

Radio Mutterings – February 2024 Part One

Hall Trophy Rally – Sunday 18th February 2024.

It's an early start as I head north up the M6 towards the M55 and then onto Weeton for the rescheduled Clitheroe & DMC Hall Trophy Rally. Passing through the 50mph 'permanent' roadworks from Haydock north, I can only smile at the new road signs proudly proclaiming the 'new' finish date of Spring 2025. The latter only bettered by the 'You won't see the workforce, as we work at night', perhaps the lone workman and his shovel were having a night off.

I arrive about 07:10 and quickly weave my way through the busy service area to sign on with Stuart and agree to cover the area around Junction 35/36 and the ramp area. My thanks to CMDC and their supporters for the much appreciated warm breakfast voucher and a lunch voucher to keep behind my ear for later, memories of the sadly missed Blyton venue and 'pie & peas' for lunch. After chewing the fat with Stuart in Control and Keith Gem 9, I eventually make my way through the stage, which to my surprise from Junction 34 to 35 resembles a waterpark, with deep wide stretches of water covering the roads. I gingerly follow another car through the water and exit up the ramp and park safely off the stage, but with visibility of quite a wide area.

Shortly before nine, we get the go ahead from Chris the CoC and Stage 1 is live with Car 1 at 09:00, as per the schedule. From the very start the cars progress through the water and up the ramp at my location is spectacular, with the competitors split roughly into two camps. First there are the gung-ho, who accelerate into and through the water, sending plumes of spray over the tree tops and steam pulsating out of every part of the car. The opposite camp almost stops their cars to check the waters depth before slowing progressing with a gentle bow wave.



Each method has their strengths, but I know what makes me smile and it's not the slow and cautious, although the numbers of potential engine rebuilds that follow such an approach will only be seen later on in the day.

Car 22 is the first to hit real trouble on SS1 and stops with Gem 59 around Junction 32, shortly followed by Car 28 who stops at Junction 5 and apparently shortcuts into service. Of only 38 starters, Swift 40 at the Stop reports only 35 out of the stage ?. There follows some confusion before eventually Car 36 is reported also parked up at around Junction 32. It's disappointing to see only 38 cars starting the event after the previous years loss of the venue and all of the hard work of the CDMC team.

By just after half nine, SS2 is live and the action resumes and the airwaves are soon full of messages as cars hit trouble throughout the stage. At my location I report Car 3 as mobile but with a flapping tailgate and probably numerous gallons of water ballast as they exit the water and up the ramp. More seriously Car 9 is reported as traveling slowing on hazards and exits into service. Hardly has Stuart time to call 'control is clear', before Car 11 is called in by Gem 59 off with a broken drive shaft. Next Car 18 pulls off into service and then Car 25 drowns out in front of me, before finally restarting.



Completing the misery of SS2, Car 38 begins a trend of stopping after each run through the water in clouds of steam, only to restart a couple of minutes later. Our final loss in SS2 is Car 40 who stops with a cracked manifold, although they return to continue through later stages sounding like an old tractor on about three cylinders !. By 10:02 we have 27 cars out of this second stage and it's time for the first stage changes.

After a slick set of relatively minor changes and the CoC's permission, SS3 starts at 10:38 once again with Car 1. With multiple cars benefiting from copious amounts of WD40 or similar in service, this time we see 32 cars attempt this third stage of the planned ten. Unlucky Car 13 only manages about 100m from the Start line before pulling off the stage, all witnessed by Gem 55 the Start Radio. After a calm middle section of this run, the later cars hit trouble of various types. Car 38, stops once again, possibly water related, but does eventually manage to continue off of the stage. Car 41 is then called in by Maverick 31 as "off into the trees", around Junction 15 but is

reported as OK. Car 42 then loses drive around Junction 31, making for 28 cars out of the stage by 11:04.

A couple of minutes later we have the CoC go ahead and SS4 starts at 11:06, with the fast and so far reliable Car 1. With lunch beckoning, by some miracle it looked as if all of the 29 starters for this run will be OK, that is until Car 42 stops with a lost driveshaft at Junction 31. The stage is over in double quick time and we all head for a well deserved early lunch break, just as the sun breaks out, yes at Weeton in February !.



