

## Radio Mutterings – Lucas Oil Rali Menai 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2024.

With Ian W unavailable, I come off the 'subs' bench to act as Radio Controller for this event, split over Saturday's four stages and a further eight planned for the Sunday. With a planned 13:30 first car, I leave Liverpool mid-morning for the drive over to Anglesey, dodging various day trippers heading to the North Wales coast in the early sunshine. The drive over is uneventful and I'm soon in the Control Tower and setting up Control, joined by two trainee Controllers Craig and Ben, but more of them later. Radio crews are soon arriving, and I must thank the organising club C&A and their sponsors for the goody bags and Lucas Oil promotional goodies.



It's a packed Paddock and the view from the Tower shows North Wales at it's very best. With everyone signed on and directed to their positions, there is a brief pause before I set about the various radio checks and the organisers begin last minute checks through the stage. On time and schedule at 13:30, Gem 59 confirms Car 1 live with SS1 and the action begins. High up as we are in the Tower we enjoy some excellent views of the action. Whilst I concentrate principally on the 81 MSUK safety frequency, Craig and Ben support me with the management channel and also help monitor 81. The first stage is relatively calm, with only a smoking Car 56 and a slow Car 62 worthy of a call into Control. In the end it's a very simple 68 cars in and out of the stage by 14:12.

With permission from James the CoC, SS2 starts once again with Car 1 at 14:14. After their first run, (perhaps to warm up), the action on this second run is far more serious, with cars really pushing the limits of grip and in some cases ability. Maverick 31 opposite the Tower at Junction 11/12 soon has a JoF for collection and then they call in Car 31 dragging their exhaust. Meanwhile with Maurice and Phil in Gem 59 they query the non-arrival of Car 30 ?. After getting Ben to chase the organisers we then see the car up on axle stands behind the Tower with an apparent oil seal problem. Car 59 then stops at the chicane around Junction with a bust alternator, our first but by no means only recovery of the event. This time around it's a job for Crossrigg 2 Recovery and their trainee Crossrigg 5. By 14:55

the last car is with Oak 8 at the finish, making a total of 66 cars out and time for the stage layout changes.

With all of the necessary changes to stage layout made and with the CoC's permission SS3 gets underway at 15:22. It's almost a carbon copy of the first pair of stages, with little for the radio crews to report, other than Gem 59 who calls in Car 20 "boiled up" on the start and pushed clear. The stage flies by in the blink of an eye and by 16:03, Oak 8 calls in 64 cars out with only the one car stopped in stage. Almost immediately we are into the final stage of the day, as Car 1 enters SS4 at 16:04:30 and once again the stage is incident free and forty minutes later we are done and dusted with 64 out and stand everyone down, ready for what Sunday may bring. Once packed up I head over to the village of Amlwch for my overnight stay and find the Gem 59 crew also checking in to the Dinorben Arms. An invitation to join Maurice and Phil for dinner is accepted and we enjoy a fine meal and put the rallying world to rights !.

Sunday morning is an early start for me as I leave Maurice and Phil at breakfast and head back across the island to the Circuit to reestablish Radio Control and check in the additional Sunday only radio crews, scheduled to arrive by 08:00. With everything in order, I complete a radio check at 08:30 in anticipation of first car into SS5 at 09:00. Bang on schedule the action resumes with Car 2, this time first car into the stage representing the finishing positions at the end of the first day. Bob, Jupiter 14 is first to call in as the merge boards around Junction 13 are mullered. Caron 3 is next on the air and reports that Car 70 is off smoking badly at Junction 3, crew out and OK. Sport 2 then reports Car 16 shortcutting back into the pits, with the crew making a 'throat cut' motion to indicate that their day is apparently done.

