

A Novices view to Racing – Part 2

The Team:

Myself,
Paul Jeffries
– The Driver



I am married with a 2 year old son. Career wise I am a Chartered Surveyor specialising in Commercial Property including warehouses, shops, restaurants and offices. Hobbies include spending time with my family, Motor Racing!, Cars in general. Cars: Toyota MR2 (Rev3) Race Spec, Caterham 7, Toyota MR2 G-Limited (Rev1), VW Passat



My Father,
Stewart Jeffries
– Transporter,
Mechanic and
soon to be
Driver 2.

Another
Surveyor
specialising in
Road Schemes
and Compensation. Hobbies include
Classic Cars especially Jaguars.
Likes anything with an engine
including Tractors, Diggers etc....
Cars: VW Toureg V10, Alfa 156 V6,
Jaguar XK120

Ben Colley
– Engineer/
Mechanic
and Support
Person



Engineer
by trade
specialising
in Electrics
and
rather big engines! Hobbies
include Off Roading, Land
Rovers and engine conversions.
Cars: Land Rover Defender 2.5,
Merriva, Vauxhall Engined Mini
(Previous), Bobtailed Range Rover V8
(Previous)



Steve Trask –
Web Designer/
Marketing Man
Advertising and
Design Man

specialising
in magazine
publications
and ads.
Hobbies include
Socialising,

Chilling at the beach and working! No
Cars (This will change).



The Car, the Team and Snetterton!

I will start from where I left off...

In the first instalment of this ongoing feature I focused on obtaining my race Licence and buying the car. In this article I will introduce the Torque Racing Team, summarise getting kitted out with racewear and report on the first meeting at Snetterton.

Having passed my ARDS it was time to get kitted out. A friend who had just started racing Caterhams had warned me about the costs. I shopped around trying to find the best deals and soon realised there were only a handful of motorsport suppliers based in the UK, Demon Tweaks and GPR Racewear - both at different ends of the country!

Demon Tweaks was the closer of the two, so with the credit card handy I took the family for a ride out to North Wales. I had three items to buy, a helmet, pair of gloves and some boots, having found the race suit cheaper through another firm I chose not to buy one at the time.

It is important to try everything on so don't be tempted to buy until you have at least visited your race wear specialist. I chose the most comfortable gear for me, which happened to be a Bell Helmet and Alpinestars boots and gloves. Unfortunately these were almost double the cost of equivalent brands, in my opinion it was money well spent considering the strains of motor racing. Before leaving I tried on a similar race suit to the one I had seen online to check the sizing and fit. I purchased everything but the suit benefitting from a nice discount in the process!

Once home, I contacted Nickygrist.com, headed by the former Rally Co-Driver and ordered the Alpinestars Race Suit for a knockdown price, approximately £270 as opposed to the newer design which was closer to £500. Once it arrived in the excitement of knowing I was ready to race, I tried it all on, sat in the MR2 and pretended to be a racing driver.

During the next few weeks I concentrated on getting the car ready for the first race at Snetterton. This included

refurbishing the wheels and fitting Toyo R888 tyres in the appropriate staggered sizes of 195's on the front and 225's on the rear. Additional improvements included a Carbon Airbox with cold air feed, piggyback ECU and lightweight Race Exhaust. This proved to be the greatest improvement saving up to 18kg in weight on its own and with the Cat removed hopefully a few extra ponies. A photographic diary of these improvements, referred to as Stage 1 can be seen on the community pages of torqueracing.com Following an incident on a rather wet and slippery road, the final improvement prior to Snetterton was to have the car's suspension tracked, this was completed by a well known national tyre fitter and transformed the predictability of the car no end!

A few weeks passed and it was soon time to load the car on the trailer and set off for Snetterton. We were due to tow it with Ben's Land Rover but following an off road day and a bit of careless driving by myself it no longer had a rear cross member and therefore limited towing ability! Luckily my father had just bought a Toureg which turned out to be the ideal towing vehicle with 550 lb/ft of torque on tap from its V10 Diesel engine.

We left Stafford at 12.45pm on the Saturday following a busy morning loading spares, tools and checking the car was secure for the journey, having purchased the tow vehicle only that week and were keen to try it out. On the road the Toureg would cruise with ease towing the trailer and MR2, with a 25minute stop we arrived at Snetterton at 15.50.

Once tickets had been handed over at the circuit gates, we found a suitable spot to unload the MR2 and parked up. We then set about trying to locate TSL for the race transponder but had to wait until the races had finished at 17.30 due to the timing tower being on the inside of the circuit. In the meantime another MR2 had arrived together with its driver Colin Halls. He was a great help and pointed me in the right direction regarding the car, scrutineering and holding my nerves! Once we had the

transponder, with a bit of swearing and perseverance a suitable location was found. Once fitted we made our way to the B&B and had Steak and Chips in the local pub – a great way to finish the day off!

