

# FAMOUS BRITISH TEST HILLS

No. 3.—DOVERHAY

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RISING out of Porlock village, in Somerset, scarcely more than a stone's throw from the better-known hill on the main road to Lynmouth, is one of the steepest and most difficult hills in the south. This is Doverhay, for long unknown to motorists, which was only used tentatively at first by such bodies as the Brighton and Hove M.C., and was incorporated, for motorcycles only, in the M.C.C. "Land's End" trial route last Easter.

Doverhay is easy to find. I think it is the first turning on the left after descending into Porlock from the direction of Minehead. At first fairly "civilized," the lane climbs in a southerly direction and, where it forks, one should bear to the right. It goes on, up and up, steepening gradually and growing ever more narrow. The surface is the rich red earth of Devon and Somerset.

The "tricky" part of the hill begins where the gradient stiffens perceptibly and, over a low bank, a pine-wood stretches downhill on the left. After a straight hundred yards or so comes the wickedest right-hand bend imaginable, and round it the sort of acclivity that makes you gasp. It is just as if you came round a corner to find a ladder staring you in the face.

You cannot rush this bit.

The hill is cambered all the wrong way. And about ten yards or so round the corner is an even more acute left-hand bend. Round this, and you stiffen with apprehension as you see ahead a never-slackening gradient of the same red, stony soil, and sharp bends in swift succession. And after all this you have still a long drag up over the fringe of Exmoor, along a track so narrow that the heather and gorse scratch your wings on either side. . . .

At the top, look back. Far below the village of Porlock nestles sleepily in a hollow, hemmed in by wooded hills. Across the shimmering silver of the Bristol Channel the mountains of Wales rise out of the mist. A steamer, leaving a sparkling wake and a plume of black smoke astern, picks its way diagonally across the scene.

Turning, you see Exmoor in all the glory of its rolling moors. Over to the left the sombre mass of Dunkery Beacon stands against the sky. . . .

But, back to Doverhay! How best can it be climbed?—The rudimentary laws governing trials hills apply here, as elsewhere. Tight shock-absorbers, soft tyres, engine in perfect tune; plugs suitable and petrol system clean.

Beyond this, it becomes a question of gear ratio. You

cannot rush this hill. You are in bottom gear before reaching the worst part. It is just a question of keeping your foot down and cornering wide, only slackening speed if you are going too fast to get round.

It is a long hill, so don't "let up" until you've reached the wind-swept top. The gradient between the bends is about 1 in 3, and the approach is a good 1 in 5. That it is sheer climbing ability that counts is borne out by the fact that I climbed it on a Le Mans 4½-litre Invicta with six carburettors, using mostly second and third gears. My next attempt was on a very old M.G. Midget, borrowed from a friend, and fitted with unsuitable plugs that grew branches like Christmas trees on their central electrodes. I climbed the hill "solo," but, with those plugs, taking up a passenger was out of the question. My last ascent was in a Wolseley Hornet Special and we failed through an insufficient head of petrol, for the gravity tank, installed for such an emergency, was not full enough to ensure a sufficient feed to the carburetter on so steep a gradient.

But run down to Doverhay yourself — it is only about 4½ hours' run from London — and just see how well your modern Midget will climb it!