

MONTLHERY

Autodrome de Linas - Montlhéry

- the old place with the very steep banking!



Have you ever found that traffic direction signs, in France, leave much to be desired. The problem is that the signs seem to be good, from far out but then seem to peter out - as if the French couldn't be bothered to put more up. The upshot, in my experience, is that I have an idea of where I am going, but once I am on (or think that I may be on) the right road, I can never be sure, because there will not be any signs to re-affirm it to me.



Why am I ranting about this? Montlhéry! That's why.

I have family who live on the Loire, south of Paris and so have travelled, on many occasions, down to Kent, through the tunnel and out into (with what always seems to be better weather) France, at Calais. I head down the E19 / A1 towards Paris, where I look out for signs to the A86 Francilienne, the (sort of) outer ring road, to take me round Paris. The problem is that this road has many different numbers - A104, A86, E50 and N12, to name a few. It also has various different names, used on signs, as you pass round Paris.

However, by keeping faith and with a fair wind, I usually end up heading roughly in the right direction and turn south, onto either the A10 (also called E5) if I want a quick drive down, or onto the N20 - and here's the point - I had never realised that this junction, where the A104 (as it is at that point) Francilienne meets the N20, is right next to the Linas-Montlhéry Motor race

track - the old place with the very steep banking.

During the first quarter of the 20th century, a time of terrific technological development, speed records and competition were king. Brooklands had been built, in 1907, Indianapolis in 1911 and Monza in 1922. In France, a wealthy industrialist named Lamblin, decided that his country should have it's own version. He constructed a 2.5 km length ring, with two short 180 meter straights, on opposite sides, which was completed in 1923. The unusual feature, of Montlhéry, though, was that the obligatory (for the time) parabolic 50 degree plus banking, designed to allow increased speeds to be achieved and which was set at an incredible angle of banking - so steep and so high. A road section was added a couple of years later, giving added versatility of use, to the circuit.

It was here, also, over many years, that Healeys and Austin-Healeys were brought, for various speed distance record attempts - records which, once achieved and suitably publicised, would result in sales of new cars.

In 1948 a pair of Healeys - a Westland and an Elliott - were entered into the Paris 12 Hours race at the circuit. Sadly, although both put up a good show - including the Elliott managing to show the entire field it's rear number plate, at the start, both were retired before the



**The Healey 100 at 100 MPH
Montlhéry - 1955**



end of the race, with mechanical problems.

In 1955, a collection of 5 standard BMC production cars, including an Austin Healey 100, was loaded onto a "Silver City Airways" Bristol Freighter (one of those planes, where the whole front opened up, to allow cars to drive inside) and flown to Le Touquet, en route to Montlhéry. They were to

attempt to set an extraordinary record - all 5 cars were to individually drive at a speed of at least 100 miles an hour, each for an hour.

Unfortunately, on the day which was set for the record attempt, they were to not only encounter the technical problems and tensions of such a feat, but were also to be severely tested by the weather - some of the worst imaginable. As they drove the 170 or so miles, in convoy, to reach the circuit, things were not good. By the time they arrived, they were greeted with the news that gales and heavy rain were expected. The series of one hour trials began with an MGA, then a Riley Pathfinder (with driver and three passengers on board), followed by the Austin Healey 100 (in the hands of Ron Flockart) as the weather and spray off the surface worsened. An Austin A90 Westminster followed and the final session was taken by a Wolseley 6/90.

All five cars completed their one hour stint and all achieved the minimum 100 miles per hour average. The event was covered, as was often the case, by BMC camera crews and became the subject of a BMC documentary entitled "Against the Clock" which is available from BMIHT. Ahh, yes, I remember, I hear you say!. The place where Jeremy Welch lead an AH race, in 2002, from the flag dropping at the start, until, on the last lap, he was nudged off at one of the infield hairpins (designed to slow the cars down, on the banking sections) and was slammed into the outer wall, at the top of the spectacularly steep banking, ending his race.

You might also have seen reference to the circuit having been used for a spectacular motoring advertisement, in 2010, featuring rally driver Ken Block. Called Gymkhana Three - it was an advertisement for his own show company - and it received some 7 million views (yes 7,000,000) on You Tube. If you haven't seen it, have a look. You can easily find it on You Tube and it is well worth a viewing.

Montlhéry hosted many prestigious motor racing events, through the 1920's and 30's and many speed record attempts took place there. Montlhéry did not suffer the many noise restrictions which were imposed on Brooklands, for instance.

Unfortunately, the unique feature of the track, it's parabolic banking, became it's downfall. The concrete surface proved extremely difficult and costly to maintain and, as vehicle speeds increased, the track was not able to cope - it's parabolic banked corners having been designed, back in the 1920's, to cope only with speeds increasing to 140 miles per hour. It passed, firstly, into government hands and then was used for research. In 1946 the management of the facility changed and improvements and maintenance were carried out, which again allowed its usage. It's racing permit appears not to have been renewed after 2005, although it is still used as a venue for motor racing revival and enthusiast meetings.

I have never been - but I bet it still has a wonderful atmosphere.....

Rod Graham

TEAM of Cambridge undergraduate drivers with the record-breaking Healey at Montlhéry. Left to right: J. A. B. Taylor, G. Horrocks, T. J. Threlfall, R. S. R. Simpson, R. S. Jones, J. M. Clarke and W. H. Summers.

AUSTIN-HEALEY TAKES INTERNATIONAL RECORDS

AN Austin-Healey 100-Six, prepared at Abingdon, has broken seven International Class D Records for speed and duration at the Montlhéry circuit, near Paris. Driven virtually non-stop from 8 a.m. on Tuesday, 9th September, until 3 p.m., Saturday, 13th September, by a team of seven Cambridge undergraduates captained by Gyde Horrocks, the car has set the following new records:—

5,000 miles at an average speed of 98.5 m.p.h. (158.52 k.p.h.).

10,000 kms. at an average speed of 97.31 m.p.h. (157.05 k.p.h.).

Two days at an average speed of 98.73 m.p.h. (150.89 k.p.h.).

Three days at an average speed of 97.33 m.p.h. (156.63 k.p.h.).

Four days at an average speed of 97.04 m.p.h. (156.17 k.p.h.).

15,000 kms. at an average speed of 97.04 m.p.h. (156.17 k.p.h.).

10,000 miles at an average speed of 97.13 m.p.h. (156.22 k.p.h.).

In addition to the above figures (which include all stops for refuelling, driver changes and so on), a preliminary run was made at an average speed of 102 m.p.h. for 3,000 miles. The remarkable oil consumption figure of 1 pint per 1,000 miles was recorded.

The drivers, all members of the Cambridge University Automobile Club, were: G. Horrocks, J. M. Clarke, R. S. Jones, R. S. R. Simpson, W. H. Summers, J. A. B. Taylor and T. J. Threlfall.

