

DRIVE IT!

SHELSLEY WALSH

A graduate engineer in automobile engineering at Loughborough University, 22-year-old Guernseyman Chris Guille regularly drives alongside father Geoff in PowerMec Leaders series events. Their 2-litre Mallock-Vauxhall Mk32, the only rear-engined Mallock to regularly compete on the hills and is one of the top contenders in the burgeoning 2-litre sports libre class. A former Shelsley record-holder in the car, Chris describes his technique for tackling the MAC's classic 1000 yard hill, the oldest surviving motorsport venue in the world in regular use since its inception.

No other venue compares to Shelsley Walsh, the atmosphere and the history just make the whole place special.

The sea of cars parked in the hillside car park just increases the nerves as you sit on the start line knowing that Shelsley is one of those hills that requires not only skill but bravery - or complete stupidity! - to drive quickly. This means your frame of mind has to be just right before the light goes green. A determination to really attack the hill must be uppermost in the driver's mind.

I've been fortunate in that my first (and only) race experience at Shelsley has been in one of the leading 2-litre sports libre cars, so this report will be mainly written from that viewpoint. However I'll endeavour to include references to other classes as appropriate.

A typical Shelsley strategy for a 2-litre car is to 'three-gear' it. There is also a possibility of using a fourth gear ratio between first and second, which makes the change down for the Esses easier rather than by going across the box, but this requires care not to pull fourth to try and go quicker! Some of the large racing cars have been known to two-gear the climb, but the idea of all this playing around with the gears is to gain fractions of a second - the main gains at Shelsley are made through cornering lines and bravery.

After waking up ridiculously early at the start of a Shelsley weekend to get in the signing-on queue and claim one of the thirty guaranteed third practice runs for early risers, you get to the line in the first couple of batches to find there is no grip on the start line - or the rest of the hill for that matter. But once rubber has been laid there is a surprising amount of grip. The start line is steep, but sub-2sec 64ft times are often achieved. The normal start position is close to the right hand side of the track so that the pronounced kink up past Vox Villa can be straight-lined.

After about 130ft the gradient reduces slightly and second gear is taken just after this slight crest. We're now ready to tackle the first corner, Kennel Bend, which is a fast left-hander. Entering close to the left hand side allows the car to drift around the corner without braking, only a mere lift of the throttle is required. When watching you can see many cars taking the fearless approach by not lifting at all; definitely something to aim for - and build up to! The imposing Recticel barriers on the exit are the main reason that drivers treat this corner with respect. But it's an indescribable thrill to get it right, as longitudinal and lateral acceleration combine with the car just seeming to corner on rails.

Third gear is taken early between Kennel and Crossing bends, to allow for full concentration on the next high speed left-hand corner. Entering

Crossing too early will push the car toward the sleepers on the right hand side. If the corner is taken correctly, the same feeling can be generated as at Kennel, with again a mere lift on the throttle allowing maximum momentum to be carried up - especially important at Shelsley as it's such a steep hill.

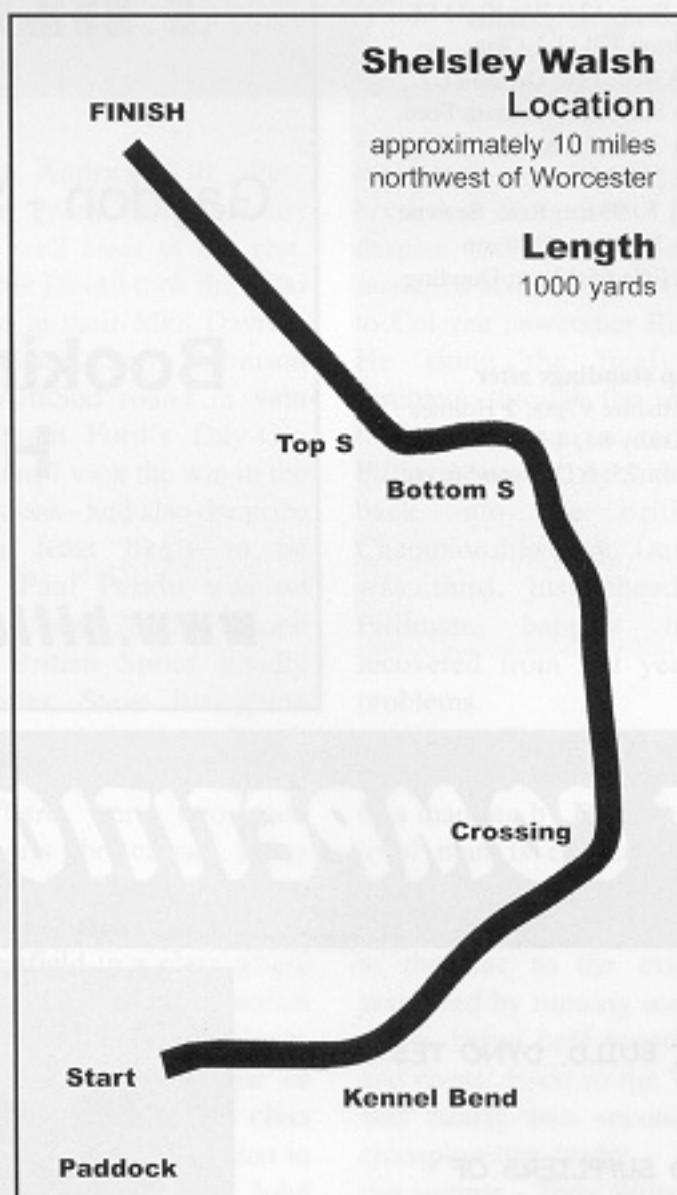
Once out of Crossing, the throttle is then firmly planted through the Kink. Before the hill was resurfaced the preferred line was slightly to the right, which avoided grounding the car over a bump. Since resurfacing, the large bump has been removed and the shorter line, tucking in close to the left hand bank, can now be used. However a glance at the tarmac - or observing the big single-seaters through this section - demonstrates that cars still bottom out here. Particularly in a 2-litre, this reduces both speed and control and should be avoided.

