



Radio Mutterings – November 2024

Salford Van Hire Neil Howard Stages, Oulton Park – Saturday 2nd November 2024.

It's an early start as I head out across the Runcorn Bridge and on to Oulton Park, to join the Chief Marshal in the Rally School 'chalet' at 06:30 to sign on the Radio, Rescue and Recovery Crews before joining Helen and Ian Winterburn in Rally Control, alongside Probationary Controllers Ben and Craig. With all of my crews safely signed on I head across a busy Paddock and up to Rally Control in the tower. After setting up the masts and radios with Ian the previous day, its pretty much a case of raising the masts and switching on the MSUK 81 safety & medial frequency and the two Gem high band channels, the latter for the organising team and a separate channel to communicate with the Sector Marshals.

By 08:10 Ian has the radio checks completed and hands the 81 frequency to me, whilst he principally manages the organisers management channel on highband 3 using for the first time the new Gem Team Mitex Sport handsets recently purchased to supplement and in effect replace much of the previous Tait handhelds. A number of the latter remain in good order and are distributed to the Sector Marshals for use on Channel 11. The Course Car and Safety Car are soon in the stage making their final checks and Jack the CoC soon gives permission for SS1 to start on time as planned at 08:30. Once Swift 39 on the Start line passes this on the first stage is underway.



Maybe it's the first stage, but lap counting for some is a bit of an apparent challenge, although to be fair maybe they just enjoyed their first run around the picturesque Cheshire countryside ?. Our first safety shout for the day comes from Quinton 5 out at Junction 17 who report that Car 54 has pulled off the stage at their location with "lost drive", our first customer for the recovery trio of Bulldog 2, Tiger and Gem Recovery. The big advantage of using the Control Tower at Oulton Park is our access to the live bank of cameras that cover the racing circuit but not quite the whole of the rally stages

as the event does make use of some of the off circuit roads. With the help of Ian from the circuit team we are also able to zoom in on cars and also provide the CoC and his team with recordings of various competitor transgressions as the day goes on. The latter capability is of great assistance as one or two crews contest various penalties, but in this case the 'VAR' evidence is clear and unequivocal.



By 09:22 a total of 105 cars are into the stage, Oak 8 at the Stop Line reporting 104 safely out with one car stopped in stage. With Jack's permission SS2 is not long in coming to life.

As SS2 starts we are afforded a grandstand view of the chicane beneath the tower on the main straight and watch in awe as Car 7 manages to not only hit the barrel at the exit of the chicane but punt the barrel high and perhaps 25m or more down the stage, a slam dunk. Our video screens show similar action elsewhere, including the action out at Junction 14 with Gem 69 who reports the cones at his junction well and truly mullered. Not to be left out of the action Summit 7 at Junction 2 and Maverick 31 at J16 report Judges of Fact reports for collection at the end of the stage. In the end the only loss of this stage is Car 95 who are pushed clear of the start under the noses of Bulldog Recovery 2. By 10:39 the stage is complete and Oak 8 report 103 cars out and into Service.

After some slick changes of stage layout by the Bolton Le-Moors Car Club Team and set up crews the action resumes with Car 1 once again into SS3 at 11:04. It's not long before our eyes are drawn to the camera feed from Lodge and we see one car stopped

at the split right in the junction before another car coming behind them makes contact, one for Jack the CoC and a subsequent review of the camera recording. Meanwhile Swift 40 out at Junction 8a reports one car taking the wrong stage direction and a JoF required. Gem 16 out at Junction 18 then calls in that Car 95 has stopped with them, although a short while later the car resumes, only to stutter to a halt, metres further down the stage and a request for a straight tow. Cowy 3 adds a Welsh accent to the airwaves from Junction 20, with Car 88 stopped with them "no power". Not to be left out Gem 69 next shouts up that Car 93 has made it through the infamous Oulton Park watersplash but not much further with a drowned engine. After looking at the cameras we ask Gem 69 to ask the marshals to push the car further off the stage as recovery will have to wait until the end of the next stage. As usual we request that the OK Board and warning triangle are displayed for any stopped cars. A first for me at least is then when Gem 69 reports that the competitor with them has a warning triangle case but therein no warning triangle, we can only assume the triangle was deployed but not collected back on a previous event. This novel set of circumstances just shows that you can't be too careful and should always check and check again that you have the mandated safety equipment in the competing car at all times. Swift 39 soon reports 102 cars in but then amends their report as late running Car 91 reports to the Start Line, making for 103 cars in the end. With three cars stopped in stage, SS3 eventually sees a total of 100 heading back into the paddock.

