

DRIVE IT- THREE SISTERS

Already an FTD man at Three Sisters, JAMIE HYLTON takes us round the popular Wigan circuit

The race circuit at Three Sisters is named after three huge slag heaps from local coal mines. They were a feature of the landscape until a few years ago, when the local Borough Council decided it was time they were replaced by a park and recreation area.

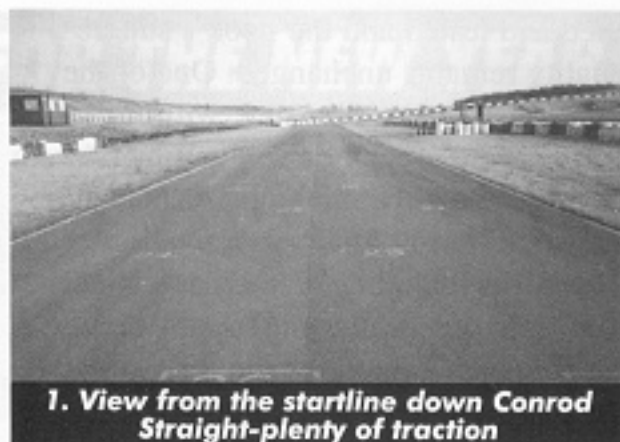
The circuit started as a small kart track, which has now grown into a six layout complex accommodating different types of motorsport. There are few days in the year when the track is not in use, with every weekend fully booked and karts, motorcycles and cars practising during the week. Good value for money too, at £25 for a two hour session.



21-year-old Jamie Hylton has competed regularly at Three Sisters, first with a Cox GTM and more

recently with his Malan-Ford. Despite relatively humble 1600 pushrod power, in only seven outings with the Allan Staniforth developed single-seater Jamie has already scored two FTDs, including one here.

With several alternative tracks available at the Wigan motorsport complex, here he describes the one used most frequently. It's the one on which Longton & DMC hosts two rounds of the Farndon Engineering British Sprint Championship and where, had he been registered, Jamie would have qualified the Malan in seventh place for last October's British Championship run-off.



1. View from the startline down Conrod Straight-plenty of traction



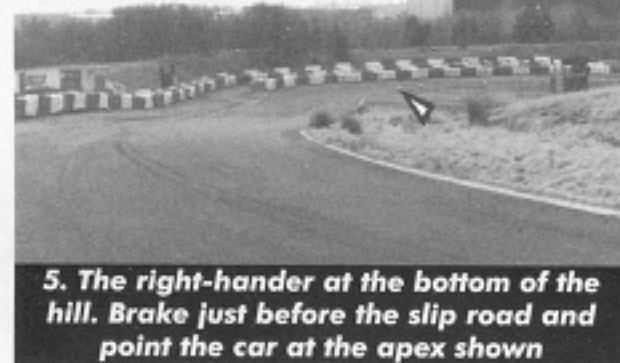
2. The first bend, with Pentith climb in the background. Note the apex.



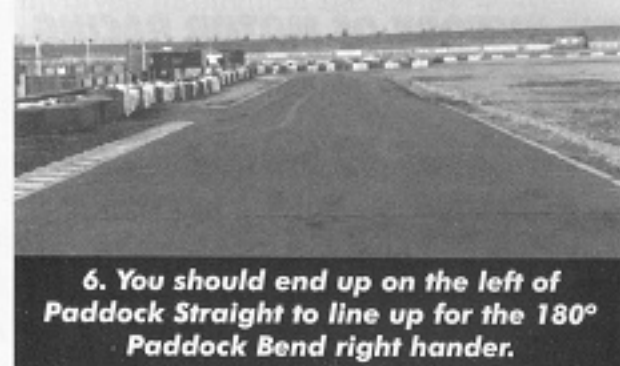
3. Pentith climb. Keep that right foot down and drift to the left.



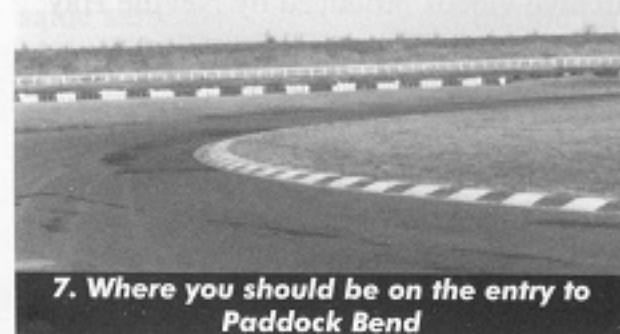
4. Cresting the blind right-hander on Cowards Summit. The apex is opposite the marshals' post.



