

MARCH HARE 12 CAR RALLY - WEDNESDAY 22nd MARCH 2000.

A very-nearly full entry list of 11 crews met at the cosy Blue Bell Inn near Kirk Langley, for the annual running of the March Hare 12 Car Rally. This event has been the longest running 12 Car in recent history for EDMC and over the years has seen different maps used and different helpers – but always it has been set out for some competitive fun!

For the new Millennium event, it saw the return of the “old Team” of Wagstaff and Davis to run it – which is how it all started (from Nealies at Milford some 14 years ago!) and this year, I was determined to make a no-frills event. As I told everyone who was listening, I had neither the time nor the inclination to make anything fancy or difficult.

So it was that we saw 1 Expert crew (Ade Ancliffe and John Chadwick) and 10 Novices, pick up a reasonable amount of pre-plot at the start. This pre-plot would take the crews from MTC1, through TC1 to RTC2; from that control, they would pick up the rest of the remaining route. For the Experts, I used out of order tulips but numbered; for the Novices I used in order map referenced junctions. Novices also had the benefit of a copied map with the location of all Time Controls marked on it (which was handed out at the start) – so all they had to do was plot the references to find the Passage Checks. Easy!

The pre-plotted first section took the crews south east towards Derby, looping anti-clockwise around the Radbourne loop (and the tricky narrow bridge!), collecting two PC's before diving south towards Etwall and TC1 – manned by Roger and Sara Ashmead. No real casualties here, except car 1 (last years winning driver Jim Holmes but a raw novice navigator, Richardo, who had been drafted in from Italy! They managed to miss both PC's and TC1 and cut straight to RTC2 – quite how I am still dumbfounded and can only assume that they decided to take a tour of Mickleover town centre and picked up the A516 before rejoining the correct route??

The other casualty here was poor Course Closer Car, who in their enjoyment of driving round the route, picked up both PC's and arrived a little early at TC1; where Roger pointed out their error and the fact that some cars were still out there and would never find these two PC's which were now safely stowed in the rear of the Golf! Never mind – experiences learnt in many ways.

As for the Course Opener – well Paul and I were having a great time! As is my wont with Course Car duty, I always enjoy the thrill of the chase; that is, us being chased by Car 1 - as I usually leave things a little late to start the event! However, I had already planned for this and had taken the precaution of asking the first few marshals to take the PC boards with them and put them out for us in advance. This meant that all we had to do was drive round the route, find the boards (in all the EXACT places – thanks a million folks!!) note the code and drive on. No need to stop at all!

Which meant that thanks to a little prior knowledge of the roads, Paul's expert use of the Poti and road calling – and the superbly well known acceleration and cornering abilities of a Mondeo Estate (EH!?!?), we cleaned (and thus made up time) section MTC1 to TC1 by 4 minutes, TC1 to RTC2 a further 2 mins, RTC2 to TC3 a further 3 mins, TC3 to TC4 a further 2 mins and arrived at TC5 1 minute before a due time. Which meant that we had we now had time to take things easy, enjoy the company and put out the remaining PC boards as we went around the route. I shall be doing the same planning for next year!

Back at TC1, car 4 (John Sanders and Russ Jones) had dropped 2 mins, car 8 (brand new members Philip Wardle and Anna-Marie Wardle and raw novices) some 5 minutes and car 10 (Geoff Lord and Mick Watkins) a very slack 7 minutes.

All the crews found RTC2 (Roger Hage) okay, obeyed the instructions on not arriving early at this control and thus suffered no penalties (VERY good!) - and they duly got the remainder of their

route instructions for the event. RTC2 was situated just south of Devils Elbow near Sutton on the Hill.

From here, the crews headed north and anti-clockwise around the full Churchbank loop, back south towards Lane Ends, collecting 2 PC's before instantly slotting back north again through Cropper and into TC3 where Bob Marshall was awaiting them. Car 4 missed the second PC board and took the shortcut at the pond cross roads; time wise, car 1 was 2 minutes down and starting to feel the effects of navigator sickness nightmare (we all know it well Richardo !!). Car 6 (Peter Reeson and Paul Daft in that well-known and highly successful Pug 205Gti – sounds rather bias eh?! – well successful by one of the previous owners!!) made a very costly error on this section and although made sure they got both PC boards, dropped a sole minute. This was going to prove very important at the finish!

