

how fast



In a country that's overpopulated with speed cameras and congested with traffic, it's no surprise that track days are so popular. Let's face it, if you really want to enjoy your performance Ford's full potential, you have to get to a track, and as luck would have it, there are dozens of awesome circuits in the UK on which to let rip and have some fun.

From Knockhill to Lydden Hill, we really are spoilt for choice and, as many enthusiasts will confirm, once you've experienced the buzz of

The Fast Show

Club MSV's new How Fast events promise a track day with a twist. We borrow a Focus RS and head to Bedford Autodrome to find out more...

Words: Luke Pics; Chris



blasting around a race track, it's hard not to get addicted. But while track days are undoubtedly fantastic, they do have limitations. Yes, you can drive as fast as you like, and unless you're dropping oil everywhere or acting like a pillock, the marshals will generally leave you in peace.

Racing, however, is a strict no-no, as is timing, and while it can be tempting to out brake the car in front or overtake around the outside of Paddock Hill, the rules are clear; if you want to go racing, then get a race licence.

Motorsport is expensive though, even at club level, and by the time you've earned your National B and bought race overalls, you could have had an entire year's worth of track days.

Happily, there is now an alternative that combines all the best bits of a track day with the competitive adrenaline rush of a proper race, and it's all thanks to the guys at Club MSV. Called 'How Fast', Club MSV has created a whole new track experience that allows you to put your car up against the clock, and as the results

are fed into a computer and stored online for all to see, you can not only see how fast you are compared to a whole host of other cars, but you can effectively throw down the gauntlet to your mates as well. Best of all, you don't need a licence or any other expensive safety gear apart from your usual crash hat, so with sessions priced from just £99, it's got to be one of the most affordable ways of getting out on track.

In fact it sounded like such a good idea we decided to head along to the first How Fast



With just an hour to practice, you have to keep a cool head in order to make the most of the timed runs. All the times are posted online

event at Bedford Autodrome to see if it would live up to expectations, although in order to do the job properly, we needed a willing volunteer.

They needed to be someone who loves their track days, someone who has a decent track car and, more importantly, someone who was daft enough to let us borrow the keys so that we could have a go as well. Enter Neil Springgate, the proud owner of a Mk2 Focus RS, a bona fide track day junkie and a man who was more than happy for us to abuse his pride and joy around Bedford. Neil, who was weaned on a diet of Fords thanks to his dad, had always promised himself an RS before the age of 30, and while he came close to buying a 3-dr Cosworth, it was the Mk2 RS that eventually won the place on his driveway.

"It was actually at one of the PF Brands Hatch track days a couple of years back that I decided I wanted one," Neil explained. "I'd

come down to watch with Andy Burton who's a mate of mine, and we spotted an early Focus RS out on track. We were so impressed that we both ordered one each within a week!"

With some close ties to Burton Power, it's no surprise that Neil's car hasn't remained standard, although rather than spend big money on increasing the power, he's decided to concentrate on upgrading the chassis and handling. Powerflex bushes and a Vibra-Technics torque link have added some rigidity while a set of Gaz Gold coilovers are in place to fine-tune the suspension, which has been adjusted and corner-weighted by DT Motorsport. The standard wheels have been replaced by lightweight 18" Wolfrace Pro Lites wrapped with Newton NT5000 rubber, and while the standard calipers have been retained, Neil has upgraded the lines with Goodridge braided hoses and the pads with Cosworth

track and fast road items.

It's a relatively modest list of mods, especially in a world where big power gets all the headlines, but then they all add up to a very effective package – as we were about to find out for ourselves...

While we were champing at the bit to find out what Neil's RS could do, we first had to attend the obligatory safety briefing and while this covered everything you'd expect for a regular track day, the different aspects of a How Fast event soon became apparent. We would have a one hour un-timed session to familiarise ourselves with Bedford's 1.8-mile West circuit layout, followed by a pair of three lap timed sessions that would include an out-lap, a hot-lap and an in-lap. As we were sharing the car with Neil (something that wouldn't normally be allowed at How Fast) we would only get 30-mins each and one flying lap – no pressure then!



