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While enjoying our picnic lunch at Loton Park, we got chatting to **PETER BAKER** who volunteered to send ShACC an article on his experience of the **LOTON DRIVING SCHOOL**. I leaped at the offer.

Some would say (to pinch a Clarksonism) that the most rewarding Sunday driving may not be in a queue of many, unable to do a simple manoeuvre to over- take a hired campervan at 43mph in a 60 limit, seemingly attached to several mindless drongos velcroed to each other's back bumper and happy with the view. The horses you'd need to unleash to get past that lot, if allowed, would take you well into losing-your- licence territory and frighten your passenger.

Better by far (say I) to be hooning up a twisty road knowing there is nothing round the corner and exploring all the limits of your machine and yourself in an attempt to do it even quicker than before, and maybe show the world and yourself how good you and your horses are.

I have lived within earshot of Loton Park for over half my life and at last decided to get on with competing in Speed Hillclimbing there. As one who has never been on a track or competed on anything since the second flush of youth, the Loton Park Drivers' School fitted the bill.

For the price of a few tanks of petrol I had an excellent day at Loton in late August. Provided were a welcome, brews and a bun if needed, initial briefing, a guided walk in small groups up the track with advice from instructors, all seasoned competitors who know it well, to set us up to get the right lines and good habits from the start. There followed 4 solo runs, untimed, in the morning each followed by a debrief with a résumé of our good or sub-optimal performance on all observed key corners, with tailored advice. Blue cones were posted at entry, apex and exits of corners, but were removed after lunch which was top-class cuisine. Four more runs followed after lunch.

I was one of 28 drivers there, in a variety of road-legal cars from a Ferrari to a 1935 MG, with a few sports cars and some hatchbacks. Mine (the competition car is not ready) was my 1275 Scamp. The day before I spent wishing I had something posher and pokier to drive up the hill, but most of the day itself thanking my lucky stars that I hadn't.... I need not have worried as I had more than enough fun and a very valuable day at the limits of a road-going A+ powered box devoid of aerodynamics. I could not have handled the Ferrari's power (nor could its driver, he went off! He and the car escaped unscathed and did not need the attendant ambulance).

Later I was sent a video with good coverage of the day's runs, a lot of fun and testament to a day in which all of us learned a lot, whether newbies like me or seasoned drivers who wanted to learn or practice the course before competing. The day doubled for many as a practice day. I have certainly got the bug, it is confirmed, and look forward to competing next year with confidence.

The day was excellent value, cost no more than a few hours' labour at an independent garage, and my thanks go to the army of volunteer marshals, instructors, not forgetting the Hagley and District Light Car Club organisers who run the Loton Park set-up. The organisation was spot-on. Finally it's worth noting that several of the 28 present rated it as much better than the other Drivers' schools they have attended, the staff being friendly and courteous with a sense of humour not present at some other venues.

There will be Schools next year. Any petrolheads who (unlikely) do not know the Loton Park set-up which is more-or-less equidistant between Oswestry, Shrewsbury and Welshpool are missing out. I also attended the final day of the season there when the hill record, which had stood for 4 years was broken no less than 4 times in the run-offs; gripping, superb entertainment.

A few months after writing this (and still a novice!) I am researching my best bet from the limited choice of 1A/1B tyres available in the sizes I can run, when the car is ready. I stumble across what seems good advice that, out of Tyre choice, BHP, Suspension set-up and Seat time/Instruction/Experience, rubber comes firmly bottom of the list and the last three top: a priority. Plainly, even with the most expensive rubber, perfectly tuned suspension and limitless BHP you are not going to get very far if you haven't learned the basics properly which is not something possible except on a closed track

*Peter Baker*