Just as we are listening to reports of Car 60 losing fluid, I look out immediately across from the Tower and see Car 40 slide at first onto the grass and then in slow motion dig in and roll over. Worryingly the crew do not immediately exit the vehicle and the next competitor Car 50 immediately stops and the crew of Andy Yeomens and Jon Shepherd are out of their car and under the stricken Car 40 to help, as marshals begin to appear. With Ben onto the Clerk, its Red Flags and I immediately dispatch Stoke Rescue and the two Crossrigg Units from the start line. In less than three minutes from the car leaving the track, we have the rally emergency services on scene. Thankfully after a couple more minutes Stoke confirm that both crew members are now out of the vehicle and conscious. As the Paramedic and Rescue Crew carry on their casualty care, I get the Crossrigg team to right the car and load it on the Crossrigg 2 trailer for transport to Parc Ferme and the Scrutineers. With one of the Assistant Clerks now with us in Control, we hold our breaths and await an update from Stoke Rescue.

Less than ten minutes from the start of the incident, Stoke reports that the two crew members are now in the Rescue Unit and will be transported to the circuit Med Centre, at the end of the pit lane for further assessment. With the crew now in some very safe hands and the car on the way to Parc ferme, I remember to take a breath, after a very intense ten minutes or so. At this point I must pay special thanks to the crew of Car 50 in stopping and assisting as they did, it was a textbook action and worthy of much praise indeed. Time seems to tick by slowly and after what seems a lifetime, we get an update from Stoke Rescue and unfortunately assistance is required from the Welsh Ambulance Service to transport one of the crew to A&E and the 999 call goes in at 10:07. Ambulance Control advise that we can potentially expect an ambulance within circa 40 minutes or so, but this

is dependent upon them not receiving a higher priority 999 call. After settling down to await the ambulance Ben then answers the phone in Radio Control and is advised by Ambulance Control that the air ambulance Helimed 2 has been tasked to the incident and is inbound. Hardly has the phone been put down and we look out of the Tower and can see the lights of the helicopter approach and they are on the ground in front of the Tower by 10:28.



The Helimed team exit the aircraft and meet with Stoke Rescue and the Paramedic and accompany them to assess the casualties in the Med Centre. Interestingly, the HEMS Doctor inspects the remains of the car in the adjacent Parc ferme area to better understand the mechanism of the injuries sustained. Once the team's assessment is completed, the decision is made to fly the driver out in the helicopter and the co-driver to make their own way to hospital with minor injuries in one of their team vehicles.



As the Helimed and Stoke Rescue teams package up the patient for transport to hospital, the CoC confirms that the remainder of SS5 and also SS6 are to be scrubbed and the organisers set about setting up for SS7. I also get the previously stopped Car 70 picked up by Crossrigg 2, to save some potential time later on. Just after 11 o'clock Helimed 2 lifts off and we set about checking with the radios through the stage as we prepare to resume the rally with SS7.

By 11:18, with Stoke Rescue back in position, SS7 starts with Car 2. After all of the earlier drama I was hoping for a calm first couple of stages after the incident, but it was very



definitely not to be. SS7 starts with Sport 2 reporting another car shortcutting to the finish, so another JoF is requested. Car 43 then stops with Summit 7, beginning a pattern of stop-go action, apparently linked to a fuel pump issue. Car 65 is then reported as travelling very slowly, but Oak 8 confirms their exit, with all of the 62 starters out. SS8 however is a different kettle of fish, as almost from the start reports come in of cars stopped. Car 43 continues their pattern of 'stop go' rallying and pulls off again with Caron 6, restarts and then stops again with Sport 2 at Junction 20+. Jupiter 14 then calls in Car 29 who takes out all of the merge boards but does continue. Chicanes take a clattering elsewhere and multiple cones are no more. More terminally Car 38 pulls just about off the circuit with Quinton 5 at Junction 9, with reports of oil under the bonnet and not in the engine !. As the stage concludes at 12:43, I have time in the turnaround to send Gem Recovery out to the stricken Car 43 and Crossrigg 2 and their trailer to Car 38. The logic here is to put the car with the oil leaks onto the trailer to avoid dragging oil around the circuit, Crossrigg are appreciative of the decision as they come back to Control to describe that "their trailer is now well lubricated" !.

