

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED CLASSIC RALLYING? . . . NEITHER HAD WE, BUT WE'RE GLAD WE DID!

Jottings from the Quinton Hazel Three Castles Welsh Classic Trial 5th – 7th June 2003

Though brother Paul and I are regulars at Track Days in our Elan +2 S130s, we had never tried Classic Rallying. Sure, we had looked at the reports of the Lands End to John O'Groats and epic dashes across Europe or down the Inca Trail, but more in awe than with longing. Last autumn, however, I noticed an announcement for a slightly 'softer' style of Classic Rallying: three days in and around Snowdonia with a competitive element but a strong social theme.

Rapid consultation with Paul and negotiation with my live-in navigator Sandy and we both sent off the entry cheques and started looking forward to June 2003.

I can't claim things started too well. With 300 miles to do just to get to the start from our Surrey home, spirits were not in good shape that Wednesday morning as we stood in the pouring rain in a pool of our own oil at the Oxford Services on the M40 with no oil pressure to speak of (in fact with no oil to speak of!). Rescue came and a split oil line to the oil cooler was diagnosed but what to do next?

With the realisation that our intended route took us within yards of Paul Matty Sports cars, a phone call ahead confirmed that if we turned up they would help us. The next 70 miles of our journey was undertaken on the back of a low loader up to Paul Matty's Bromsgrove base.

Forty minutes after arriving we were on our way again, fresh oil, fresh oil pressure and now in convoy with brother Paul's car, who had caught us up from their Buckinghamshire start. A trouble-free run to Rally HQ in Llandudno saw us arrive in time for evening scrutineering and a bite to eat before bed. The troubles and delays of the day were put into perspective when we waited longer for our meal to be served in the Italian Restaurant that night than the whole of our rescue had delayed us! Well who usually eats out in Llandudno on a wet Wednesday evening? – not twenty or so hungry rally crews obviously.

Day one started with all 110 entrants (including 4 Lotus, our 2 +2s, an S2 Elan DHC and a lovely Mark Six in polished Aluminium) lined up on the sea front promenade for concours judging and a chance to meet the other crews. There in the sunshine were a varied selection of Classics from humble 105E Anglia and Minis through Railton, Crossley, examples of just about every model of Jaguar ever built and Triumphs of all sorts, to sublime V12 Ferraris, Dinos and

'70s RS Porsches.

Off we all went at one minute intervals through a very appreciative crowd of on-lookers with Roadbooks on our knee and a strict timetable to stick to. Within minutes we were on a scenic road round the Great Orme and the event was on in earnest.

Day 1 got us used to following 'Tulip' route instructions, maintaining a steady road pace, taking in the spectacular North Wales scenery and settling in to the event, being clocked in and out of Control points with a 30 minute margin on your scheduled time. We visited Conwy Castle and finished the day at Bodnant Gardens. A good day, free of drama, got us thinking that there wasn't too much to fear in this Classic Rallying lark.

ber two. Food excellent and a little time to socialise and swap Regularity stories.

Then came the second Regularity Test. Longer this time and over roads so narrow and hilly and twisty that it was actually difficult to get up to the 30 average, even with a big valve Twincam, legendary Chapman roadholding and a fairly small car. Ignoring protests from nauseous navigator I pressed on as best as I could and we were pretty pleased with how well we kept to the schedule, one marshal commenting that we were the only car so far (running 82 of 110) who had received an 'early' penalty – only 3 seconds though so no disgrace!

Day two was rounded off with another Regularity Section and a

bends! Paul and I tobogganed, Sandy skied. More homework and then to bed.

Day 3 was based on Anglesey and was mainly a series of Auto tests at different locations linked by road sections. The schedule did include half an hour at a Classic Motorcycle meeting at the Anglesey racing circuit allowing us to admire some different classic machinery and to rest our weary brains.

One constant feature of road sections throughout the three days, but especially notable on Anglesey on the Saturday, was the support we all received from the roadside. Whole families were camped out at the kerb in their picnic chairs waving and cheering us on wherever we went. We were particularly pleased to see them as we took it to mean we were still on course!

