

Classic Marques Speed Challenge

Entry Level Motorsport for Sports Car Drivers

Many sports cars offer such performance that it would be irresponsible to use their full potential on the road so there are several alternatives open to car owners, the most popular ones being Track Days, Speed Competitions and Racing.

Track days offer a safe environment in which a driver and a fast car can get to know each other a little better. If you find the prospect of hurtling round a track with a bunch of would-be racing drivers a little daunting, you should take comfort from the fact that these events are safe and well organised with instructors available so there is no reason why anyone with basic driving skills shouldn't thoroughly enjoy the experience.

The important thing to remember about track days is that they are non-competitive. There are strict safety guidelines and the emphasis is on driving within your own limits and being courteous to other drivers at all times; racing and aggressive driving are simply not tolerated. Having got to grips with the car at track days it is understandable that some drivers will want an opportunity to drive more competitively and many decide that a speed series is for them.

What are Speed Competitions?

Speed competitions are a friendly and low-cost form of motorsport organised by and for motoring enthusiasts. Not to be confused with Autotests (three-point turns around cones against the clock), Trials (stuck in a muddy field or grassy hillside) or 12-car rallies (getting lost on public roads), Speed Competitions are high-speed events at well prepared circuits or hillclimbs where the performance of your road-going sports car can be exploited to the full.

Competitors drive individually around a course (or up a tarmac hill) of about a mile against the clock. Courses vary from a lap of a racing circuit such as Goodwood, a course laid out at a disused airfield, to more specialised hillclimb venues which are more like your favourite twisty country lane, often complete with rather solid bits of scenery to catch the unwary. The hillclimb venues have the best facilities and are generally seen as more challenging.

There are various prizes at each event, but the main reason to come along is that it gives you a chance to drive as fast as you dare without any worry about traffic jams, speed limits, flashing blue lights or some other idiot pushing you off the road. The number of sports cars competing has increased substantially in recent years and sports cars of every shape, size and age are popular choices. It is easy to join a speed series and new competitors are always welcome.

For those considering having a go, here are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions:

Is it Dangerous?

Some events take place on race circuits, and some of these have fast corners with wide run-off areas or gravel traps, but there are others where more discretion is required. Some events take place on airfield circuits that have lots of space and nothing to hit other than the odd traffic cone. Hillclimb events present a different type of challenge and are characterised by the presence of trees and walls during the ascent.

Whatever the type of course, you are alone on the track so there is no danger of colliding with another car. Also, in the interests of safety, under MSA rules, rescue crews and paramedics must be present at all events.

However, it must be noted that any time you drive your car at any motor sport event; there is the possibility of damage. Normal road insurance will not cover competitions of any kind but you can arrange specialist competition insurance at a daily rate if you wish. You may want to consider taking out this insurance if you're planning to compete in something expensive.

Above all this is a low-cost, and relatively low-risk form of motor sport but competitors are advised to view safety as their first priority.

Will it Hurt the Car?

Speed competitions involve a busy day with several runs of the course, but each run lasts only a minute or so. During that time the tyres and brakes have barely got warm, wear and tear is minimal and no special preparation is required to a regular, reasonably modern roadgoing sports car.

However, speed events are a form of motor sport and there is always the possibility of mishap. Misjudgements generally result in a spin or trip across the grass, but it is possible to make contact with the scenery.

Will I be Fast Enough to Compete?

Many sprint competitors are new to motor sport and it is unlikely that they will win their first event but they soon find they're keeping up with others and even beating them from time to time. That isn't a reason to enter, though; the whole point is to have fun with like-minded souls. You will meet people of all ages and driving abilities; the one thing they have in common is they are all have a good time in their sports cars. If you take home a trophy once in a while that's a bonus.

How Much Does it Cost?

Protective gear (overalls, crash helmet, fire proof gloves are all mandatory) for the driver will cost between about £500. Annual MSA license is £40 and entry fees for each sprint or hillclimb event cost between about £85 and £140.

Where are the Competitions?

There are many speed series in the UK. For example, the [Classic Marques Speed Challenge](#) offers 26 rounds per year at venues spread throughout England and Wales, but there are many speed series available to novice drivers in the UK.

Handicapping System

There are many different types of handicapping systems used by speed series in the UK. Classic Marques handicapping is based on power, weight and tyres. To keep the Classic Marques Speed Challenge fair, a sophisticated handicapping scheme is utilised to level the playing field across cars of different sizes, weights and powers. In practice this handicap scheme results in a very close match between the various models. There is no reason to believe that any model has an advantage over any other.

Getting Started

Here is a list of the things you need to do to join a speed championship:

1. Download a set of the 2014 championship regulations from your chosen series and send off the application form.
2. Apply for a National B Non-Race competition license. In order to get the license you need to be a member of an MSA affiliated club.
3. Buy a good quality, fire resistant crash helmet.
4. Buy Nomex race overalls. You can buy a fire-proof Nomex suit from about £300 from any of the suppliers are listed in Autosport or the MSA Blue Book (which arrives along with your MSA Speed License).
5. Buy a pack of stick-on 9" race numbers while you're there.
6. Make up a timing strut to fit the front of your car. The exact dimensions are given in the MSA Blue Book, but basically when viewed from the side of the car it has to be twelve inches high and stick forward two inches, and be black. See section 4 for detailed guidelines for making one.
7. Mark the battery earth wire with yellow tape.

