

LUCKY THIRTEEN AND A POP-UP TENT

Or to put it another way, the Welsh Endurance Road Rally held on 18/19th August and organised by Amman & District Motor Club, complete with 54 starters. Wales may well be God's rallying country, but it don't half rain a lot as soon as you go over the Severn Bridge. I think I first noticed this in about 1989 when I was one of those stage rally type blokes going to the Wyedean and the Bridgend Stages.

So what is Endurance Rallying? To those that may have only just heard of it, it is just five years old and was 'invented' by a certain Philip Young who was also in at the early conception of Historic Rallying in all its current forms. Endurance cars are limited to 1400cc with engine and gearboxes as standard, i.e. no lsd's etc. You can do roughly what you like to the suspension (billys & hard bushes etc), brake lines inside the car, aeroquip brake hoses plus proper engine mounts. From the safety side, a simple cage, fire extinguisher and 4-point belts are requirements. Philip Young approached the MSA with a set of rules which included running the 'tests' at a 40 mph average, as opposed to full stage events at 60mph. He had worked out that a Group N 1400cc stage car only averaged 47mph in a full-blown event and with the reduced safety things then 40 mph was acceptable.

Local crews representing the South were myself (Woolbridge Motor Club) with Mark Appleton (Salisbury & Shaftesbury Car Club) in my Corsa SRi and running at 13 due to a somewhat late entry. Paul Heal had Mike Gray (both Salisbury & Shaftesbury) in the navigator's seat of his MG ZR. Paul, now being used to the high life in the US of A due to a 12 month working trip, was holed up in the local posh hotel (that is of course if you consider a Travel Lodge to be posh), whilst me and Mark slummed it by camping with many other crews at the Banwen Rugby Club near Neath which was Rally HQ for the weekend. I was awaiting Paul to start calling us all Limies with a bit of a yankee drawl, but the land of George Dublyer Bush has yet to conquer him. Graham Dance (Bournemouth & District C. C.) was navigating for Jamie Turner, who was a bit of a foreigner as coming from Luton. Jamie, however, is one of the quickest Endurance drivers around and was a hot favourite to win. However he was not the only Turner on the entry list as last year's winner was brother Owen. Mind you, it was said that the only reason Jamie didn't enter last year was due to a small operation to make sure there wouldn't be any more potential Turner winners in the future.

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The event featured 95 miles of tests based mainly in Walters Arena with the vast proportion being forest together with an 80 mile thrash through the lanes at night.

The timetable was:

Friday night, go camping and get bloody wet except in my new pop up tent.

8am Saturday – bacon & egg sandwiches supplied and cooked by Mark after we decamped to the club changing rooms as, surprise surprise, it was still raining. Owen Turner tried to make breakfast in the rain, but it was his only mistake all weekend.

Saturday 10am and off to scrutineering (or scrutinizing as my spell checker, thanks to Paul, says). Just as we left, a funny sound started. Lucky 13 was now coming into play. One of the spark plug leads had managed to come unclipped and was clanging against the radiator fan (clanging was to become a usual sound). A quick cable tie sorted it, but if it had happened in the forest, then it would have been chopped in half by said fan and big trouble. Scrutineering was, to say the least, very slow and crews were still signing on when the Competitors Briefing was taking place. Note to organisers – don't let the MSA scrutineers make crews do the 'adjustments' in the scrutineering area rather than outside.

And now to the event:

Leg 1 – 2pm to 6pm with 45 miles of tests. Yes, 45 miles through the forest in 4 hours. When I did those little stage events, 45 miles would take a day and cost twice as much!

Leg 2 – 8pm to 9pm. Just the one test at 20 miles that only took 45 odd minutes. That's nearly an hour by the way. And yes, it was in the dark, through the forest and guess what? Still bloody raining. It made 23 miles through Hafren in about 1984 on the Welsh International look easy. Then it only took us 35 plus minutes in the dry and in daylight in an RS 2000. Some bloke called Hannu in an Audi Quatry thing did it in about 25 minutes.

