

MSCC TECHNIQUES SPEED CHAMPIONSHIP

Venue: Shelsley Walsh

Date: 25 July 2020

Weather: Torrential rain, eased before first practice, almost dry for run 1 & 2.

The first hillclimb of the year. Shelsley Walsh Hillclimb is the oldest motorsport venue in the world. First run in 1905 by the Midland Automobile Club (MAC) as it still is today. The entry was limited to 115 cars and strict rules were in force to comply with Government restrictions for the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Four SpeedMog Competitors were entered for the Saturday event: George Proudfoot, Alan Foster, Mike Meredith and James Walter. Three of us were allocated grass paddock spaces, but George did have one of the sheds. Only half of the sheds were in use to help with distancing, and some other car clubs were relegated to the main car park. There were no spectators allowed.

On arrival, all competitors were required to enter at Gate C, which used to be the main spectators' entrance. There was a long trail through the car park to a gate where several marshals looked at the car and the driver from a distance, including a temperature check with a "gun" to the forehead. Masks and gloves were very much the rig of the day. Then on to the paddock, passing close to the usual competitors' entrance which was closed off from the road and guarded by a large man in a bright yellow jacket.

The usual routine of signing on, scrutineering, and drivers briefing did not exist. The sound check was abandoned. We had already signed on electronically and signed online documents that covered the scrutineering aspects. There was a drivers' briefing, but only for drivers new to this hill. The walk of the hill could only be done physically in person and there was no restriction on that.

In the grass paddock, the three Morganeers made preparations for the upcoming rain. Small tents were erected and umbrellas covered cockpits. Practice started at 9am. We were in batch four, the last. Fairly soon the downpour arrived, and we huddled out of the rain for about twenty minutes. Surprisingly, the runs were not halted even though the hill became a river and debris was washed down and spread over the tarmac. Even more surprising was that we heard no reports of any off-track events during this downpour.

Then the sun came out and soon it was time for the Morgans to queue up for First Practice (P1). The track was still wet in parts and it was advisable to be careful with the right foot. P2 was almost all dry, with just some patches of damp under the trees at the esses to catch us out.

Lunch was available from the Stratstone Restaurant. Face coverings were advised, and one could only sit down outdoors in the courtyard. A couple of hot dishes were available and sandwiches, coffee and tea. There was an ice cream van up near the entrance, otherwise all

the other catering places were closed. Toilets were scrupulously clean, and extra staff were on the case throughout the day. The bar did open, but there were not many customers, if any, until much later.

In the afternoon, the public address (PA) system crackled into life. Many people wondered who the commentary would be aimed at because there were no spectators. This soon became clear, as the commentator explained that there was a live video of the event being transmitted on YouTube.

The Morgans in batch four had their two runs in the afternoon, improving incrementally as the drying track gave more confidence. Clouds and occasional light sprays of drizzle were a constant worry. At the end of the day we all achieved a time slightly better than last year, and on handicap score the order was George, Mike, Alan, James.

As we packed our kit into the Morgans, the bar filled up with a crowd of thirsty marshals.

Incidents:

George lost a pair of spectacles in the trailer park and recovered them the next day after searching through all the trailers.

Mike's car ejected an object at the first esses, causing a red flag. The Marshalls recovered a pair of scissors.

James did some gardening on P1 after forgetting where the finish line was located.

James Walter