For SS4 the water splash remains in use and the large crowds are treated to some spectacular action. Up in Control we get down to business once again as the airwaves ripple with various notifications of more JoFs, Clip 3 at Junction 5 and Summit 7 at Junction 2 needing more lead in their pencils as the stage progresses. As we get towards the end of this run, we experience the loss of just two cars, Car 86 with Summit 7 at Junction 2 and then Car 90 a little further on from the same junction. Just as we are bringing the stage to a close, we get a shout from Ian that the Circuit Medical Centre needs the assistance of the Chief Medical Officer as a competitor has reported to them with a burn to their hand. MoMo 167 is soon dispatched to the Med Centre at 13:10, as we concentrate on the set up for the next pair of stages.

With all of the recoveries completed during the turnaround we soon have the recovery units back in location and by 13:37 SS5 is live with Car 1. We are able to continue with the rally action as our second Paramedic is on the Start Line with Staffs Rescue as MoMo 167 remains in the Med Centre, eventually arranging for the casualty to make their own way, with assistance to hospital for treatment for what sounded like a rather nasty burn. Back in Control we are kept busy as Gem 16 calls in Car 20 stopped with them at Junction 18, although they do shortly restart. Less fortunate is Car 50 who only makes it a very short distance at all from the start before pulling off onto the grass. Next Car 27 pops an apparent drive shaft at Junction 18+, also with Gem 16 but restarts and then Car 61 pulls off with Jason, Summit 7 at Junction 2 also with a drive shaft issue, more entries for the recovery Log. Clip 3 monitoring the bus stop chicane reports Car 96 stopped briefly but then restarts. Whilst all of this is happening our CMO is released from the Med Centre and is able to go off circuit to rejoin Stoke Rescue at the midpoint location. From 96 starters into SS5, we eventually hear from Oak 8 that 94 are out.

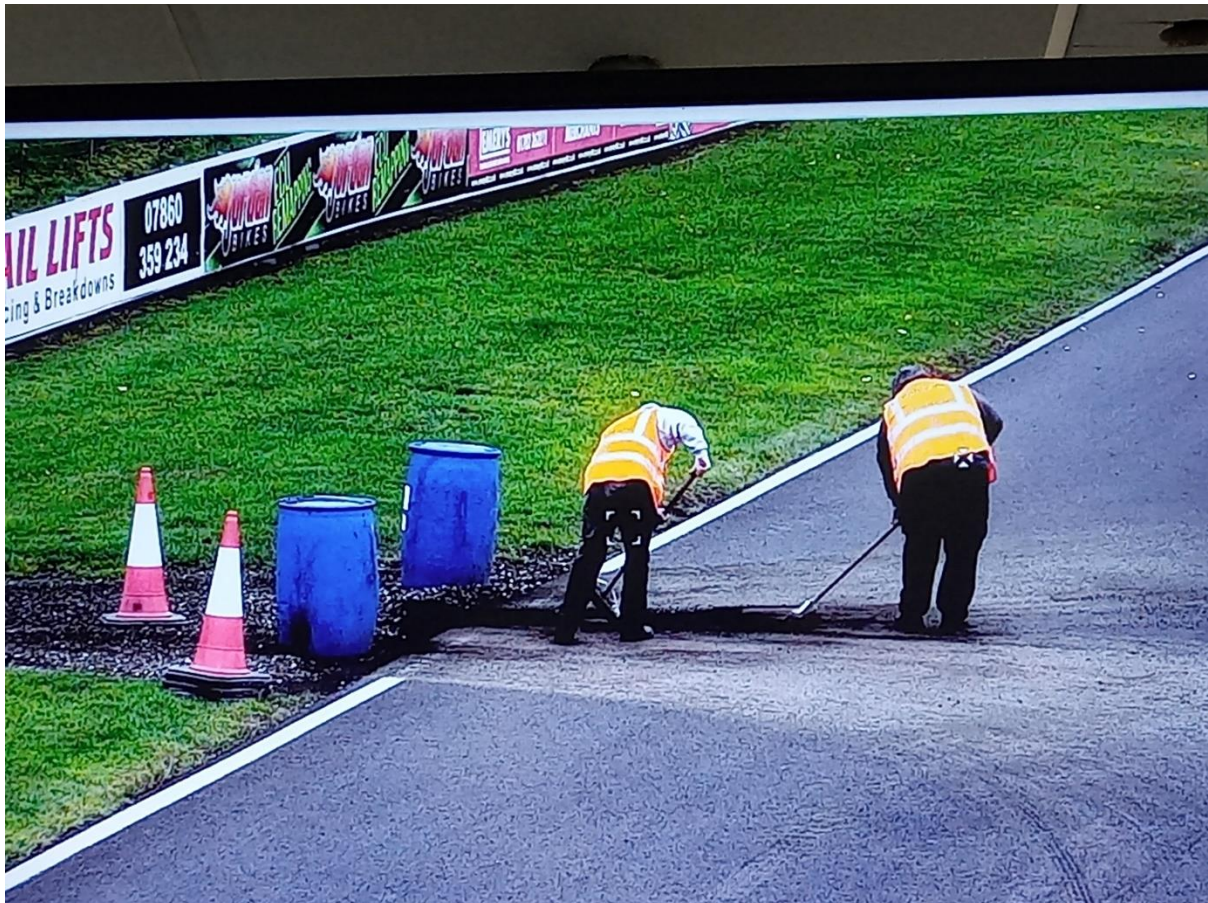
By now the overcast afternoon is rather gloomy, but then someone helpfully shares with us that the Control Tower windows are quite tinted, duh !!. With Jack's permission once again, we have SS6 up and running at 14:41. An early casualty this time around is Car 20 who just about gets the car off the start line, before pulling off the circuit after only about 5 metres progress. Caron 3, another one of our trio of Welsh radio crews then shouts up that they have Car 47 with them at Junction 8, "steaming nicely". A quick spin on the circuit cameras and we are able to zoom in and get a bird's eye view of the stopped car, pulled off into the deadleg area. An update from Caron 3 then reports that the car will need recovery but is losing oil. Not wanting to spoil My Palmer's newly laid tarmac we task Thunderbird 2 aka Tiger Recovery with their large tipping trailer to this particular recovery at the end of the stage.



