



Radio Mutterings – October 2024

Visit Conwy Cambrian Rally – Saturday 26th October 2024.

It's an early start as I head out across the Runcorn Bridge and on to Llandudno and Rally HQ for the last round of the BRC, the Cambrian Rally. Once parked up I head into Venue Cymru and join Chris, Heidi and Mark as the Gem Rally Control team, with other members of the team staffing the two remote repeater sites out in the North Wales countryside.

As expected Elsi SS1 is already being set up, but due to a significant technical issue, the repeater team out in the field has assumed control of the 81 safety & medical frequency for this stage, with Heidi glued to an open mobile phone to maintain comms into Rally HQ. Meanwhile I settle down for a long shift staffing the management A frequency channel across all stages into Rally HQ. As Heidi sets about Elsi there is a steady stream of traffic on the A system, with messages passing between the convoy of safety vehicles and into Rally HQ, where I link with the Clerk, Wenna and her deputies.

As Chris sets about Clocaenog SS2 he gets a warning that the stage route is partially blocked by an abandoned Range Rover at Junction 49, with the vehicle parked up with a note in the windscreen "two punctures, will return tomorrow", the latter meaning the day of the rally !. As I organise one of the Interim Safety vehicles to attend the scene, Chris organises Cam Recovery 2 to the location to see if the vehicle can be moved. After much debate it becomes apparent that the Range Rover can't be easily moved without damage and that it is impacting upon the safe operation of the stage. Our Police liaison in HQ are helpful, but as the vehicle is not on the closed public road section but Forestry land they can't intervene. After the CoC receives photographs from the scene it becomes even clearer that urgent decisive action is required, if we are not to lose this long iconic stage at such an early stage of the rally. Eventually the decision is made to shorten the stage and bring the Stop Line up to the abandoned vehicle and the Flying Finish to just past Junction 48. After some heroic efforts by the teams on the ground and the Chief Timekeeper all is reset up and the stage is saved. The selfish and illegal actions of the owners of the Range Rover were nearly catastrophic to the event.

Inevitably the opening of the Clocaenog stage is delayed and I work with the Clerk's team to hold and reschedule the various safety cars into the stage and in some cases pause their passage through the stage to try and close up some of the lost time. In the end the event timetable slips by around 30 minutes, but at least we can continue. By hook and by crook we get all of the safety cars through SS2, with significant numbers

of spectators moved to safe locations by the time the first car enters the stage at 10:52 a real success in the difficult circumstances.

Whilst Heidi and Chris continue to look after Elsi and Clocaenog, I'm fully occupied with the A system as officials and safety cars head on to SS3 Brenig and SS4 Alwen. By now the event schedule is about 35 minutes later than planned, but at least moving. Out in SS1 and SS2 the safety channels are kept busy as it seems car after car wants to explore the outer limit of the Welsh scenery, creating much business for the recovery crews later on. I don't get much of a chance to listen in to this action, as I juggle the safety cars into and out of the second half of the morning stages and act as the bridge to the Clerk and her team. Thankfully the radio gods are with me today and the A system comms are clear and precise, in many cases I simply maintain a log once the safety cars are into the stages as they are able to talk between themselves and resolve issues, only intervening when needed or when the Clerk needs updating. By 11:48 we have the first competitor into Brenig and at 12:07 into Alwen, Mark looking after 81 comms for these two stages.

To Heidi's relief SS1 Elsi is finally closed at 12:20 and after something like five hours her monitoring of the open telephone line and the handling of the stage comms by the repeater team can be stood down. The effective management of this first stage was a real tribute to members of the team and really showed the benefits of having experienced Controllers in Rally HQ and out at the repeater sites, able to intervene and manage problems small and large but keep the event running and above all safe. By the time of the refuel / regroup we manage to bring the earlier delays down to only nine minutes from the published schedule. As I talk to the safety cars about this new schedule, adding nine minutes to previously published timings for some is a challenge. A helpful suggestion from across my fellow Controllers is that maybe if I ask them to add ten minutes to their schedule and take away one there won't be a problem !!

By 13:26 the Chief Marshal is back into Clocaenog for the second run as SS5 and is asked to stop at one of the radio points as nothing has been heard from them all day ?. All becomes clear when Marshal 1 comes back to me on the A system to report that they did stop at the radio post as requested but found that the crew had their set on the wrong channel, hence a quiet morning !. The lesson from this please is check and double check your event paperwork and make sure you have not only identified but also selected the correct channel on your radio set. As the safety cars traverse the stage I receive reports that the tarmac link section from Junction 30-32 is a "sea of mud" and "very, very slippery". In the end I ask the Safety Delegate Delta 1 to review the area and he reports back that a verbal warning to crews at the stage start is advisable and this is actioned. I must say that post the event looking at some of the video coverage on You Tube this was a correct decision, as the stage here is just one big mud slide !.

With the British Rally Championship hanging in the balance and ITV filming the event, at times I seem to be producing their coverage as numerous requests come in to move film crews, equipment or camera operators around the final two stage of the day Alwen and then Brenig. Thankfully we are able to accommodate all of the requests with the assistance of various officials, safety cars and interim cars to make sure all movement

in and around the stages is safely managed to all parties satisfaction. The final stage through Brenig is as expected very popular with spectators and the safety cars effectively shepherd both members of the public, their various dogs and media to safe viewing locations in the forest. As Mark continues to manage the final pair of live stages, Chris sets about his numerous recoveries in Clocaenog and I maintain control of the A system as officials head back to Llandudno and derig.

In the end by 18:01 all of the final competitors are clear of the final stage and we begin slowly derigging, but maintaining comms across Brenig as the final two recoveries of the day are completed. In the end its another forty minutes or so before we are finally able to ask "any last messages for Gem or Rally Control" and start the final derigging process both in Rally HQ but also out at the repeater sites.

With a team meal booked for later in the evening I take a walk along the Promenade after a long day in Rally Control and just manage to catch the last couple of competitors from the UK Armed Forces Rally Team climb the podium close to the pier. All in all a most enjoyable event tipped off by the company of the Gem Rally Radio Controllers and friends for a well earned meal.



Ian Davies

Gem 23 and MSUK Radio Controller.