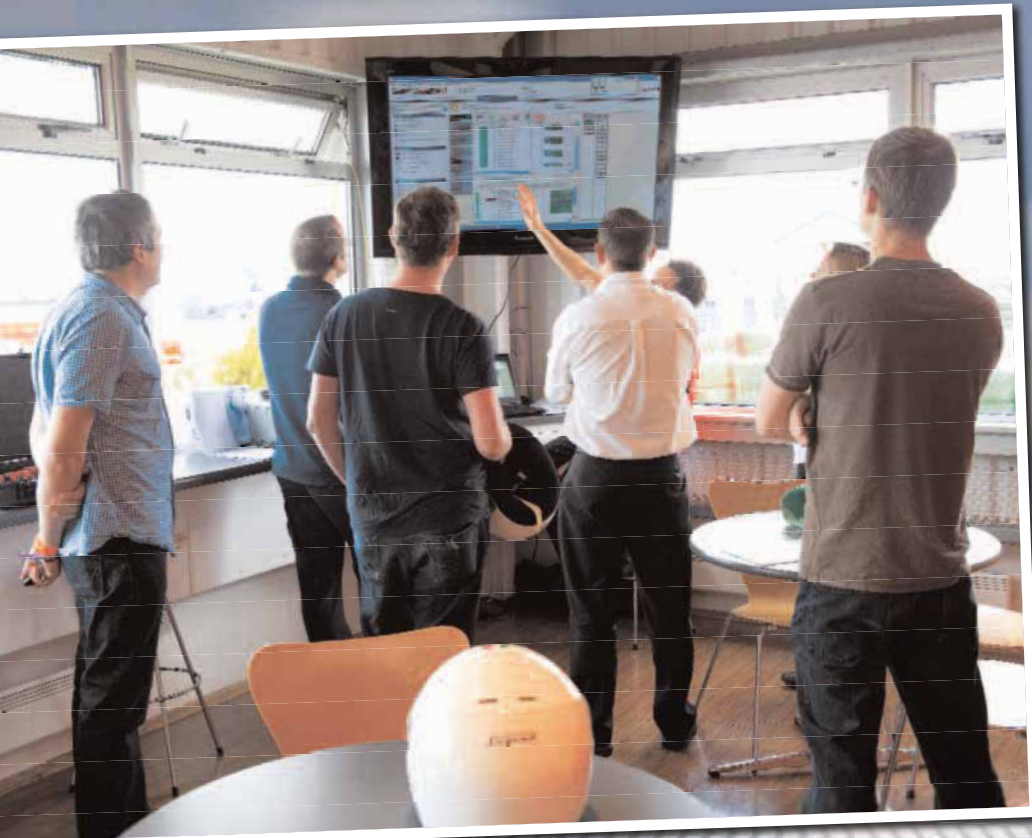


as well, so there's nowhere to hide!



“I spotted an early Focus RS out on track and was so impressed that I ordered one within a week!”





FORD FACTS

ENGINE

2.5-litre RS, Samco hoses, K&N filter, NGK plugs, Vibra-Technics torque link

TRANSMISSION

Standard

SUSPENSION

Gaz Gold coilovers, full Powerflex bushes, corner weighted and set up by DT Motorsport

BRAKES

Standard calipers, Cosworth track/fast road pads, Goodridge braided hoses

WHEELS & TYRES

18" Wolfrace Pro Lites with Newton NT5000 tyres

THANKS

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Luckily for us, it wasn't the first time we'd driven the West circuit, even if it was about five years ago, so the real challenge was going to be getting up to speed in an unfamiliar car without binning it, although with Neil watching nervously from the pit lane, that was going to be easier said than done. Fortunately, the safety of the drivers is one of the biggest factors with How Fast and this is the reason that Club MSV has chosen Bedford Autodrome as the sole venue, for the time being at least. With nothing to hit apart from cones and no barriers or gravel traps, the chances of anyone having an accident are minimal. In addition to this, the instructors make it clear that they expect above average driving standards for a How Fast event, so anyone who looks like they're not up to the task, or who is deemed to be putting themselves or others at risk, will be politely asked to leave...

As it happens, Neil's Focus was a beauty and thanks to the excellent corner weighted suspension setup, handled more like a racer than a fully loaded road car. The Mk2 RS is a pretty handy machine in the corners even in standard trim, but thanks to the adjustable Gaz coilovers on Neil's car, we just couldn't believe how much speed could be carried into the twisties - and how little understeer there was on the way out either. We've driven stripped-out race cars that didn't handle as well!

After a dozen laps or so we were really starting to fly, but with no timing allowed in the practice session we had no idea if the lap times were getting better, which was frustrating. Anyone hoping to use the practice session to fine-tune settings or tyre pressures will have to rely on gut instinct in order to tell whether they make any difference or not, although on the plus side, the lack of information does make

the final timed runs more demanding, and exciting. The key to a quick lap relies on a lot of concentration. With cars spaced out half a lap apart you have no-one to tag on to and with only one hot lap to set a time, you have to hit every braking point and clip every apex in order to make it count. Make a mistake and your chances of posting a good time on the leaderboard will go up in smoke.

As for our times, well you can check out the results on www.clubmsv.com/leaderboard.aspx, but before you start taking the piss and claiming that you can do better, trust us when we say that it's a lot harder than it seems. When you're sitting in the pit lane waiting for your turn and when you know that everyone else present is glued to the computer timing screen to see what you can do, it takes a cool head to put a good lap together. So what are you waiting for? ■

CONTACT

www.clubmsv.com

A big thanks to...

Neil Springate for lending us his awesome Focus RS