Another real source of great entertainment was watching other competitors negotiate the tests. One Capri was driven with real verve, handbrake turns, smoking tyres the lot. Similarly exuberant was an E-type, but as often as not his 180's turned into 360's as rear wheel breakaway really took hold! And there was the Citroen DS negotiating really tight tests with the suspension in the 'fully up' position, body roll in enormous quantity and those headlights that respond to the steering inputs on mainbeam and swivelling everywhere.

We just tried to keep it neat, stay in first and stay on course. I think the Elan is a good tool for these tests, good acceleration, good lock and not too big! The brakes are too good though, anyone fitted ABS to a +2?

Just when brain fade was really setting in after another good lunch stop overlooking a spectacular bay, they threw in the final Regularity test, a really long and tricky one. We knew Paul must have gone wrong when he stormed past us at about 70 mph (he was running one minute ahead of us on the road normally). We later found out that having wrong-slotted he had over three minutes to make up, while of course not knowing where the next secret control would be. He was really lucky that it was far enough away for him to make up virtually all his lost time before he encountered it.

One of the final auto tests was another new challenge. You had to drive around a course, with one stop/ start test at your own pace. Then you were told to drive round it again and try to match your first circuit time as closely as you



Black Tie dinner for us all that evening. Good food, good company and then back to our room to make a few notes in tomorrow's roadbook (see later!)

Then came Day 2! An earlier start today from a service station on the A55 (which some crews didn't manage to find!). A quick visit to the first of the three Castles, but no time to linger. We were off again rapidly heading for our first "Regularity Test". Here you have to try to maintain an exact 30 mph average for over half an hour, with secret timing controls to monitor your progress. The catch is that EVERY SECOND early or late through these secret controls accrued penalty points – and if you gain or lose time into one of these controls, you have to maintain that early or late pace in the next sector! We had been up half the previous night deep in mathematics calculating when we were due where, but even armed with this it ain't easy.

Lunch was in Harlech, shortly after having passed Castle num-

taste of what was in store on day 3 in the shape of the first Auto Test of the Rally. Memorise the route, be careful not to catch the cones and know where the stop and restarts are and off we go. Soon found the car coughs and splutters on a restart if you have stopped it 'on its nose' and taking second gear was definitely a mistake, but all in all not a bad time. Just as Paul and I were expressing relief that we had both changed from Rotoflex couplings on our cars, we heard that a Triumph GT6 did have his donuts explode on this test!

Back to finish the day at Caernarfon Castle again, this time with time to look round.

Friday evening was a hoot with a barbecue at Llandudno's ski slope. They have a toboggan run with these sledges on little wheels which hurtle down a shute (as well as the usual ski slope) and clearly the competitive urge was strong with some crews on the toboggans. If you don't use the brake at all they do roll over on some of the

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could! Mmmmm.

The final finish at Castle three, Beaumaris, saw all the survivors lined up on the sea front, again in the sunshine, with crews looking tried but happy. Shake hands with the dignitaries and amble back to our Llandudno base to prepare for the final night shindig where the provisional results would be posted. More excellent food, good company and a bilingual pop group to dance to. A memorable few days were

rounded off on the Sunday morning by the Awards Breakfast. And how did we do? Well, astonishingly well actually. Sandy and I won our class with Paul and Suzy coming in a close second, so a clean sweep for Lotus. We also won our category, as the highest finishing 1970s car, at sixth overall. Eat your heart out you Porsche and Dino pilots! And just to add to our embarrassment we won the cup for the highest finishing novice to Classic Rallying! What won out-

right? Why the 105E Anglia of course.

Trophies notwithstanding, both +2 crews had had a tremendously enjoyable time on an event that, though testing, is not a car breaker (or a marriage breaker!!) and was a splendid

mix of driving, competition, scenery and socialising. Our 300 mile trek home was fast and uneventful, if long and rather wet at times and now we have a few more things on the sideboard to dust.

Roy & Sandy Gillett



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