Car 7 (Joy Hickling/Mark Collins) going well to here, dropped 2 mins, Car 9 (another brand new crew/EDMC members and raw novices, Nathan Marriott and Michelle Shorthouse) dropped their first penalties of 6 minutes and car 10 had added a further 4 to their lot. Car 11 (hardly a raw novice in the shape of Alex Hoults in his TOCA Volvo but very novice and new to it all navigator Pam Johnson) dropped a sole minute to here - which was better than fellow novices in car 8 who missed the control all together.

The route continued northwards through Thurstaston, over Long Lane and up to Pools Head grass triangle, past the Hall, back to Over Burrows before turning north again to find Richard Shelmerdine at TC4 just before the Windy Arbour X Roads.

Car 9 missed the grass triangle but everyone else got it including John and Sandra Hickling in their powerful but big Rover (car 3), Ade/JC in car 2 using the less powerful but nimbler Astra Maxivan and car 5 (Abe Shenkar/Steve Brown in their period dress and lovely Mini) – these three still penalty free and dicing for the lead.

Car 4 saw a further 4 mins dropped here, car 7 some 2 mins again and car 9 missed the grass triangle and still managed further penalties of 2 mins – but were still going strong! Car 10 was having a nightmare and some further 6 mins had been added to their total; the Volvo opening its legs and dropping only 1 min. So at this stage, we have cars 2,3 & 5 clear leaders on nil penalties, closely followed by car 6 on that 1 minute and car 11 still in there on 2 minutes.

From TC4, the crews headed north towards Mercaston, used the fast lanes (and crests!) past the quarries and into TC5 near Hulland Ward where Justin Hume and Steve Gozzard awaited them. This was a super section that combined narrow, slippery lanes with fast sections of straights and 2 code boards to watch for.

No one missed the boards but the clock told a different story for a few crews – car 5 dropping 5 mins and starting to struggle now, with car 11 also joining them on 5 mins dropped and the difficulties of navigating in a fast moving car starting to become clear to poor Pam. Car 8 lost a further 3 mins but we still holding it all together; unlike the stomach of Richardo in Car 1, who cried enough and that terrible feeling of “Mal de Navigator” struck hard and fast. They would retire at TC5 and head for home.

The remainder had no problems on this section – the winners slot still being very closely fought and any slip ups would be punished from now on, as the route headed into the hillier parts of Derbyshire and the bottom end of the Peak District.

TC5 to TC6 took the crews north once more, through the very narrow section (and the ford, but no water present yet) between Millington Green and Kirk Ireton, right towards Idrigehay, to find TC6 on the B road junction. Two grass triangle PCs needed to be found on this tight section.

Car 9 was really starting to struggle now and missed both PC's to record a further 13 mins to add to their time dropped; car 11 saw a further 6 mins added to their time card, closely followed by car 8 who had some extra 5 mins to add. It was on this section that several crews were stopped (very briefly) by a resident who wished to ensure that her cats were not put in danger by the passing traffic – a situation that was very quickly resolved at the finish by prompt telephone calls between Cathy (at home) to me on the mobile, and me to her and her husband; all whilst the event was still running! We are all friends again.

Cars 4, 7 and 10 dropped a further 3 mins but car 4 compounded the error with missing the second PC. As for the leader board, it was still nip and tuck with cars 2, 3 and 5 still clean and car 6 hard on their heels with that 1 minute.

Colin Bryan and Mick Taylor at TC6, released the crews towards Barry Thompson at TC7 via a clockwise route taking in the classic lanes up to Lawn Farm, Dannah Farm and Shottle and past Shottle Farm to rejoin the B5023, some ½ mile from where they left it! I love these lanes- just can't get enough of them driving (as Paul found out!) and made full use of the virtually impossible tiny triangle near Carrbrook Farm, to slow the crews down a little. A tricky little PC was also slotted in very near TC6, on a unmarked triangle on the B road – this was put in to see if JC was awake still! He was – but cars 4, 9 and 11 missed it – whilst the latter 2 now cut route to get back on time and ensure a finish. Car 7 found the first two PC's on this section, but the twisty nature of the route started to tell on both driver and navigator, and the decision was made to also cut route here and ensure a finish.

Car 8 had hung in well so far, but with the real meat of the event now upon them, it too was to prove too much and although they struggled on for some time to regain the correct route, they eventually appeared back at the Finish very OTL and non finishers. But nothing to be ashamed of on their very first event.

