



The Stovebolt Special opposite-locking through the Shelsley Eses on its way to a class win: right rear working hard, left front lifting. Below: 1-r wash after dawn run to the track; chunky Blockleys

# FUN AND FIRE ON ROAD AND TRACK



**HWM-CHEVROLET**  
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 OWNED SINCE 1999  
 PREVIOUS REPORT Dec 2018

Three outings with the Stovebolt recently: a class win, a trip into the kitty litter, a scary fire. There's plenty of variety in hillclimbing.

The kitty litter episode was at Prescott, when I tried an optimistic braking point for the horribly tight first hairpin and locked up. The deep gravel did its job of stopping us dead before clouting the barrier, so I reversed out and continued shamefacedly up the hill. After clearing out most of the pellets from the undertray, we managed fourth in class. I was happy with that, because the top three were a Can-Am McLaren, the Chaparral 2A driven by Mark Hales, and a full-race 620bhp Camaro.

The fire was at Shelsley, and it was entirely my own stupid fault. It could have been far worse without the rapid reactions of Healey 100 hillclimber John Ducker. The fuel

pump on the HWM is wired separately from the ignition, and unless you turn off everything with the master switch you have to remember to switch off both. After my first run I left the pump on. D'oh!

Over the next two hours the pump pumped, so when I climbed aboard for my second run the engine would not turn over. Several cylinders were full of petrol. You can't compress neat petrol, so the engine was 'hydraulicked'.

I had done this once before, and I knew what the solution was: take out all the spark plugs and spin the engine over on the starter motor to blow out all the petrol. Which is what I did: except that in my haste to get it done before my last run – here comes my second, even more crass error – I left the ignition on.

The plugs had been set aside out of the way, and the leads had their rubber shrouds in place, but there must have been enough of a spark somewhere to reach the ejected fuel. Suddenly we had a substantial fire, fortunately not on the car but on the ground beside it. From 15 yards away Ducker saw the flames, grabbed a big paddock fire extinguisher, galloped over and let rip. Instantly the fire was out.

Miraculously there was no damage to the HWM, but every



part of the engine – carburettors, manifold, rocker covers, exhausts, bulkhead, wiring – was covered in extinguisher powder. It's highly corrosive, so I drove the car, bonnet off, to the nearest garage before carefully hosing everything down and then drying it. After an hour of work no evidence remained of my foolishness.

Despite my efforts, the HWM has been its usual lovable self all summer. At the start of the season historic racer Julian Majzub, who is the man behind Blockley Tyres, suggested I try a set. Julian's forceful driving style has shown how well they work on his own cars, scoring wins in several of his wondrous collection, from the 1916 Indianapolis Sunbeam to the Sadler-Chevrolet.

Handmade tyres can be notoriously hard to balance – this applies to other makes, not just Blockleys – and Damien Daize of Elite Motor

Services in Dunstable had to rotate each tyre on its rim back and forth until he got them just right. They make a wonderful road tyre, and on the track they feel quite different to my previous Dunlops. My perception, on my car anyway, is that they grip for longer but, when they go, they go. So it needs a confident driver to get the best out of them.

Finally, a word about the Stovebolt as a road car. I know I'm repeating myself here, but I can't think of a motoring pleasure to match thundering home across the Cotswolds after a great hillclimb weekend, tucked into the exposed cockpit of my beloved old friend. As we twisted and dived through the autumn twilight along the B4077 – try it, it's a wonderful road – a half-moon began to shine among patchy clouds. I wouldn't swap the Stovebolt for any *Chiron*, Senna or LaFerrari. They couldn't possibly give me the same raw joy.