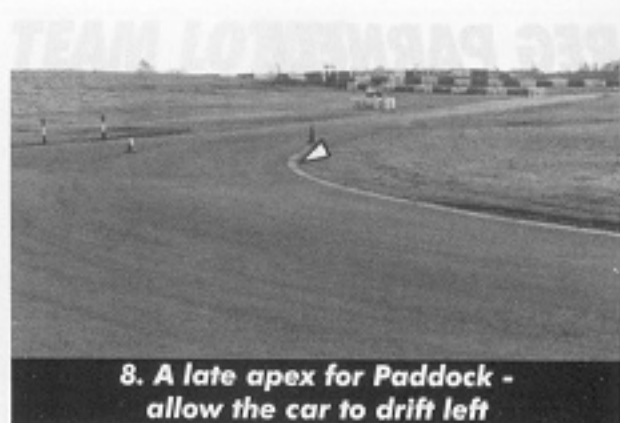
5. The right-hander at the bottom of the hill. Brake just before the slip road and point the car at the apex shown



6. You should end up on the left of Paddock Straight to line up for the 180° Paddock Bend right hander.



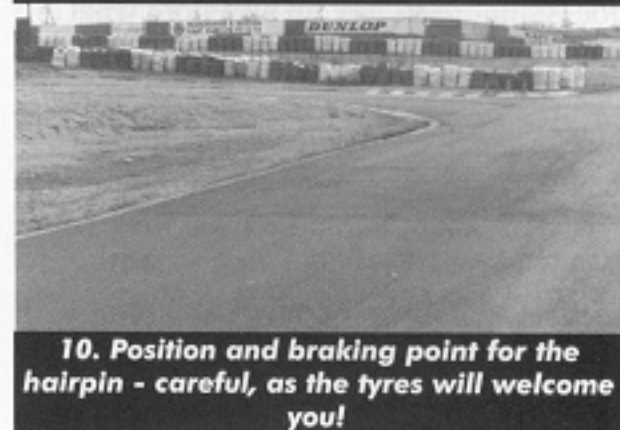
7. Where you should be on the entry to Paddock Bend



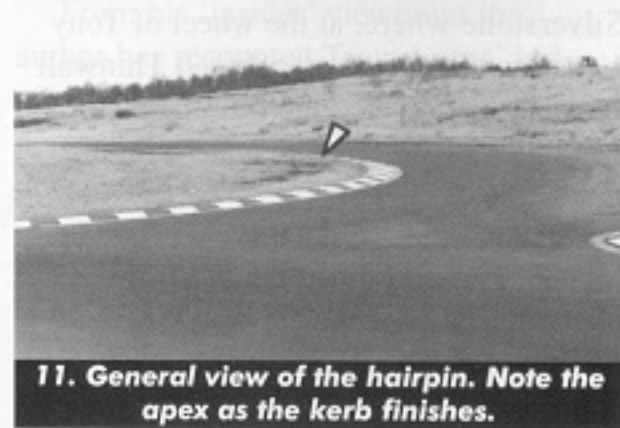
8. A late apex for Paddock - allow the car to drift left



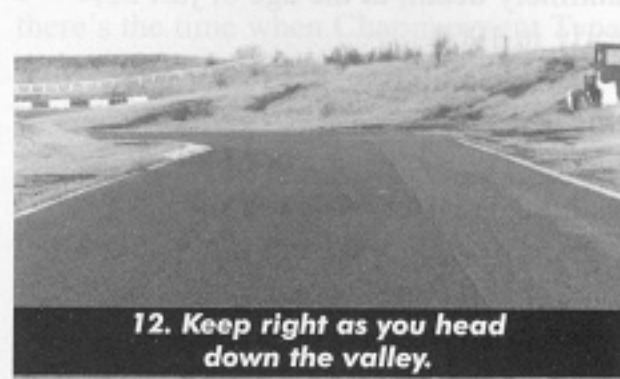
9. Move over to the right for the left-hand hairpin - it's **THIS** side of the first tyrewall!



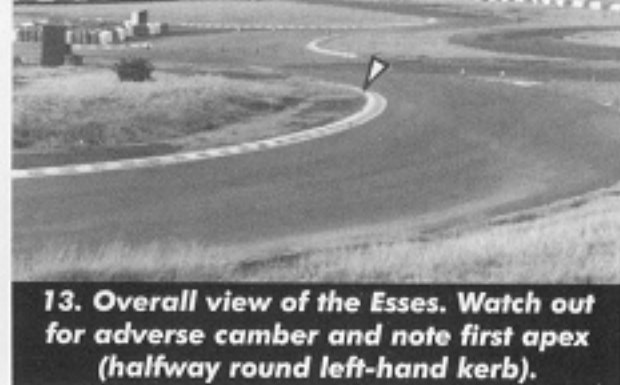
10. Position and braking point for the hairpin - careful, as the tyres will welcome you!