On the Sunday following sign on at 8.55am I made my way over to Scrutineers office where I sat a 'new to circuit briefing' which was useful and helped calm the nerves. During this time my dad put the car through scrutineering without any problems. Mental note for next time though – we should disable the bonnet, engine bay and boot pulls and fit release pins to the engine bay as this is a requirement.

At 10.20am I drove the car down to the assembly area and completed the sound test, at around 102db it passed but it's certainly not a quiet exhaust and wouldn't be suitable for track days. Having never driven Snetterton before, except on a PSP it was going to be a steep learning curve especially when mixing it with the likes of 6 Litre Jags and 911's. Never the less I built my speed up gradually until I made a mistake and spun it on Sear Corner. This was a complete shock and one of those moments you can't prepare for. I was facing the wrong way with an orange MR2 heading towards me; I honestly thought we were going to collide, luckily he missed me and when it was safe to do so I made my way back onto the track with the knowledge that my back brakes were working better than the front! This was the result of the front pads not bedding in to the new discs fitted just a week before.

I gradually improved and gained confidence, this showed in my lap times. Early qualifying times were around 1 min 54 sec, then down to 1:46, 1:39 and mid 1:30s. On my last lap of qualifying I did an impressive 1:31.5 – only one and half seconds slower than another Future Classics racer, also in an MR2. Despite the time I was still 31 on the grid out of a total of 36 runners, but was generally pleased considering it was my first ever race and first time at the circuit.

The next few hours seemed to pass really quickly



as there were a few items to fix on the car before the race; these included repairing the carbon airbox, checking the all important tyre pressures and refuelling. Confident that the car was ready I prepared myself for the race and all the cars and drivers congregated in the assembly area. We waited for the previous race to finish and were patiently sitting there for almost forty minutes. I was parked up next to another novice, Lee Fields who was racing a BMW 325i, it was good to speak to another driver who was also nervous having the same experience as me (or lack of!). We chatted about the cars and how we just wanted to stay on track, finish and get the all important signature on our Licence cards. I noticed a familiar face whilst waiting, a guy from the ARDS test at Oulton Park. He was driving a Porsche 944 in the same race but was in a different class. It was difficult to talk as the Marshalls were preparing for our race but I managed to have a quick word and I think secretly we both wanted to finish in front of one another!

Once on track, the Green flag was waved and the formation lap commenced, nothing to report other than the need to go to the toilet due to nerves and all the cars weaving from left to right F1 style. We reformed on the grid and waited for the red lights to display, after a few seconds they were out and I pushed hard on the throttle to make swift progress. Acceleration was brisk and I had to back off the throttle to prevent myself running into the car in front.

The first lap was frantic with many cars fighting for places; it wasn't until the second lap when the pack started to disperse. I found myself tussling with Lee Fields 325i, a Porsche 924, BMW 1600Ti and Jaguar XJ6 Coupe. The real battle was between Lee and myself, often trading places where one driver was braver than

the other with later braking. On two occasions I managed to pass him on the long straight where the MR2's better aerodynamics pushed it to over 120mph.

The car performed impeccably but it is clear that the other MR2s were quicker in a straight line probably due to further weight reduction and perhaps more importantly higher exit speeds from the corners. The only reliability issue was during the middle of the race when the clutch started to slip – I decided to use this opportunity to complete the mandatory pit stop where you have to switch off the engine, remove harness, get out of car, close door and get back in doing all of the aforementioned in reverse before rejoining the track. A few seconds were lost here when I had trouble fitting the belts again – practice is key in this area. If you are looking to run two drivers like we are this year this is when you would do the driver swap.

There were no hairy moments other than a blue Porsche 924 spinning in front of me at Russell only for me to do the same on the penultimate lap. I was extremely lucky not to hit the tyres or any other cars for that matter. Having got the car under control I only lost one place which was regained again on the next lap. I was ready for the chequered flag after thirty or so minutes as a 40 minute race takes its toll on concentration.

I cannot explain how much fun the first race was, it was truly amazing. The endorphins rushing through me continued well into the journey home. I couldn't wait for the next race, but this until April 2010, unless I could find a race before then. Check the next issue of MR2Only where I will report on the Plum Pudding Race meet held at Mallory Park on Boxing Day.

Photos courtesy of Richard Styles Photography

RESULTS FOR SNETTERTON – 18th OCTOBER 2009

24th out of 36 runners and 4th in class C. Full results and a break down on lap times can be seen on the results page of www.torqueracing.com

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