second, then third, tucking over towards the right-hand edge of the track prior to the first right. Staying there, I'm flat in third at over 90 mph as the uphill hairpin left approaches. Just beyond where the track surface changes, and level with the second of two pole mounted public address speakers, I brake very hard. Then, from a position well over to the right, I change from third to first and with front wheels on the point of locking I come off the middle pedal and turn in very late, aiming to exit the bend with the car as straight as possible and reapplying power early.

It's very easy to lock up here, but this should be avoided. At best, the escape road is short and downhill - at worst, an out-of-control spin or deviation from the track could result in a trip through a tree lined fence and a drop into the paddock below.

Yorkshire hillclimb legend Bobby Fryers tells the tale of a wayward Mini that did just that.

Bobby's Spanish wife, no devotee of speed events and making a rare appearance at one, was sitting in Bobby's towcar close to where the Mini landed, quietly reading the Sunday papers. While marshals painstakingly cut the hapless driver free, Bobby was stranded with the rest of his batch at the top of the hill and was naturally concerned for his wife's state of mind following such traumatic happenings. However, on his return she was still absorbed in her paper, having assumed this sort of thing to be quite normal...

Rumour has it that this lack of Armco, quite understandable where bikes are raced, was partly instrumental in the hill's fall into disuse for some years due to safety concerns, and ultimately to its being shortened. However as this section is still very much in use and still has no Armco, this seems hard to believe!

What follows next is a glorious, flowing climb through trees and as Quarry Hill is quite steep, carrying speed is everything. The first couple of slight curves can be straight-lined. So it's up into second and then over to the left before cutting right to apex a right-hander beneath the footbridge. Three sweeping lefts now follow, the third ending over a blind brow. I take third and keep to the right, essentially taking the three bends as one. There's painted kerbing on the left of the track at the second and third curve entrances. I ignore the first of these, then turn in late on to the second kerbing, brake hard in a straight line and change down to second for the tight right that follows. The clue when to brake is, I suggest, when the fencing beyond the turn first comes into view.

The right leads into the racing circuit Esses, but the hillclimb course turns immediately and sharply left, then sharp right, to be followed at once by the finish line. This complex is known as The Kink (named, no doubt, after Ray Davis who once appeared at Scarborough's Winter Gardens - only joking). My technique is to exit the opening right of this complex by clipping the kerb on the right hand side of the track, carrying as much speed as possible. Then staying out to the right, I brake and snatch first, before turning in early for the left and

taking a little grass if necessary. I then keep well left before turning in late for the final right-hander, getting on the gas early for a last lunge across the line.

A digital clock displaying the shocking truth greets successful ascendants, then there is a slowing down straight along a narrow circuit access road, at the end of which lies a tight little turning circle where those adept at the handbrake or spin turn under power can demonstrate their skill (or otherwise!)

The old hillclimb course used to continue through the Esses and down the long and then bumpy Back Straight. This apparently was pretty hairy, and Joe Ward once had an enormous accident there.

Former Castrol/BARC Champion Chris Seaman tells a good tale about those days. Then, as now, a convoy run proceeded morning practice to allow competitors to get a feel for the course. The form it took was to ascend the hill, then turn left after the finish and return to the start via Memorial Corner, Drury's and Mountside Hairpin. One unfortunate, new to the course, fell behind the course car and those in pursuit, and instead of turning left at the end of the Back Straight continued straight on down an access road. Soon the little Cooper 500 and its helmeted pilote passed people mowing lawns in front of houses, then shops, eventually arriving at a set of traffic lights. At this point it suddenly dawned on our hero that he was no long on Oliver's Mount but instead entering Scarborough. With no reverse gear, turning around was not the work of a moment. But with the help of a friendly policeman, for they were friendly in those days, the single seater racing car was eventually dispatched back to whence it came.

Oliver's Mount is great fun and a daunting, but fulfilling, driving challenge. The relaxed yet efficient Auto 66 Club run a tight ship, once they get going, and at my most recent visit bikes and cars enjoyed a convoy run, two practice runs, and five competitive runs. Good value for eighty quid. So, if you are 'Oop North', give it a try. Events can be found on www.auto66.com or by ringing 01723 500653.



