

High Performance Driving



I've just started this course with John Lyon in my 1996 855 T5 Auto. The first halfday introductory drive was an eye-opener. We started from a village in Leicestershire. John took the wheel and immediately put the box into third gear, sport mode: he never changed this set-up, except in villages, until he relinquished the wheel at Melton Mowbray, seventeen miles away.

That drive, all along 'B' roads, with commentary all the way, was a revelation. We passed through several small villages and I was surprised by how slowly he negotiated these, with the use of the horn several times, where I would not have thought of it. Also, on more than one occasion, he selected low range on the gearbox, treating it more like a manual than an auto. He was not afraid to exceed the National speed limit where safe to do so (incidentally, he refers to it as the Temporary National speed limit; he claims that it has to be renewed by parliament every six months). On that drive, it was remarkable how little he needed to use the brakes.

At Melton, I took control and we drove for about another fifty miles with John analysing my technique and offering advice. I was soon driving

much more smoothly than previously and improving my line through bends and positioning for overtaking. A most enjoyable drive.

When we got back we spent some time analysing the drive and he suggested the next stage should be a whole day, including the use of the Millbrook Proving Ground, to which he has access, so we arranged to meet a couple of weeks later.

I met John as arranged, at his home in a village near Stamford, on February 15th. As before, he gave a demonstration drive for about twenty miles before I took over. He selected a route avoiding virtually all 'A' roads, except for a stretch of the A1; this to avoid speed cameras and patrols. He expected me to use the performance of the car where conditions permitted, yet being ultra cautious in towns and villages. He said that the smoothness of my driving had improved significantly.

After a couple of hours, we arrived at Millbrook. This is a marvellous facility with, apart from the off-road sections, which we didn't use, several road circuits including handling and hill sections. Also, the two mile, five lane banked circle on which the highest lane has a minimum speed of

90 MPH. On this, John took the car to almost 150 MPH. When it was my turn, I gave up at 140! On to the hill loop, where he demonstrated and I tried to emulate him, without much success. It was the same story on the outer handling circuit, with its series of tight bends and occasional adverse cambers. I would not have believed that a Volvo Estate could be driven like that! It was, at the same time, exhilarating and terrifying. We finished with time on the steering circle where I learned the technique of 'trail braking' to keep the car balanced in tight turns, and how understeer can be so easily controlled. I had not previously explored the potential of the ABS system, but did so here. The fuel consumption at Millbrook was 14MPG, and I reckon it took about 1000 miles off the life of my tyres!

I then drove back to our starting point, where, as before, John analysed how the day had gone. A total of 220 miles driven. He marked me one grade higher than the first drive, but I still have a long way to go if I'm ever to consider myself a high performance driver.

Chris Kay

Sales and Wants

Due to my relocation to Oxfordshire during July /August 2005, I would ask that all correspondence be forwarded to me via post, not fax or e mail, as the telephone/fax number and e mail address, published in the magazine, will be disconnected from early July. All postal enquiries will be dealt with as soon as possible, but please appreciate there may be a delay in return, due to mail being forwarded from my old address. New details will be published in the next magazine and on the website as soon as possible.

Ian Ashton