11. General view of the hairpin. Note the apex as the kerb finishes.



12. Keep right as you head down the valley.



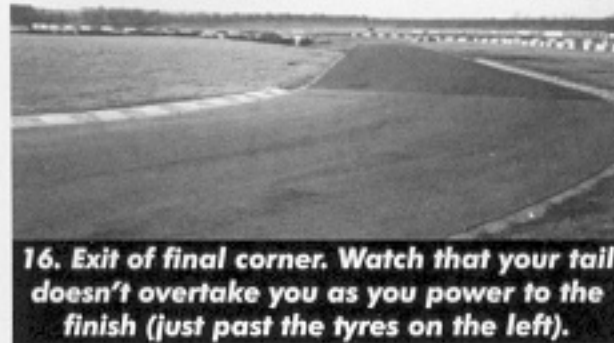
13. Overall view of the Esses. Watch out for adverse camber and note first apex (halfway round left-hand kerb).



14. Keep tight on the kerbing - and watch out for standing water if wet



15. Clip the right-hand kerb in the middle of the Esses.



16. Exit of final corner. Watch that your tail doesn't overtake you as you power to the finish (just past the tyres on the left).

Three years ago Aintree Racing Drivers School moved from the Liverpool circuit to Three Sisters, Malcolm Barfoot and John Hammersley bringing expertise not only in running a racing school, but in developing a circuit which now features armco barriers faced with thousands of red and white tyres plus some new surfacing.

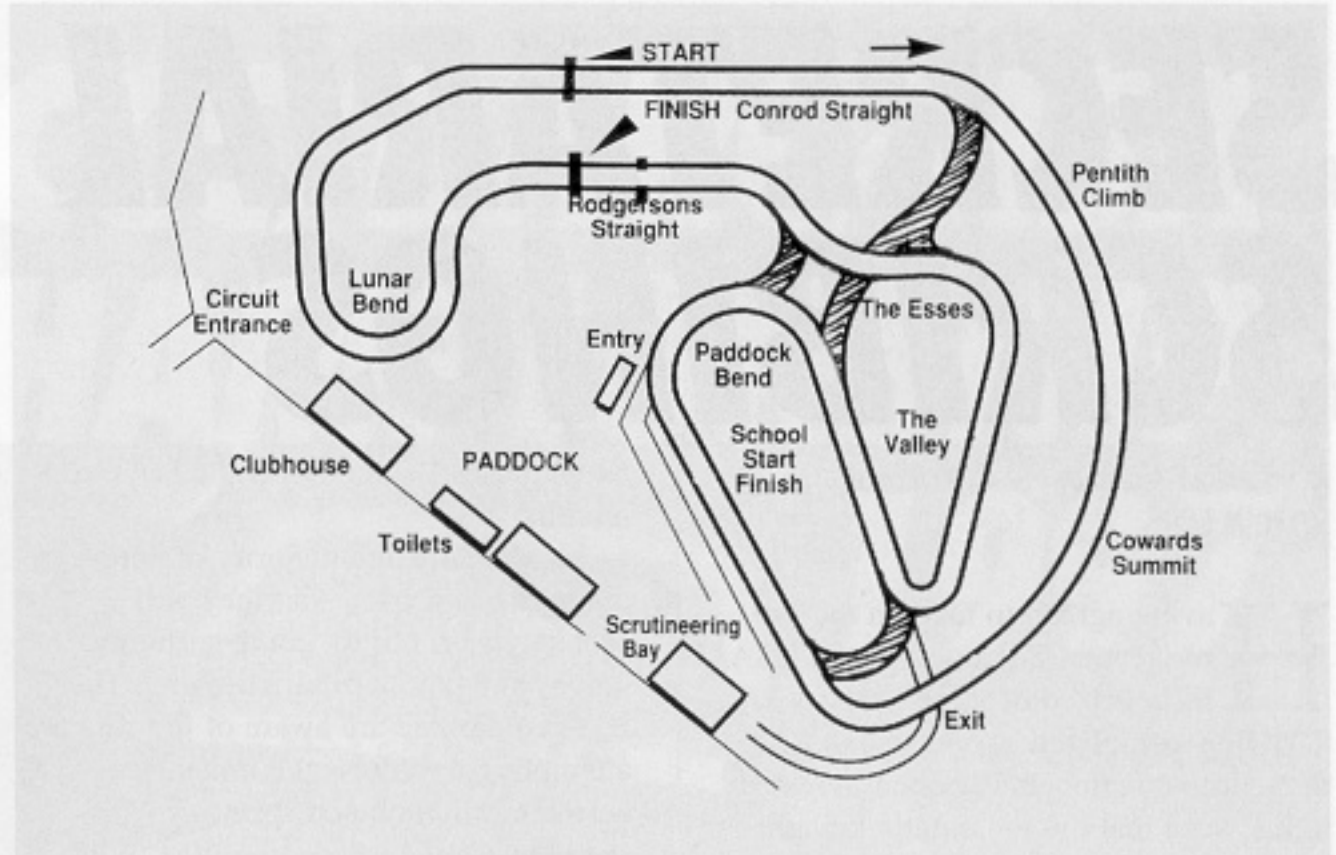
There's tarmac and hard standing for over 150 entrants, their trailers and tow barges, plus a toilet block with hot and cold showers, an under cover scrutineering bay and an office/cafeteria. Luxury indeed for a sprint course.

