

4 DAYS IN THE LIFE OF A WRC MARSHAL



As seen by Dinga King

Most of you know me by now and my passion to get involved by marshalling mostly on rallies and classic car events. I made it my goal a few years ago that I wanted to marshal on the WRC, so when Claire Abrey did it I was most envious of her. This made me realise I was in a good position with a network of friends made through club and other events to do this. The only real show stopper was that we usually have a holiday at that time of year, making it difficult to raise the extra money needed and get the time off from work. However, this year, due to our friends getting married in Gibraltar we had our holiday in the sun a lot earlier in the year leaving a space in my holiday arrangements to take up on it.

The plans started with first harassing Claire to find out more about the event and the arrangements she had made to get involved in it. As you all know she is a very busy girl and all the events she does in a year made this task a challenge on its own but she gave me the address of Cambridge Car Club who she went with and the Abercrave Inn they take over and stay in for the duration of the event.

All this duly noted and researched; we got to the beginning of June so I decided it was time to start pulling it all together and e-mailed the hotel to start the bookings. The following day I got a phone call from the hotel to check our requirements as they were pretty much booked up; the result being that they offered us the last two single rooms they had, which was absolutely fine for us as Nobby wouldn't have to put up with my snoring and farting, and me, whatever night habits that he has.

Next on the agenda was to contact Cambridge Car Club and ask if we could attach ourselves to them and be part of their team for the 4 days. Again nothing is as simple as it seems because this time of year their team leader Clive Grounds, is enjoying his yacht at every spare moment he has and is difficult to connect up with. In my frustration at lack of communication, I started sending e-mails of my interest to marshal to the top names on the WRC GB website which gave me multiple results including one from Mr Grounds himself and so the arrangements were all made.

October 22 duly arrived, all our gear was ready - mine including a large pile of OS maps bought very cheaply after weeks bidding on e bay covering most of South Wales because I wasn't sure where the stages were. The funny side of this being that we had detailed maps of Wales, but neither of us, as lorry drivers, had a decent atlas of Great Britain to get us the last bit of the journey to Abercrave. Mine was so old it just fell to pieces when I picked it up and Nobby's was 15 years old and unused! I know at this point you are all thinking they must have a sat navs - the answer to this being "yes" we had one each but a fault in the cigarette lighter left us unable to use it. (*Ed – what do you expect from a Rover*).

Away we go on a pretty straight forward journey - we push on and decide to make a coffee stop at the services on the M5 (*after all we weren't in a rush and we were on holiday*). This is where I popped into the shop for a newspaper and they had a cheap deal on road atlas's, so I duly replaced both of ours. Now fed and watered we headed off again - this is when curiosity and lack of anything to do I had a fiddle with the cigarette lighter, as I had brought my sat nav with me knowing I could charge it off my laptop and would work for a couple of hours to get us out of a muddle if needed. One piece of plastic later from a broken charger probably inserted by the previous owner we now had more direction than we needed.



We arrived in Abercrave mid afternoon and were the first to arrive. With cases to our rooms and a quick freshen up, it was back to the bar to sample the local ales, (*I tried them all during our stay*) while we waited for the others to arrive, which they all did over the next few hours making us very welcome and instantly comfortable in their company.

DAY 1

Well informed that we would get a lay in today we met out on the car park at 5am for the drive to the shakedown at Margham Park - the home of many famous tears in the history of Rally GB. It was only a 45 minute journey in the fog and rain, but enough for the group to get separated. While we were chasing back through the lanes to find the others, one of the lads cracked the spoiler on his 4 week old Skoda Fabia on loose rocks that got thrown up by the car in front.

We signed on for the day and got our first goody bag of freebies that they give the marshals including badges, hats, lanyards, and programs. We made our way through the stage to the finish line where we were doing the timing. This quite obviously turned into a mad dash through the 4.95km stage and was a lot of fun, all cars making it through the famous water splash in the park except the rally prepared Micra which stalled and proved difficult to start again. Our duty for the day was the flying finish of which you have one person calling the car numbers, as the cars cross the line, while another enters the number into the machine. Another operates a secondary independent machine for back-up which is independent from the breaker beams that the main machine uses and relies on the person pressing a button as the car crosses the line.

It was not the most exciting of days because the cars were few and far between. This part of the event is an optional extra which they have to pay extra for, so not all cars show out for it, but when the cars did come through we were in good view of the water splash, which is very spectacular due to the volumes of rain they were having.

DAY 2

The day started with the usual meeting on the pub car park but this time it was 2-30 in the morning. We were 70 miles from the signing on point for Hafren which was to be stages 1 and 4. It took us the best part of two hours to get there following the others in convoy. We thought we would be OK to keep up with them as we were in a 2 litre Rover following a Morris Minor and two Nissan Micras which soon proved to be a point of concern but they did hold back for us to keep up.