With recoveries completed, the Safety Car happy with the new stage layout and the CoC's permission we are live with SS9 at 13:26, again with Car 2. It's not long before the airwaves light up again. Silk 24 calls in Car 11 hitting the chicane hard at Junction 10, but proceeds with the second element of the tyre chicane pushed out. Car 43 continues to irritate my ulcer, if I had one, with another bout of stop-go action. On the far side of the circuit, some distance from Jupiter 14, Car 35 stops on the grass opposite Junction 13. Just as we are trying to get more information, which is difficult as the car is some considerable distance away on the seaward side, another two cars are spotted from the Tower's side windows. Eagle eyed trainee Craig makes out Car 36 and also possibly Car 8, both high up on the grass away from the circuit. Car 24 then makes for four cars stopped as they come to a halt at Junction 9+, with a snapped injector. After consulting with the CoC we agree that the three cars off on the grass opposite Junction 13 should be moved if possible before the next run. Once Oak 8 confirms 55 cars out of the stage, I set the three vehicle recovery convoy loose, and the race is on to hitch up the three cars and clear the stage before the next run. The Crossrigg and Gem Recovery Teams soon have the three cars hitched up and, on their way out of the finish beneath the Tower. Unfortunately, the tow strap on Car 8 snaps, just as they enter the pitlane, to the significant and very understandable annoyance of Crossrigg 2, although thankfully nobody is hurt. Talking to the Crossrigg team later and having seen the remains of the towing strap, it's about time that crews and the powers to be spent more attention on this critical safety issue.



Less than 15 minutes from the end of the previous stage and with the three critical recoveries completed we get SS10 running at 14:23 and what a busy stage this proves to be, pushing the radios and subsequently the recovery teams to the limit. Car 22 is first to hit trouble at Junction 22/23 with Caron 6, with reports of a major gearbox issue. Next to hit the airwaves is Car 37 who lose all drive around Junction 16. Grabbing another pen, next for the log is Car 33 with Caron 3 at Junction 3/4 who are eventually pushed into one of the dead legs. Quinton 5 and Summit 7 then report that Car 43 has stopped for what is the last time at Junction 9+, but will need recovery. Just a little further past Junction 9+, Car 16 stops, reason unknown ? and then Car 18 stops at the edge of the circuit at Junction 9 with three wheels pointing in one direction and one definitely in need of realignment !. Finally, just as my log sheets fills, Car 48 decides to add their names to the list of seven stranded cars, out at Junction 20-, in sight of Sport 2 with a suspension failure. By the time Gem 59 reports a total of 53 in, we only manage to see 46 out through the Stop Line. With a little luck and the Crossrigg and Gem Teams, assisted by marshals and the Safety Car we manage to somehow get all seven recoveries from this stage and the one hanging over from the previous stage all cleared before the turnaround for the final pair of stages is completed.

The penultimate SS 11 starts at 15:23, with a total of 45 cars into the stage and with only reports of Car 29 stopped after the merge at Junction 18+ , by 15:55 44 cars are out. Despite the lengthy stop due to the serious accident on Stage 5 and subsequent Helimed transport, the organisers manage to get the planned final SS12 underway just before the stroke of four o'clock. The final stage is not without drama, and as we look out of the tower windows, Car 12 loses it in a big way, clouting the wall through the gate into the pitlane after the Flying Finish and approaching the Stop Line. The car initially is right across the narrow gateway entrance, unsighted to other cars coming through the Flying Finish. For several seconds I can only hold my breath as the crew struggle and eventually succeed in just about getting the car clear of the gateway and the fast approaching next car, phew !. With Car 12 the only loss in the final stage, 43 cars make it to the end of this very eventful rally.

The two days have flown by, with almost every sort of incident thrown at the organisers, the radio teams and especially the Rescue and Recovery crews. Whilst there is always learning at every event, this rally was special, and I think all can reflect on a job well done and in a professional manner.

**Ian Davies**

**Gem 23 and MSUK Radio Controller.**