

So you want to go Sprinting

A number of members have asked me (and other competitors) about this, so this is part one of a three part article aimed at helping the potential competitor.

Why Sprinting?

If you want to drive fast off road there are really only three options, Track Days, Racing and Sprints/Hillclimbs, all have their advantages. Track Days give you potentially lots of time in the car, but are not cheap and you do have the issue of the "other driver", Racing is 2 or 3 times the cost of sprinting, is harder on the car, and again has the "other driver" issue. Sprinting enables you to test yourself against the clock and compete against fellow competitors, frequently in some glorious settings, on track 'wear and tear' is much much lower than the other two disciplines. Sprinting is in many ways a good stepping stone to racing, ask Andy Priaux or our own Ben Gough.

Why a Scimitar?

All Scimitars are blessed with decent handling, power to weight and can easily be tuned to go faster. There is a history of development and they are also good value. At the last Prescott meet Trevor Shortt's Coupe was faster than all the big Healeys which are very expensive cars these days.

Which model?

Traditionally the Coupe has been the favourite being lighter than the GTE, but they take more development and are generally more valuable. A car already developed is probably the best bet.

The GTE 5a makes a splendid starter as a "roadgoing" competition car for very little money, and can be developed to go very fast, at a price.

The SS1 has the advantage of being lighter and in Turbo form faster than other models. Ford and Nissan powered cars make great sprinters at a modest price. The Turbo's in particular can be made to go faster at relatively low cost.

Standard or "tuned" car?

The key point is any car must be in good condition and safe. All its components will be highly stressed on track. One of the advantages of the RSSOC Championship is that it handicaps cars on power to weight so lower powered cars can be competitive. This year Brian Crouch won our "roadgoing" class in his SE5a driven to the track complete with wife and all equipment. "Developed" cars will be faster, but so is the competition! However, competition cars can sometimes be bought for a fraction of the cost of doing the work. Whichever route you follow there is plenty of expertise in the Club. (Craig Hughes' "Hot Hatch Hunter" articles are really the bible on SS1's.)

Whilst I have covered most safety equipment separately I will mention "roll over" bars. These are not "mandatory" on roadgoing cars, but are at higher levels. It is RSSOC policy that ALL SS1 cars competing must have at least the factory roll over protection.

Why the Scimitar Sprint Championship?

One of the “idiosyncracies” of Motor Sport is that you have to be a member of an “approved” club to be invited to events. Whilst RSSOC Club membership covers this for many events, the Championship offers a number of advantages for a small cost, including a level playing field of classes to compete in, a wealth of advice and help as well as assistance with entries. Above all a great “camaraderie” which is addictive.

I might make a fool of myself.

Very doubtful. An average driver (like me) who is prepared to learn and prepare well can be competitive. A number of clubs provide training/test days when you get the benefit of instructors. I did the one at Prescott and came away confident enough to give it a go. Seven seasons ago! There are also our own test days at Curborough in August where experienced competitors are available to help.

What will it cost?

There is no getting away from it, Motor Sport is expensive. To go sprinting you need:

Before you start:

Personal Safety Equipment (helmet, suit and gloves) £500. Seat and 4 point harness for car £ 250 (not strictly necessary for Roadgoing, but highly recommended, mandatory in other classes).

Each season:

A competition licence and club championship registration, say £60

Entry fee's for events. These vary from about £80 to £120 each. For seven events say £700.

So in the real world you are looking at about £1000 to get going, plus about £1000 per season including your travelling costs .Obviously equipment can be bought second hand, as can cars with seats/belts etc. ready fitted.

To put it in perspective this is a lot less than the depreciation on your neighbours new MX5!

In the next article we will look at preparation and what needs to be done before you compete.

Part 2- Preparation

The Car

Presuming you have a roadgoing car, with MOT tax etc. The Regulations do not require a great deal.

MSA Requirements

An oil catch tank is required. A One litre bottle with hoses from the engine breather is fine. An additional throttle spring is needed, as is clear (yellow) marking of the earth lead every few inches to

differentiate it to a Marshal from a pipe or other such lead in the event of an accident. . The ignition switch also needs to be marked with the "off" position, good old Dymo should do.

Basic Preparation.

It goes without saying that brakes, suspension , steering and the clutch must be in good condition. Decent tyres can make quite a difference, but will wear out (or more specifically work harden) in about three seasons. All items , battery etc need to be secure.

Give some thought to anything else that will make your life easier in the heat of battle, for example, many SS1 owners lower the floor to reduce the drivers head height. I have a 5th/reverse gear blanking plate so I cannot select these gears by mistake.

Safety

In my view a decent competition seat and a four point harness are essential . A basic seat can be had for about £150, and a four point harness from about £80. Both need to be fitted securely, pay particular attention to belt mounting points as the existing ones may not be adequate. If you do not want to fit these you will need to ensure you have a headrest.

Roll over protection is a tricky one. I would consider competing in an open car without one as foolish. The RSSOC will not accept a competitor who does not have at least the factory roll bar. It is a fact of life that no standard Scimitar has very good roll over protection.

Shared drives.

It is possible for 2 drivers to share a car at an event so sharing car costs. Both drivers still need an entry along with appropriate fee

Personal safety equipment.

