

MN'S PRIZE WINNER

Photos: Duncan Stephens



Hills and thrills

A newcomer's first steps

MN winner John Fox loved the Loughborough Autosolo

by **Matt Burt**
editor



Talk about an eye-opener. In the past couple of months, John Fox has experienced two contrasting motorsport events. Each time he's been thrown in at the deep end, and each time he's scaled the almost-vertical learning curve.

The common thread linking Fox's exploits is that each time he's competed he's discovered how easy – and cheap – it can be to get

started in motorsport. Fox was the winner of the *MN*/British Trial and Rally Drivers' Association (BTRDA) Drive competition at the start of the year, and his prize was the loan of the BTRDA's 1300cc Nissan Micra for a series of grassroots events.

Since his adventures on the first event, the Warwick Drivers Autotest in Rugby, were detailed in *MN* on May 21, he's competed twice more, sharing the car each time with Julian Archard (pictured with Fox, right), winner of a similar competition for under 17s.

The Wyre Forest Car Trial in Stourport was an event of highs and lows for Fox. The high point

was scaling one of the hilly tests successfully, but Fox found the trial lived up to its name: "It was hard due to my lack of off-road experience, as well as learning with no more than three minutes of practice. It is a sport of no reprieve. Make a mistake and it is game over – for that hill at least. I never really got my teeth into it, but I will do better next time."

After the rigours of the trial, Fox turned his

attention back to asphalt for the Loughborough Autosolo in Nuneaton earlier this month. Although he hadn't driven the Micra on a hard surface since the autotest in May, and was cautious on his early runs, his times

tumbled as

he built up confidence. He ended the day seventh in class A (for production cars up to 1300cc) and 22nd overall out of the event's 37 competitors.

"I felt I could really push myself on the autosolo. I really enjoyed it and it was the best fun I've had in a long time," he says. "With some more time to get familiar with the car, I think I could really push up the leaderboard. It's just like

thrashing round Sainsbury's car park just without the danger of arrest, and only a clock to beat!

"I was able to challenge a few people, but to be competitive you'd need to get the body roll out of the car and be very familiar with it."

With three events under his belt, Fox is at the halfway point of his first season of motorsport. Although he has three more events scheduled in the Micra – starting with the Loughborough Autotest at Nuneaton on September 17 – Fox has started thinking about buying his own competition car: "I've learned that practice is the key. When I have my own car, you won't get me out of it," he says. ■



"It's like thrashing round a car park" Fox

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