Car Modifications

Cars must comply with the technical regulations issued by the MSA. You should consult the MSA Blue Book for specifics but here's a summary:

Tyres: Depending upon the MSA category you select, cars must be shod with tyres appearing in list 1A or list 1B in the MSA Blue Book.

Shock absorbers: Generally, handling improves if you stiffen up the dampers by about 25-50% from normal road settings. If you are replacing the dampers at any point, it is recommended you buy those that can be adjusted on the car.

Harness: a competition harness is recommended as a safety measure, but it also holds you in your seat and improves your control over the car. Once you've tried one you'll never go back. Costs start from around £40, some work is generally required to fit them and the best advice is to come and see how someone else has done it.

Roll-over Bar: these are recommended but not always easy to fit in sports cars – MSA regulations with regard to roll over bars change regularly so best to read the MSA blue book for guidance.

Seat: you are allowed to fit a competition seat if you prefer it. Many people get by with the standard sports car seats if they are reasonably supportive.

Engine Modifications: engine modifications are permitted but will affect the car's power to weight algorithm. Any changes affecting the power to weight ratio of competitors' cars must be declared to the championship administrator so that the handicap algorithm can be updated.

Your First Sprint

You will receive an application form a few weeks before each event. If you intend to enter you should apply immediately - many events are oversubscribed and places are usually allocated on a first-come first-served basis. You should receive an acknowledgment within a week or so. In the week before the sprint you will receive a set of final instructions telling you your individual competitor number, how to find the circuit, timetable for the day, and the competition order of event.

Preparations

If you are running a modern roadgoing sports car, there are no special preparations, but any competition car needs to be well maintained kept on optimum running order.

What to take with you:

- . race overalls
- . crash helmet
- . timing strut (and means to attach)
- . competition numbers and number backgrounds
- . a groundsheet to protect any tools etc. from the elements
- . MSA competition license
- . Car club membership card
- . Speed Championship registration card
- . RTA driving license (normal road license)
- . Toolbox
- . Jack
- . Tyre pressure gauge
- . Foot pump or electric inflator
- . Oil for topping up
- . Spare fuel

- . Pre-mixed coolant
- . Bucket and chamois
- . Windscreen cleaner and or squeegee
- . Duct tape
- . Chair to sit on
- . Warm / waterproof clothes
- . Money for the burger van

If you're competing in a road-going car, you also need:

- . Insurance certificate
- . MOT certificate (if applicable)

Or, if you're competing in a non-road-going car, you need:

- . An MSA log book, or registration documents and a recent colour photo of the car showing the front driver's side three quarter view with the number plate visible, so you can buy a log book on the day.

What Happens On a Sprint Day?

Competitors start arriving shortly before the signing-on time in the final instructions – usually 8:00 or so. The normal order of business is to start by going along to "signing on" where the event organisers check your paperwork is in order.

Then, competitors check their cars (tyre pressures, oil and coolant level etc) attach their numbers to both sides and fit timing struts. They're now ready to join the queue for scrutineering, which is a basic safety check of the cars, crash helmets and race overalls. At a competitor's first sprint the scrutineer will check that the new crash helmet is of an approved type and sell the entrant an "MSA approved" sticker for £1 to show future scrutineers that it's OK.

Some clubs organise signing on and scrutineering differently so check the final instructions to see what has been organised.

Competitors are encouraged to walk the track if there is time before practice starts. This is your chance to visualise your line through each corner, look for useful reference points for braking and turning-in points, and to spot any hazards around the course. By the time you get back the chuck wagon will probably be open for business so you can tuck in to build up the calories you're about to burn off.

Top tip: Make sure you get back in time for the compulsory drivers' briefing where they'll remind everyone about how the runs are going to be organized and any special information or local regulations.

At some events entrants get a chance to drive round gently in convoy so you can see what the track looks like from the driving seat. Try not to be too wild - it is considered very bad form to spin on the convoy lap!

Then the driving starts. First there are a couple of practice runs (which are timed but don't count towards the final results) followed by the competitive runs. Make sure you know how many practice runs there are, and how many laps the practice and competitive runs are (they aren't always the same!).

Official timed runs follow the same sequence: cars queue up in number order and are ushered up to the line one at a time. Once you get close to the line the start-line marshals will take control of the car and push it the last few inches until it is perfectly lined up with the timing beam. Don't try to help unless they ask you to.

Timing is electronic. At the line, wait at the red light. A few seconds before your run starts one of the start-line marshals will direct your attention to the lights. The red light will change to green and you start in your own time but within 5 seconds of the light turning green. Note that the clock starts when the car breaks the timing beam and not when the light goes green.

Times are generally posted a few minutes after your run, so you can see how well you did and figure out how you're going to go even faster next time.

The day ends with a short prize-giving ceremony half an hour after the last runs. When packing up remember to take your timing strut and numbers off before you drive home - the police take a dim view of people driving on public roads with racing numbers on, and if you're reported your competition license may be revoked.

2014 Season

The new regulations and entry forms will soon be published to the various speed series websites.

At the end of the year, the various championships award prizes at their presentations evenings.

Useful contacts:

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www.classic-marques-speed-challenge.com

Chat group:

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/ClassicMarquesSpeedChallenge/conversations/messages>