

Preparation is Everything

Evan Bottcher looks at what you need to go racing

So you want to be Tazio Nuvolari?

You've always dreamed of getting involved in motorsport, but always felt it was out of your reach. The Alfa club runs a calendar of motorsport events that are easily accessible to the average enthusiast. So there's no excuse to put it off any longer!

The Alfa club run a series of entry-level circuit events called 'supersprints', where the driver is competing to get the fastest lap time for the day, on circuits including Phillip Island, Winton, and Sandown. As the emphasis is away from 'wheel to wheel' racing, the requirements for licensing and preparation are lessened. As such the AROCA Sprint days are an excellent way to get into circuit racing.

So how do you get started? Following is a guide – mostly taken from our club's excellent 'supp regs' for sprint events.

Paperwork

First of all you need to be a fully paid up club member to enter in our sprints, or a member of another car club that has been invited to the event.

You do need a couple of licenses to get started in the club sprints, but they are not difficult to obtain. The first is a CAMS "Level 2 Speed (2S)" licence which involves filling out a form and sending it to CAMS with a fee (currently \$85). This is your license to drive in "speed events" like sprints.

The second required license is a

CAMS official's license – why an official's license? The officials who make our sprint events run so smoothly are all volunteers, and we need to be able to ask any of our competitors to lend a hand. CAMS now have compulsory licensing requirements for officials, so we require our competitors to acquire an official's license. There is no cost for the official's license.

If you have ANY prior experience officiating at any level, fill out an application for a grade 4 license in as many categories (i.e. flagging, competition area, event command) as you can. If you have no prior experience of any sort, then print out a 'junior license' and bring it along to your event – after 3 events you will qualify for grade 4.

Equipment

Here is only a summary of the equipment required to attend a sprint – please read the detailed supplementary regulations issued before each event as rules will change.

Clothing – At minimum clothing must cover all limbs e.g. jeans and long-sleeved top made of non-flammable wool or cotton. No nylon or polyester for obvious reasons.

Helmet – Your helmet must be in good condition with no visible scratches or marks. It must display a sticker showing it conforms to the AS1698 or equivalent standard and be less than 10 years old.

Fire Extinguisher – A suitable fire extinguisher (conforming to AS 1841.5) must be mounted with a steel bracket within ready

reach of the driver.

Headlights – Headlights and foglights must be covered in a clear adhesive film e.g. contact to hold the glass together in the event of breakage.

Battery Triangle – A 150mm blue triangle sticker must be affixed to indicate the position of the battery. This is to show emergency crews the position of the battery in the event of an accident, they might need to cut power to avoid a fire. These are available to purchase at check-in on the day.

Numbers – You will need to affix numbers to both sides of your car and one side of your bonnet (this varies depending on the track, check your supp regs). These numbers must be minimum 230mm in height. These are also available to purchase at check-in on the day.

Throttle return springs – On carburetted cars, each carb throttle valve must have an additional return spring to prevent sticking open if the main throttle linkage becomes detached.

Bonnet catches – Cars must have 2 independent catches or fasteners for their bonnets, meaning an additional catch or strap must be added to most cars. Bodily unmodified cars with front-hinged bonnets (made after 1973) are exempt.

Metal valve caps – Tyres must be fitted with metal valve caps.

If you aren't sure about any requirement, please contact the competition secretary who will help you out.

Trackworthy?

Your car will be inspected by a scrutineer before it will be allowed near the track. This will check that all the requirements in the previous section (bonnet catches, throttle return springs etc.) have been met, plus some basic checks of the integrity of

your car. Here are some examples of the types of things that commonly cause a failure at scrutineering: loose battery, loose wheel bearings, oil leaks, brake lights not working.

The scrutineers can only check so much, so you do however have to use some common sense. You're about to take your car on the track and explore the limits of its acceleration, cornering, and braking. Here's a few areas to consider...

Brakes – Brakepads tend to take a beating on the race track, so generally with normal road pad material you'll need a set that are no more than half worn to make sure they go the distance. You might consider a set of harder compound pads that will handle the heat better.

Brake Fluid – Brake fluid is hygroscopic – it absorbs water from the air, which then boils in the fluid when it gets hot. If you haven't changed your brake fluid in the last year, definitely do it before your first sprint to stop your brakes from boiling. I mean a full flush and replacement of the fluid, not just bleeding a little bit off.

Steering and Suspension – This is just common sense – all of your suspension components have to be tight and free from wear to ensure your car goes where you tell it and in a safe manner. If you're not sure, get things checked out.

Tyres – Tyres will always take a beating on the race track, but things will be much worse if you don't consider tyre pressures. Somewhere in the order of 10–15psi higher than normal road pressures is needed. Ask around the paddock for advice if you're not sure.

If this sounds a bit serious, remember that lots of entries at every AROCA sprint event are standard road cars – people who

drive the car to and from the track.

On the day

You've paid your entry fee, you have your licenses and your car is fully prepared. You've received the 'supplementary regulations' that cover the specifics for this event and include a detailed running order for the day including your group numbers for practice and the sprint.

You will be required to arrive at the track very early, usually around 7am to check in and prepare your car for scrutineering. Empty your car of all loose items, including the spare tyre and tools from the boot, and line your car up to be scrutineered. Get into line particularly early if this is your first time, this will give you a chance of fixing anything that's wrong in time to make practice. A short driver's briefing will happen before practice – you must attend.

If this is your first event, make sure you put your hand up for a familiarisation session. An experienced driver will go around with you to show you the correct line and gears to use around the circuit. Practice will then begin, wait for your group to be called to the dummy grid over the loudspeaker. When your group is called please move quickly to line up your car to keep the day running smoothly.

Practice is intended for familiarisation with the circuit and to warm up – stay well within your limits and try to memorise the circuit, pick out braking points and corner apexes. Don't pass other cars unless they clearly indicate you to pass. If you wish to be passed, indicate with your arm which side the passing car should go, and slow down. Carefully read the instructions in your supp regs regarding flags and

other procedures on the track.

The rest of the day will be made up of the sprint event. When your group is called to the dummy grid line up and when the track is clear the start line marshall will call you forward in pairs to enter the track. Each sprint will start with a warm up lap, followed by 3 or 4 'hot laps', then you'll be presented with the chequered flag and you will go around for a cool down lap before exiting the track. Have fun – the adrenaline will be really flowing during the flying laps. During the cool down lap slow down and watch your braking points and lines and think about how to go faster in the next session.

Between sessions make sure to see if you can offer a hand to the officials. Lap time results are generally posted progressively during the day so check up on how you've gone. Also make sure to check your car – water and oil levels, tyre and brake wear should be checked out during the day. Above all else have a good (and safe) time!

Next time

So that was hopefully fun, what next? Come along to our club nights at Bell's Hotel, there's always a number of experienced drivers who are happy to help out new drivers. Draw a map of Phillip Island on the back of a coaster and you'll get three different opinions on what gear to take through the southern loop. Ask questions about tyres and brakes – you'll get good answers right up until you start going faster than those offering advice.

Now you've got all the information you've got no excuse! Check out the club calendar and get your entry form in for the next event...