There is a speed trap just after the kink, where 2-litre cars reach over 110mph. Both Adam Fleetwood and Graeme Wight Jr have been clocked at around 130mph through here. This sort of speed is a good indication of just how little the top drivers lose out by way of a confidence lift not only for the Kink but also for the two lower corners. Momentum is so important at Shelsley, as the car is at full throttle most of the time and there is little improvement to be gained other than carrying as much speed as possible all the way up. Speed carried around Crossing is taken all the way to the Esses.

Bottom Ess is quite tricky, with imposing sleepers on the right-hand side and no reference point for braking. The corner is quite heavily cambered but a great deal of speed can be carried around it, however large amounts need to be scrubbed off, and a downshift to second is necessary for a quick stab of power between the corners. If using that 'trick' fourth ratio, this is where it would be selected. Try and stay as tight in to the left exiting the first Ess as possible, as the camber drops off sharply on the right.

Top Ess is the understeer corner on the hill and many people collide with the left-hand bank exiting this right-hander. The drain cover on the right hand side is a good marker; turn-in should be after it, but as many times as you say it in your head before the run you always find yourself being

drawn into turning in too early. The throttle should be wide open as soon as possible, changing up to top gear on the final straight to the finish line. The excitement doesn't stop at the finish, by the way. With only a limited amount of space to slow down the brakes must be applied quite hard before turning right into the grass holding paddock - and just to make things more exciting, the asphalt surface changes to concrete.





1 The start line is steep, with the normal start position close to the right hand side of the track.



2 The pronounced kink up past Vox Villa can be straight-lined.



3 Second gear is taken just after this slight crest as we line up for Kennel Bend.



4 Entering close to the left hand side allows the car to drift around the corner without braking, only a mere lift of the throttle.



5 The imposing Recticel barriers on the exit are the main reason that drivers treat this corner with respect.



6 Third gear is taken early between Kennel and Crossing bends.



7 Again a mere lift on the throttle allows maximum momentum to be carried up through Crossing....



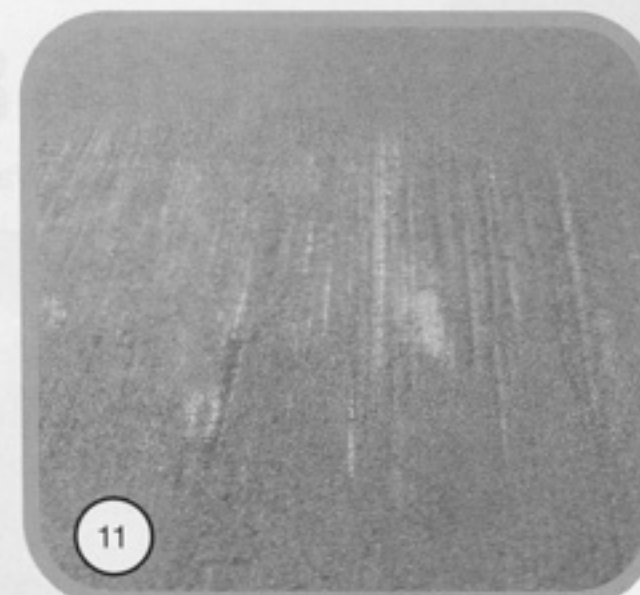
8 ...especially important at Shelsley as it's such a steep hill.



9 The throttle is then firmly planted through the Kink...



10 ...tucking in close to the left-hand bank.



11 A glance at the tarmac demonstrates that cars still bottom out here.



12 Both Adam Fleetwood and Graeme Wight Jr have been clocked at around 130mph through here - speed carried around Crossing is taken all the way to the Esses.



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Try and stay as tight in to the left exiting the first Ess as possible, as the camber drops off sharply on the right.



Top Ess is the understeer corner on the hill. Turn in late, after the drain cover.



Watch the understeer!



The throttle should be wide open as soon as possible...



...changing up to top gear on the final straight to the finish line.



The excitement doesn't stop at the finish, with only a limited amount of space to slow down!