It's my home track, and one that has to be attacked hard, but as with all venues it needs an element of smoothness to achieve the best results. The surface varies in different parts of the circuit and can be very abrasive on a hot day. Unfortunately after a downpour, oil seems to rise out of the tarmac and sit on the surface making it like a skating rink - which most of us have discovered at some time or other!

Leaving the paddock and entering the holding area round Lunar Bend, the first priority is to get as much heat into the front tyres as possible. Leave space behind the car in front and manoeuvre the car from left to right. Even if this only increases the temperature slightly, every degree Centigrade helps.

On the approach to the startline it's time to get some heat into the rears. I find that spinning the wheels continuously until within a few feet of the line is more effective than a series of short bursts (not to mention reducing the load on the transmission!).

The green light comes on, you dump the clutch, and the first thing you notice is exceptional traction off the line. On the approach to the first right-hander I'm in third gear in the Malan, pulling about



90 mph. Keep to the far left of Conrod Straight and ease off slightly, then pick an apex approximately as shown by the arrow before pushing your right foot to the floor. Your car should finish up on the left hand side of the track to ascend Pentith Climb, which will position you for the next blind, descending, right-hander. This is the part of the track that separates the men from the boys.

The apex for this critical right-hander is opposite the marshals' post on the left of the track. Try to keep your right foot buried as the car gains momentum down the hill, where centrifugal force and gravity should push you to the left-hand side of the road ready for the 90 right at the bottom of the hill.

I brake heavily about ten feet before the slip road on the left, selecting the required gear with a touch of heel-and-toe and fixing my eyes on the early apex, as shown by the arrow. Turn in quite sharply and place your right front wheel within inches of the kerb before applying as much power as possible. You should end up on the left-hand side of the road past the paddock using every last bit of horsepower.

You'll then be approaching the long 180 degree Paddock Bend at a fair rate of knots. There seem to be many different lines round here, but I choose to brake very hard and keep to the left as long as possible, making the late apex shown. Most of us will experience a lot of understeer here (if not, you're not trying hard enough!) so keep a happy medium on the accelerator.

G-force will take over on the exit, but try not to ease off as the car drifts to the left-hand side of the track, it will gain traction as it straightens up. Don't flatten the throttle too soon though, as you'll have a problem keeping the car straight.

Get over to the right for the following

left-hand hairpin, where again firm braking will be required. A wide, late entry is essential, apexing at the end of the kerb on the left. If you don't get this right and apply power too early, understeer will throw you on to the grass - not good for skirts and very time consuming...

You should now be on the right of The Valley, heading full bore towards the first, descending left-hander of the Esses. Make sure that when positioning the car for this corner you don't turn in too late - the road cambers away and off-line there are ball bearings of rubber left by karts, bikes and other sprint competitors.

After picking your apex, which should be halfway round the left-hand kerb, place your left front wheel actually on the kerb which helps transfer more weight on to the right hand wheels. The car will naturally be drifting to the right, but try to hold it as much to the left as possible while choosing your apex on the right-hand, middle section of the Esses. The kerb should again be used here while choosing the apex for the final left-hander, where it should be used again.

All the way through the Esses you should be feathering the accelerator, keeping the maximum amount of momentum possible. On exiting the final left, watch out for your back end overtaking the front. I've seen this happen many times, on occasion wiping out the timing beam to the displeasure of marshals, spectators, other competitors and not least, the hardworking timekeepers!

To write this down on paper is definitely a lot easier than to actually do it. As Mark Waldron says - wouldn't it be great to achieve that perfect run... ■