1 The startline - position your car well over to the right for the fairly straight passage towards Farm Bends



2 Farm Bends approach



6 Farm Bends 2 (out) - turn in early and decisively to clip the kerb on the right and exit in a straight line



7 The start/finish 'straight' - give it death!



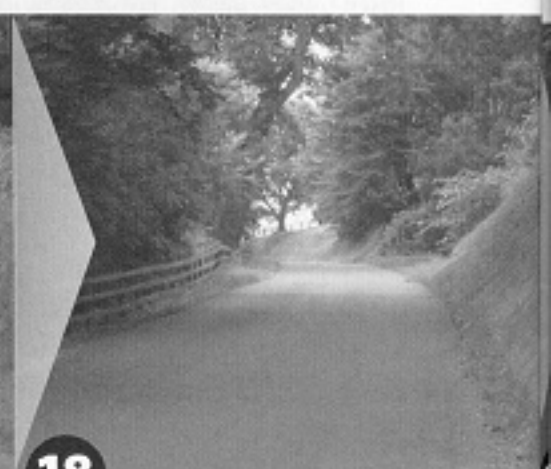
12 Mere Hairpin approach - keep right, brake straight no earlier than the surface changes, no later than at the 2nd PA speaker



13 Mere Hairpin entrance. Note the escape route



17 The Bridge - clip the extending verge on the left, then clip the extending verge late on the right



18 Quarry Hill - keep right and keep flat



23 The Right-hander - turn in late, clip the kerb on the right and stay right



24 The entrance to the far right



3 Farm Bends 1 (in) - brake in a straight line, turn in late, carry speed



4 Farm Bends 1 (out) - keep left



5 Farm Bends 2 (in) - still keep left



8 The first Right Sweep - move from the centre of track to the right and take it flat past race control



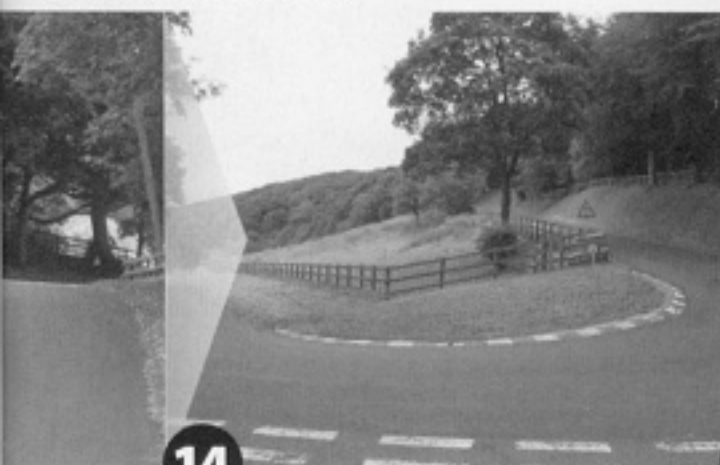
9 The starting grid - hug the right of the track and stay flat



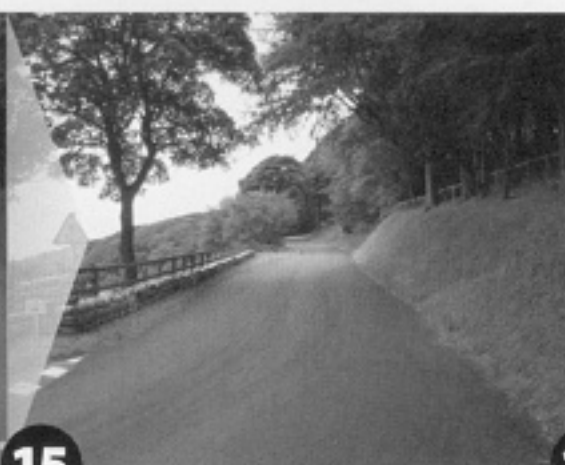
10 The second Right Sweep - stay right and stay flat



11 The Left Sweep - still right, and still flat



14 Mere Hairpin (in) - from the outside



15 Mere Hairpin (out) - now the climb really begins



16 Get back hard on the power and aim straight for the bridge



19 First Left - still right and still flat.



20 Second Left - still right and still flat



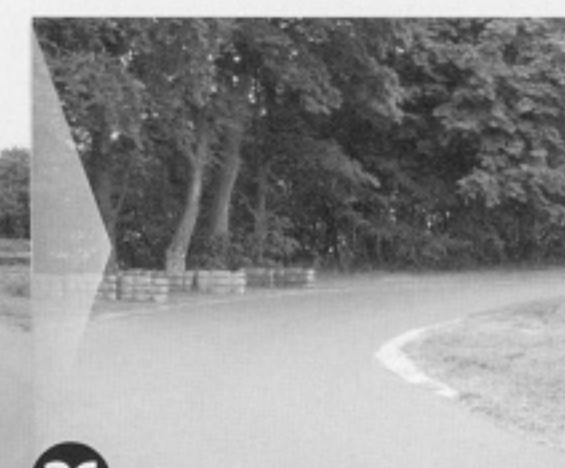
21 Third Left - move across to the centre of track but remain flat



22 The approach to the Right-hander - brake on sight of fencing and in straight line, move left and aim for the kerb on the left



25 Kink (in) - brake in a straight line, turn in early and use the grass on the inside if necessary, it's included in the entry fee!



26 Kink (out) - turn in late and get on the power early for the dash to the finish line



27 The Finish - you've arrived. Timekeeper Alan Smith's car will be moved!