As Oak 8 calls in 89 cars out, we alert the set-up crews to enter the stage and release the recovery teams to their allocated tasks as we move towards the final pair of stages.

As the set up crews get about their business, through the organising team and circuit management we have to try and sort out clearing the tarmac circuit of the mud, gravel and other detritus pulled onto the stage as the cars exited the wooded offroad area opposite the pits at Junction 18 and came back onto the racing circuit. The track is covered with a liberal coating of crap, in both directions as the cars from the previous four stages split left and right onto the track at this location. Whilst 'circuit' Ian organises one of their tractors with a 'blower', via the Chief Marshal (yet another Ian) we get a couple of marshals with brushes to the scene. In Control on camera, we are then treated to a fine example of how not to sweep a circuit, as the tractor valiantly

tries to blow the muck off and then back on to the circuit and the marshals get to grips with the technicality of brushwork. The latter is not helped as Ben and Craig know the marshals involved and phone one of their wives on scene to offer some 'friendly advice', including perhaps how to Google "brush usage". To be fair these are clearly rally marshals not used to the art of circuit brushwork, but they do their best, under the ever watchful cameras !!.



Just after four o'clock we get permission and Swift 39 gets SS7 underway with Car 1. Only minutes from starting the stage we get the shout that Controllers really don't want to hear from Gem 69, "Urgent ...we have a collapsed spectator in the disabled viewing area". Immediately as I try to get further information Ian from the circuit alerts the Oulton Park medical teams and their Advanced Paramedic Medical Car is on scene in only a couple of minutes, followed by the circuit's own Emergency Ambulance. As we monitor the scene 'live' we offer the event Medical and Rescue resources if needed as the rally action continues. Clip 3 then reports that Car 22 is off on the deadleg around Junction 5, followed moments later by Caron 3 who report Car 75 off, but then restarting. Thankfully the circuit medical teams have the spectator incident under control and whilst we await an update the rally cars continue to throw challenges at us. Car 62 pulls up on the Pit Lane after the Flying Finish and then Car 88 pulls off into the muddy grass after Junction 4 with apparent gear issues. The stage is soon complete by 16:54 and with the Circuit not looking for too early a finish due to the planned bonfire and fireworks, with Jacks agreement we get the recovery teams busy shifting cars out of this penultimate stage.



Whilst we await completion of the recoveries we get an update via Ian from the Circuit medical team, thankfully the 'collapsed / semi conscious' casualty is OK, a trapped finger in a car door the root cause of the incident to everyone's immense relief.

By 17:13 we have 'lost' enough time to start the final stage of the day and ensure that the rally action is not completed too early before the bonfire night party can start. With darkness enveloping the circuit even our high tech cameras struggle to pick up all of the action outside, whilst radio crews on the ground similarly struggle with a 'black cat in a coal hole scenario', trying to identify and report in stopped cars. Between eyeballs on the ground and the limited camera visibility, we soon have Car 70 reported by Gem 16 stopped beneath us and then 105 flies off into the gravel trap at Lodge with Caron 13, our final loss of the day and 81 cars safely out. With the final stage completed I maintain 81 radio coverage as Tiger Recovery and Gem Recovery are tasked to the final two recoveries of a long but worthwhile day. Meanwhile the other Ian W, Helen, Ben and Criag begin the process of derigging the two highband channels and collecting radios. Once the two remaining recoveries are safely back in the Padock I can finally stand down the Rescue and Recovery Teams and assist in the derigging, finally setting out for home just after 19:00. Next stop Anglesey in a couple of weeks, back with Ian W and Helen in Radio Control.

Ian Davies

Gem 23 and MSUK Radio Controller.