A helmet needs to conform to MSA regs, notable show the red "fireproof" label. A motorcycle helmet will probably not do. These can be had from about £150. An open car will require a helmet with a visor. At your first "event" your scrutineer will check your helmet and for a small fee apply an MSA Blue approval label.

Race overalls similarly need to be MSA approved. These are a minimum of two layers of Nomex (for 2012),from about £ 230. You will also need fireproof gloves, another £45. You may want racing boots (I do ,with my big feet!) but these are not mandatory yet (they may be in 2012).

With all the safety gear you need to ensure a good fit, and it is wise to take advice. Somewhere like Demon Tweaks may not be the cheapest but they do know what they are doing.

Administration.

All serious Motorsport in the UK is controlled by the Motor Sports Association. To compete you will need a current National B Sprint Licence. Fortunately this is pretty straightforward with a form to complete and fee of about £40. This can be renewed annually on line. With your licence you will get

a copy of the rule book (known as the Blue Book) which details all the relevant regulations. Whilst this is not the easiest read I would strongly recommend perusing the relevant parts.

To compete in the RSSOC Championship you need to register with the Championship Co-ordinator (currently me), at a fee of £23.50. I will then ensure you get entry forms for events in our Championship and circulate results. You also get a Championship T shirt and car stickers. As our Championship uses power to weight to calculate handicaps I need a copy of a weight ticket for the car and a dyno power run. This is not essential for a standard roadgoing car where we will use the original factory figures.

Once you have our “programme” you will need to decide which events you wish to compete in. The RSSOC Curborough meet should be a must! To compete in any event you need to complete an entry form and forward to the event organisers with payment. This needs to be done at least a month in advance, possibly 2 for the most popular venues to ensure an entry. This can increasingly be done online. You will receive confirmation and instructions a week or so in advance.

In the final part of this article we will consider what you do on the day.

Part 3- The event

I am a great believer in planning and preparation (even if I do not always practice what I preach).

You will receive by post or E mail Final Instructions a week or so before the event. READ THEM .Note timing, your location, how to get there, and any special instructions. You should also receive passes and tickets. If for any reason you cannot compete you should get a partial refund.

Prepare for the venue. These days you can watch most being driven on U Tube. Preferably a model as close to your own car as possible. There are a number of Track Guides, there is a link to one on the Competition page of the Club Web Site.

Check the car, all fluids, tyres, wheel nuts etc. Make sure you have enough fuel. You will need two extra items. A timing strut (size as per the Blue Book), which you need to fix to the front of the car. This strut acts as a ‘beam breaker’, starting and stopping the start/finish line clock. Also race numbers (as per your final instructions). DO NOT fit these to the car in advance if you are driving it there. Much frowned upon by MSA and Police. Most of us use self adhesive numbers ,but you do not have to. If you do , beware,- they may “remove” paint or varnish from the car (one of the reasons many fit “roundels”).

Collect all your paperwork. Your Competition Licence and current Club Membership Card (and/or Championship Registration Card). If you are in a Roadgoing Class you need Tax, MOT and Insurance. An MSA Logbook is an acceptable alternative for Modsport and higher classes.

Prudence dictates taking some basic tools and parts. Oil and petrol, and a tyre pump. If you are driving to the event remember all this will have to be removed from the car. Some way of keeping them dry would be wise!

And so to the event. Allow plenty of time, being “rushed” will not put you in the right state of mind. Having got there park your car in your allocated space. Fit numbers, timing strut etc, remove ALL loose items from the car including the spare wheel.

Take all your paper work and “sign on”. You will not be scrutineered or allowed to run until you do this. Take note of any special Instructions, not all events run the same way.

Now is a good time to walk the track. This is traditional (all GP drivers do this), and there is no substitute for this to understand the finer points and condition of the track. Many venues make this compulsory for first time drivers. There are a few venues (Goodwood, Castle Combe) where this is not very practical, but a slow paced ‘convoy run’ drive through behind a safety course car is organised to familiarise the drivers before starting practice proper.

Next is Scrutineering. This will be a check on the safety of your car, and it’s conformation to relevant MSA regs. It will also include your personal safety kit. Remember, the Scrutineer is always right! If you have an issue, work with him to resolve it. If necessary ask your fellow competitors to help. Most of us have had a problem at some time or another. Whilst on the subject remember all Marshalls are unpaid volunteers without whom they would be no event. Treat them with courtesy and do what they ask.

You should now be ready to run! You will be called to the start , normally in number order. Get your kit on in plenty of time and let the car warm up. When you get to the start the marshalls will position your car just before the timing light. When the red light turns to green go in your own time. Do not feel rushed. Your two practice runs are exactly that, think about your lines, gear changing and braking points.

So what about your times? Some venues show you a display at the end of the course, most have a “timing hut” where you can see your times on a display. Most will give you a number of “splits” of your time at various parts of the course. Over time this can be very useful (and worth recording) as you can see where you improve, and how you compare with your competitors.

So to your Competitive Runs. You will always get at least two, some venues may give you as many as 4, but this is never guaranteed. In reality this is no different to practice. I will not presume to advise the best approach, but tidy usually pays.

At the end of the day remember to remove numbers etc, and do not forget any of your gear! (I have). Hopefully you have had a rewarding day and both driver and car are in the same condition as when you arrived. This is what I call a Good Day.