

Staff Cars

WHO:

ANDREW EVERETT
 TBMW CONTRIBUTOR

WHAT:

E36 320i

MILEAGE:

133,000

YEAR:

1992



This month, more on the Croft track day excursion which we touched on last month. Preparation for the Green Beast was unusually thorough for me. Leaving it mechanically standard, I fitted the Spax VSX kit I removed from the green J plate 320i albeit with M Technic 325i Coupe rear springs as the Spax ones seemed a bit low – no idea why but with the M Technic springs the car sat perfectly with the nose slightly down.

Other prepping involved replacing the lower front wishbone rear bushes with E36 M3 items which although still with voids, are hugely stiffer than the standard items and make the car more stable under braking. Finally tyres – a fluke trip to a tyre shop found a pair of virtually new Toyo Proxes in

the correct 205/55x15 size to add to a pair of mint Pirelli P6000s I already had. Put this lot together and we have an E36 that doesn't go any faster than a standard car but which should handle really well.

Saturday and Sunday morning were spent doing last-minute checks and installing a new set of brake pads. I went out and bought a set of EBC 'Yellow' pads which are

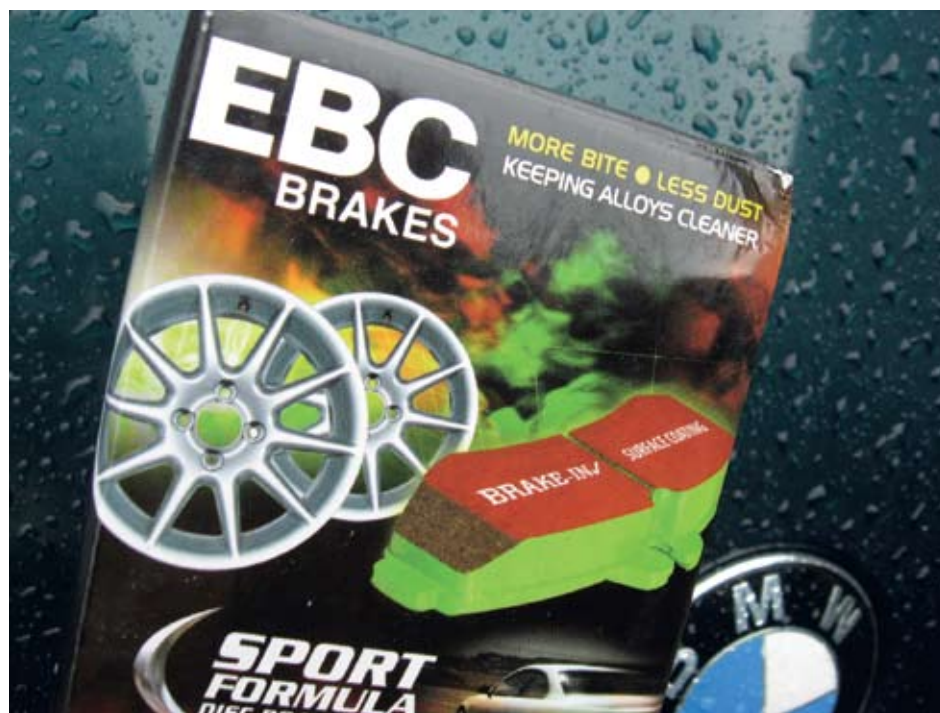
specially made for track use but which can also be used on the road. As it happens, EBC yellows are excellent – not once did the car threaten to run out of brakes and judging by the smoke coming from a couple of wheels after pulling in from a hard lap, they were hot enough. Take that as a recommendation!

Arriving at Croft at just gone 8am I was greeted with the sight of some serious machinery – plenty of E30 M3s on trailers with a selection of tyres, a stunning red Porsche 911 GT3, a TVR and lots of other BMWs including various diesels and a pair of E21 316's.

First thing first is briefing ably done by both Nick Wright and Colin who is full time at Croft. The good thing about BMW Car Club track days is the lack of headbangers – it's all professional people with cars they take pride in no matter how old they are and the driving etiquette to match. The Croft people like the BMW Car Club as a result.