Leg 3 – 11pm 'till 2.30am-ish and an 80 mile road rally section.

Leg 4 – 10am Sunday to 1pm with another 31 miles in the forest.

So what happened to us? The first test of the rally was just 4.33 miles which took us a mere 10m 41s. Less than a 30mph average you all say, but Endurance events have to run, as you know now, at a maximum of 40mph average on tests. The middle part of Walters Arena was ROUGH to say the least. Even to the point of the big rocks being painted yellow! The 40mph average is achieved by putting man-made chicanes in, code boards at which you have to just about stop at to record, and tightening up other junctions. The fact that it was still raining takes a good 5+ mph off the average. Other than that, you are peddling just as fast as you can. There are also no arrows for the

wussy-like stage crews to follow, and it is all done on tulips. This has the result that the navigator is talking to you all the time. It should be added that although there are no arrows, it is still safe as it is very difficult to wrong slot as junctions are still taped off. You just lose valuable time if a dithering happens.

We managed to complete half of Leg 1 (4 tests) with no trouble, and the second half was a repeat of the same tests. This is where Lucky 13 came into play again. Near the end of the 6th test I could hear another clanging from below the car. Corsa's are prone to breaking rear sump guard mounts, so I feared the worst. Another thing about Endurance events is that you can't have a service crew, but the organisers arrange this for everyone in the shape of an official crew with every sort of bodging gear you could wish for. Guess what, the official bodging crew [*the intrepid Peter and Betty-Ann Banham - Ed.*] were at the end of test 6. I love No 13! We pulled in and said we probably needed the mounting welded. It just ended up that the bolt had fallen out. A quick delve in the boot of the car produced a spare which was fitted by the intrepid 'bodging crew' in no time.

Our clanging sump guard wasn't to be the end of our troubles on this leg. After the end of the 9th and last test of Leg 1, yet another clanging was heard. To be absolutely honest, it was more of a Tinky Winky tinkling sound and only to be heard on right hand bends. We couldn't find anything dangling under the car, but a good look under the bonnet showed that the 'funny little octane rating sensor thingy' had become detached and was clanging against the alternator pulley. Another 'Lucky 13' cable tie soon sorted this out. Probably a bit lucky again as if it had been sliced off then the ECU (not a clue what this does) would have probably decided that there was no petrol and thus shut everything down. Don't have this problem in my old Mini!

By the end of Leg 1 we were in 6th place overall, and next on the agenda was the best buffet meal I have ever seen on an event. Even lots of fruit to keep my Dr happy.

The Second Leg, one mammoth 19.8 mile test through Walters Arena, was three of the afternoon tests were linked together. This, as on many tests, used a two-lap system with a split and merge, which was nearly our undoing as there was a code board a couple of yards before the merge point. We thought we had it all OK but 200 yards down the road Mark had a 'navigator's' moment and suddenly wasn't sure as there seemed to be a letter missing. 'I don't think it's right' he said. 'Oh bollocks, write what I said down and we'll sort it at the finish' was my reply. We then set off towards our next Lucky 13 moment.

[We've looked at the timecard and there wasn't a letter missing, but the Results Team marked another possible error and then gave the competitor the benefit of the doubt, a Lucky 13 that Worth didn't know about. Ed.]

If you are still with me (and there's a long way to go yet) you will remember that chicanes are used, with each element being a hairpin. Mark was chief in charge of the handbrake in these (due to heavy steering and with up to 5 elements in each) except for coming out of the last element. The problem was that after a fast downhill section into a chicane ended up with me getting caught out on the mud and gently sliding to a standstill with one wheel in the ditch. This wouldn't normally have been a problem as

a quick tweak from me on the handbrake would have sorted the situation. However, we seemed to just end up holding hands in the middle of the car like star-crossed lovers! It ended up as the RAF phrase 'You have control'. 'No I don't, I thought you did', which meant neither of us had control. Lucky 13 worked again as we managed to reverse out instead of getting completely stuck and without Mark having to get his pushing boots on.