Yet again we duly signed on and had to drive approximately 25km into the 32 km stage which was very slippery and had a lot of rocks on the track, which would be swept away by the volumes of traffic and officials travelling down the stage.

Our junction was a fast 90 degree left hand bend which climbed steeply into 90 degree right bend from which they had the tail hanging really wide into the first corner then was digging in heavily as they accelerated into the right hander.

On arrival at our stage we walked the section and planned where we going to be manning it as it was probably half a kilometre of track to cover, then out came the stoves. A plastic sheet was stretched between the Rover and a Micra to make a kitchen and everybody was fed. During setting up the driver of the Morris Minor was seen rolling about in front of his car as it wasn't handling properly, he discovered a roll bar had sheared off so emergency repairs were having to made. It was ratchet strapped back together and even though at the end of the day he felt not happy to go

the rest of the



stage we left by the fire tracks on a less bumpy route. This didn't slow him down at all and was seen racing a large sports car into a roundabout and beating it. Even with this problem the strap was checked once or twice but it was not touched again and was last seen heading home fully loaded after the event on the Sunday afternoon.

DAY 3

With the early mornings and not too late nights but excellent food and a nice choice of ales to choose from, the group was split as to what time to start in the morning. If you wanted to drive through the stage you had to be there and signed on at 3am - this was the choice of half the group so they took the signing on cards for us all. The rest of us left the hotel at 5-30 and drove into the stage from the bottom. Today we were doing the finish so didn't have to go on the stage because as you all should know stages are one way traffic only so we took the press route in.

We are on stages 7 and 10 otherwise known as Rhonda 1 and 2, the longest stage of the event at 35.72 km. This is the day we would have to work hard as we had timing machines and needed runners to ferry timecards to and from them. Also we had to do the buddy board for information to the co drivers and my job for today was cleaning the number plates and lights so the cars were legal to drive between stages on the highway. Great fun was had writing in the dirt on the back of the cars with WSMC and CCC being the most popular things. Nobby was sat in the dry writing times on the time cards.

This is the first experience of me being in the middle of a media scrum and it was fascinating to watch. On one edge you had the the radio WRC man who, if you listened to had an amazing vocabulary and could make everything sound fantastic as well as being able too just keep talking between cars. On the other edge you had the tv cameras and photographers trying to get a few words and their photos. To do this we noticed the photographers put a large stone in front of one of the rear wheels.

On discussion with one of them we discovered this is an arrangement between drivers and press so they don't have to hold the cars on the brakes because these are glowing red hot and have the potential to seize on or even fly alight. Amongst the scrum you had a poor little man from Pirrelli sticking his probe into the tyres and recording the temperatures off all the cars.

The stages today were very long and the number of cars towed off stage was quite large. A couple of them minus wheels and at least one had rolled and quite a few changing tyres at the end of the stage so as to be able to do the road miles back to base camp.

DAY 4

Final day is a 4am start at the same rendezvous point on the car park made more confusing because of the exit from British summertime and not knowing if our clocks had altered properly. It was the nearest stage to the hotel and only took half an hour to the signing point. The Stage, Port Talbot, was Nos13 and 15 and 17.41km. We all opted to drive the stage today with the exception of the Morris Minor who again entered from the press entrance due to the earlier damage, as we were doing the finish again.

The stage was excellent. It was fast but had some really steep descents down onto narrow bridges crossing streams. It had a lot of gulleys to the side which were laid with logs for safety, to stop

cars falling in but the best bits were the jumps which we didn't do at speed but are as steep. It was as if someone had buried a Volkswagen Beetle.



Today the weather was at it worst with rain and very strong wind causing all the problems associated with paper work and bad weather. A bit of a battle of wills ensued between the timing engineers and us the timekeepers over us using a van as an office for the paperwork and also as a windbreak for the gazebo somebody had brought for a catering point. After a few phone calls from Clive Grounds the engineers parked the van as required.

Nobby was a runner with the timecards from the car to the timekeepers and I was copying the stage times onto the buddy board and holding it up.

I got some fantastic photos just putting my phone camera to the side window of the cars while Nobby and some of the others were practising their calligraphy on the back of the rally cars.

In between the stages we had a chat with Rupert Grint also known as Ron Weasley in the Harry Potter movies who seems to like meeting up with WSMC members as I'm not the first to meet him this year.



I would recommend this event to anyone who has an interest in marshalling. It is a real petrol heads break, made even better by the welcome we got from Cambridge Car Club who treated as one of their own group. They do this every year and have realms of knowledge of whos who and what to do. I will definitely go again but will wait for the new super 2000 cars to settle in so it will be a different set of cars. Also because holiday is limited and I do like to get myself to the sun that time of year.

The best bit of advice we had was from Claire Abrey who said don't forget

to take an umbrella and I will pass it on to the next people who choose to go.