After a much appreciated lunch break and the chance for another natter with Chris and Stuart, I head back to my location around Junction 36, ready for a planned half twelve restart. In the end SS5 starts at 12:39 and the morning's action resumes. With the lunchtime service interval, a few more cars are dried out and we eventually see a total of 31 cars into the stage. Although there are no real incidents in stage, a couple of cars do shortcut off route into the service area meaning a total of 29 cars recorded as out through the Stop Line.

A mere five minutes from the last car through the Stop Line and Gem 55 announces that SS6 is now live, once again with Car 1. Rather strangely an odd pattern then develops with one car deciding to do an extra lap for what turns out to be three stages on the trot, maybe water got into the co-driver ?. Anyway, Car 37 stops around Junction 21 with electrical issues, not a real surprise given the watery landscape, whilst Car 40 also stops at the same location with a puncture but then cuts into service meaning 29 cars out.

Another slick turnaround means that we are ready for SS7 to start a couple of minutes after 2 o'clock. By now the immediate field is down to only 26 cars and by some miracle the airwaves stay quiet and all of the cars make it safely in and out of the stage by 14:21. For some their luck runs out on the next run when SS8 starts at 14:30. First to hit some sort of trouble is Car 20 who is reported by Gem 9 as "off into the trees". There is an anxious few minutes wait before the marshals report back via Keith that the crew are thankfully out and OK. Our familiar extra lapper does it again and then Car 42 pulls off the stage after only one lap with sort of mechanical issue.

For the final two stages of the day, a reversed direction means that the cars come through Junction 34 and into the deep water, before having to turn 45 degrees right up to Junction 35. This latter part of the route hasn't been used so far and given the challenges of the deep water I relocate my position to the base of the ramp facing directly into the water. Oak 8 relocates to my previous post at Junction 36, thus between us covering this part of the stage, with Gem 59 on the other side of the lake. Sensibly a couple of marshals also relocate, to

cover this tricky section of the stage, although perhaps 'lifeguards' might have been a better choice !.

SS9 starts at 15:33 and unfortunately Car 1 doesn't get very far before stopping around Junction 34, just before the beginning of the deep water. Subsequent cars can just about pass the stricken car, which is eventually pushed a little further off route by the busy marshals at this location. The differing styles of this new route through the water seem to boil down once again to a binary choice, accelerate and damn the consequences, or slow and steady. I'm given a grandstand view of this action, parked as I am on the ramp immediately opposite the water channel.



Whilst I'm kept busy, Gem 9 reports in that Car 29 is off the stage, around Junction 9 but OK. In the end this makes for some 25 cars in and 23 cars out of this penultimate stage.

On the stroke of four o'clock the final stage of the day, SS10 starts with Car 4. Barely have it seems we have got going before Gem 16 calls in a 'safety' that the stage appears blocked around Junction 28/29 ?. A very confused scene then emerges as reports come in that a couple of cars have collided, blocking the stage and that nobody can pass the blockage. Thankfully nobody appears hurt, but with all bar one of the remaining cars into the stage, Chris quite rightly orders that the stage is stopped. As the confusion clears it appears one car went

off or stopped and was then hit by another competing car, creating the problem. In the end the stage is scrubbed and the cars are reouted back into service, avoiding the deep water.

Not the end to the day that was planned, but the 2024 Hall Trophy Rally was definitely one to remember at Weeton. The event was very well organised and run by Clitheroe DMC and their team and it was enjoyable to come back to Weeton, after lasy years unfortunate 'owl' break. The venue lends itself to a compact single venue tarmac rally, although the camp roads are deteriorating somewhat. Venues like Weeton are hard to come by and I hope that organising clubs and the various regional associations can work together with the MoD and MSUK to at least maintain the venue for future use. I for one will be looking forward to the next rally here, The Heroes Rally scheduled for the 4th August, where next time I will be running Control.

Ian Davies

Gem 23 and MSUK Radio Controller.