The long test took us 44m 24s and resulted in 4th quickest.

Back to the Rugby Club for a couple of hours of R & R before the night section. This was only 80 miles and 11 crews cleaned it including all the top runners, except Paul who managed to drop a minute. Doh! Nothing of an exciting nature happened to us as being 'experienced' road rally crews, it was more like a walk in the park to the extent that Mark accused me of nearly falling to sleep at one point. Road rally sections on Endurance events are a big debating point as there is such a great variation in crew abilities and so organisers find it hard to pitch it just right. We would have liked a much harder one, but many of the novices thought it just right.

Sunday morning dawned and blow me down, it was only a light drizzle. Amman club members were now on the case and were making bacon rolls & a coffee for £1 each, a bargain in anyone's money. It may rain a lot in Wales, but they know how to make you welcome before they subject you to even more forests.

Before the 10am start and another 31 miles of forest, good old Lucky 13 came visiting again. The night section had included some lovely smooth forest which still managed to break one of the exhaust heavy-duty mountings. No 13 made sure that the other one hadn't broken and thus left a dangling and possibly retirement-making exhaust problem. The Endurance scene being what it is, the crew next door donated just what I needed and the emergency service crew popped it on. It all seemed fair to me as the night before I had given away my spare lower ball joint (as not wishing for any more children).

The first Sunday test was a pig. Nice and smooth gravel but with grass growing in the middle and on both sides just off the wheel line. Any slight deviation from the road would result in an off, and with ditches either side then end of story. Martin Clark and Bob Rutherford (Tavern M. C.) in an MG ZR managed to put it nose first into one of the ditches after a downhill section into a 90 right. They were in a top 5 position, but all of the drivers that I talked to could have done the same, including me. With only 30 miles of tests to go and gaps opening up between crews, the last 6 tests were taken with a degree of caution as we were never going to make up 2 minutes to 4th, but a puncture or a small off would drop us a few places.

On the last but one test, the sun finally came out but only for a few minutes. It was then back to the Banwen Rugby Club for yet more great food in the form of a cracking barbeque and the prize giving. With the results being declared provisional within minutes of the last car finishing and, with Welsh Timing it meant that they

were soon declared final, the awards were being presented by 2.45pm with most crews still in attendance. In whatever motor sporting discipline you take part in, I still think it's great if organisers can get the results out and have most of the competitors still present for the prize giving.

So where does this Endurance Rallying stand in the general scheme of things? It's not Stage Rallying due to the reduced average speed and it's not Road Rallying in the true sense. As Adrian Patten (Bournemouth & District CC) mentioned to me when we were recently at a single venue stage event, 'there are only two sorts of rallying, one is through the lanes and the other is on the loose'. In my opinion, never a truer phrase was uttered. It combines an element of driving ability together with an element of navigational ability without having to spend a fortune on the car to be competitive.

And finally, don't ever buy a Pop Up Tent. Let go of the string and you have a tent in 2 seconds. It then takes one person to read the closing instructions and two to put the bloody thing back in its bag. We did have a Plan B for this as Paul Heal now has one of those enormous Volvo Chelsea Tractors and could easily have taken my tent home still fully erect.

So that's the story of yet another wet weekend in Wales. Oh and we ended up 5th with big grins on our faces. Jamie Turner with Graham Dance retired on the third test with a broken gearbox. Paul and Mike finished 8th and Owen Turner won for the second time in a row. Three hours through the forests, a great social time, a weekend away from the grindstone, serious competition and all for an entry of just £250 for 95 miles through the forests. What more could you want?

Just finished putting the car back together and out again three weeks later.

Thanks

Worth
