

CLASSIC DRIVER

Driving the Noble M400 at the Goodwood Festival



There can be no better demonstration, anywhere in the world, of the very best that today's motor industry has to offer. The supercar run at the Goodwood Festival of Speed astounds spectators with a diverse collection of current road-going supercars driven at tremendous speed - one after another after another.



At Goodwood last weekend, well-known historic racer and occasional Classic Driver contributor Tony Dron took the new Noble M400 – and your correspondent – for a balls-out run up the hillclimb. Now we all know that this car is going to be very, very quick. The Noble M400 is so called because of the outstanding power-to-weight ratio of 400bhp per tonne and that alone is warning enough. But as the marshal dropped his hand at the start of the hillclimb, the sensation of sheer acceleration was breathtaking.

While some drivers enjoy giving a crowd-pleasing spectacle of rubber-burning wheelspin, Dron decides to go for a genuinely quick start. Taking the Noble to 4,000rpm he drops the clutch and there's just a short, slippery squeak of rubber before the car takes off. Accelerating away from the start you can feel the boost come in and simply rocket the car towards that first corner, pressing driver and passenger back into the race-style seats. Dron snaps rapidly through first, second and third gear, and then it's time to back off for the corner – that long, double-apex right-hander. Still, the speed into the turn is astoundingly high: you sense the Noble understeering a little and then neatly gathering itself together, the handling and balance superb. It's

immediately obvious that this is a real, no-compromise driver's car. Dron applies more power and the Noble wriggles out of the corner, bringing us into sunlight and full view of the Goodwood crowds.

We climb the lengthy straight outside Goodwood House and there's just time to glance at the speedo as the M400 emerges from under the footbridge: 110mph and rising. Then we brake vigorously for the twisting, unsighted, bumpy entrance to that tricky left-hander at Molecomb: no wonder this is the one that catches people out. Quite a few went off here over the course of the weekend...

From Molecomb we again gather speed and blast up to the wall. This is where knowledge of the hillclimb pays dividends. It's amazing how quickly an experienced driver can flick a car round the wall, close up to the all-too-solid flint. Dron's foot is buried to the floor for the entirety of the left-hander, before checking his speed a touch at the end and getting the car straight for the next 40 to 50 yard straight run. Then we brake gently and turn into the narrow entrance of a right-hander with tall bales of straw on each side. The Noble displays a lovely neutral attitude, ready for a quick blast up the steep stretch ahead and carrying undiminished speed into the final, blind, rising left-hander. Suddenly, there's the finish line.

After the finish the cars trundle up through the trees to the top paddock, where smiling drivers and breathless passengers laugh and swop impressions of the cars. Our driver is full of praise for the M400: "The cockpit is extremely well designed," says Dron. "The controls feel really good - almost race-car style. Visibility is excellent but the thing which impresses me most is how, here at Goodwood, I could drive it into the first corner at speed and just know that here is a car with outstanding roadholding and handling balance. The Noble is going to do everything you want it to do. It's that wonderful feeling of a very well-sorted motor car."

Text; Charis Whitcombe

Photos; Noble

Gallery

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