So, how were the leaders getting on? Car 5 in the Mini were having no problems with the tiny triangles and fairly scorched around the lanes to see no penalties still recorder; JC nearly fell for taking the wrong option at Dannah Farm but spotted the correct route (the short one instead of the usual long one) through Shottle but by the time they had got to Barry, the clock showed a 1 minute penalty!. The lads in car 6 have got the hang of the Road Rally lark and they too pedalled the Pug well to record all PC's and no time penalties – but what of the Husband/Wife pairing in car 3? Things were going very very well up to the 2nd PC – when the pressure suddenly told on the navigating and a wrong slot was called!

As I said, any error on this section could and would prove costly and so it was, that by the time they had spotted this tiny error, and retraced route to regain the correct one, Barry was to bring them the sad news of their first penalties, some 6 minutes dropped!

So, with just one competitive section to go, it was down to a straight fight between car 5 (Abe/Steve Brown) and their nerves over the remaining 16 minute section, the longest of the night! Behind them came the rampaging pack of car 2 (Ade/JC) and car 6 (Peter/Paul) on 1 minute each and poor car 3 (John/Sandra) who had dropped from joint leaders to 4th o/a slot by one tiny error, now on 6 minutes. Car 10 (Geoff/Mick) were still hanging in there with no fails but had amassed some 26 minutes and would be unlikely to pose a threat the crews above them.

The last section (after a very short neutral manned by Roger and Sara), took the crews south to Windley, up Gun Hills, to the Quarndon X Roads (manned by Mike Reeson – thanks) down the

lovely tricky, slippery, tight yellow to come out at the back of the Kedleston Park Hotel, turn north again and through Kedleston, past my infamous “write the Harrier off on a EDMC 12 car” tree and into TC9 to be met by Roger Hage once more.

This section would prove fast and tight but would flag up no more errors as the crews all held their nerves and all but the cutting crews and car 10 (who dropped a sole minute to add to their total), managed to clean the section.

There was one casualty on this section though – a certain Mr Hage! As I would have expected from Roger, he had plotted the entire route from his first control (RTC2) and had “had a play” on one or two of the sections, just in front of the Course Opener! Whilst Paul and I were charging through the last section (the promise of a pint and a sandwich always does that for us oldies!!), I caught sight of some car lights climbing the crest in front of me. I guessed it would be Roger and told Paul so and we stepped up the pace a little to see if we could catch him unprepared and worried in case I boll@@ked him at the next time control, for mucking about!

As we ground to a halt at the last SGW of the section, I turned left to be confronted by his stationery car and the bonnet up! I could see that something was hanging below the front of the car and reminded Paul of one of the nasty little dips we had encountered earlier in the night – where I told Paul that I had literally stood the nose of the Pug on its end on a previous rally a few years ago! It was my guess that Roger had done the same with his Sierra but it came off much worse! It transpired that the whole front of the car was rattling itself loose over the night and the final action of SGW, had managed to shear the remaining rusty bolt and the whole front bumper had fallen off!

As we talked to RH through the car window, who should appear from the opposite way but a Police Car! I quickly pulled out of the way and moved slowly down the lane, watching if the Police Car would stop at talk to Roger. Paul & I were already planning to man this last time control our selves, as it looked unlikely that RH could make the last few yards to the location – he was that close!

With water (from the washer bottle – not radiator!) pouring over the road, RH was unaware that the Police car had stopped along side him and blindly chatted away to the Cop, laughing about what had happened. It was only as he looked up as the car pulled away, that he realised it was a Police car! Paul and I ran back to help rip off the remains of the bumper and with the Sierra starting first time, RH pulled into the Time Control location and manfully completed his task for the night! The rest, as they say, is now history and the full results are hopefully printed elsewhere within the magazine.

Thanks go to all crews for making it a great nights sport. To all the marshals for coming out and helping it run so smoothly to the finish pub and the locals for putting up with our rabble and crush in the “snug” and for putting on some super snap and, as usual, to Cathy for still letting me have a play every now and then! Yes – the palms did get a bit sweaty and the feet really enjoyed thrashing the poor estate round some cracking roads – but I guess I will have to wait just a little longer before I return to the Road Rally scene as a driver. I WILL return, and I intend to do it in a good car with a bit of oomph, to show all these youngsters that experience still counts! And I might just do it with my very able navigator of the night – Paul Davis.

It was great to team up with Paul again to run a 12 car – thanks a million old boy – I had a barrel of laughs and felt very confident in Pauls usual, professional approach to the event; from the checking of the route instructions to ensuring that we left on time and had his side of car/job all sorted out in correct order, leaving me to just concentrate on driving and knocking the PC boards in - same again next year chappie?

Mark Wagstaff.