So, it's out on the circuit and as it's been two years since I last did Croft I join a load of others for a few slow laps of the circuit to remember what it's about.

Croft is a lovely circuit and although it has a few aces up its sleeve there aren't really any nasty surprises. As a result it's a circuit you can learn very quickly and it doesn't take long to put up some very decent times. Because it's easy to learn the basics you can spend a whole day trying different lines and experimenting with both the circuit and your car. There is plenty of run-off and so it's the perfect circuit for beginners.



The circuit is nice and fast. Going along the pit straight, you need to brake from around 90-100 mph to take the right-hander into Clervaux, full beans to 'straighten' the kink between Clervaux and brake hard for Hawthorn Bend which is taken in third gear as fast as you like. In my E36 I took it flat out in third and steaming through the Chicane, my favourite bit of the circuit. On the long straight the slight left hand kink is taken flat-out but you need to anchor on for Tower bend which is a slowish third gear bend.

From here, the Jim Clark Esses are tricky. I could take these at anywhere between 70 and 100 but 100 feels decidedly dicey, although fast cars and proper drivers can go a lot faster. Barcroft is pretty much a flat-out bend, and while I noticed a few drivers were taking Sunny In (the first right hander after Barcroft) without braking, I found that I needed to brake from around 80 mph, down to third and take it under power. Sunny Out – the next right hander – seemed to suit the E36.

In the last E30 I took here I had to back off to get the car balanced for the bend but the E36 just took Sunny In and Out in one arc under power. Along a short straight and on the brakes again for the left hander into Complex which is taken in third gear. Total circuit length? 2.1 miles.

The great thing about the BMW CC track days is that you don't get hassled. If you're exploring the circuit for the first time in a 318i, the guy in the CSL or 993 Turbo won't be hassling you and despite being one of the slower cars on the day I didn't once feel intimidated – of course it's good manners to move over when you see something much



faster steaming up behind but you'll never see bad manners here.

Being a British summer the rain did eventually come. I had been out chasing down a mate in an E36 M3 and was gaining, gaining gaining... and I'd almost got him at Complex when the rain started and he pulled into the pits. I packed all my bits into the car and prepared to head home... but by 4 pm the track was pretty dry again so I unpacked all the bits and headed out again for another 16 laps with the orange fuel light halting play.

By that time it was nigh on 4.30pm, so I parked up and hopped in with a guy who had

been blatting his 1982 E21 316 1800 around all day – his first-ever track day. "This is fantastic," he said. "Every lap I do, the more I love it." Looking at the final mileometer count revealed 139 miles – that's 66 laps and every one highly enjoyable.

Track days are becoming very popular now and too many are filled with whooshing Subarus, Fords and general mayhem – rest assured that a BMW Car Club track day is nothing like this and the next Croft meeting in July 2008 is an absolute must. Anything that gets me parting with £140 without moaning must be good...

WHO:

ADAM TAIT
TBMW CONTRIBUTOR

WHAT:

E30 320i

MILEAGE:

97,000

YEAR:

1985

I could have bought a pattern part job, but I called the helpful parts desk at Cooper Maidstone and bought a genuine BMW clutch kit. For those of you that live in Kent and need a skilled person to take care of your BMW, Neil can be contacted on 07795 843414.

Other developments include a cream leather interior which was bought from www.e30zonet.net, a new cam belt has been fitted, and I gave it a full service last weekend. But I'm not sure what to do with it now: does it stay, or does it go? Although I try to ignore the fact, it's pretty obvious that I've got too many projects on the brew.



I'm surrounded by a fleet of cars that could fill a forecourt, but a forecourt where test drives would be a no-no... because I've only one fully road legal car out of six.

Admittedly, two are used for competition, but as for the others, well, they just sit around. One of which is the E30, which has only been given some loving in the past month or so. It needed a new clutch, so with the help of a mate, Neil, who is a qualified BMW technician, the job was tackled in a dingy lockup, with no power, so the lighting was of the Stevie Wonder variety.