



After a good nights sleep, (despite the stresses of watching with friends England play football in the quarter finals of Euro 24), it's an early start from my digs for the half hour drive back into Greystoke. By 06:45 we have the Radio Control all connected up and live and begin to welcome the radio crews. Unfortunately a bit of shuffling of Junction allocations is necessary due to one no-show for a family illness which is perfectly understandable, but a second no-show is unannounced and quite frustrating. With signing on complete, radio crews make their way into the forest complex and by 08:45 radio checks are complete and the final safety cars begin traversing the first stage.

Six minutes before the scheduled start of the first car, the 0 car is into the stage for a final run through. With the final safety car clear, Car 1 enters the stage a mere one minute behind the intended schedule at 09:01. For the first thirty or so minutes the radios are all quiet, a comment from Spec Safety that inevitably triggers a shout that Car 26 is missing / late through the Flying Finish !!. Between the tracking B system and then C system radios we isolate the likely position of the car. The car is off around J27, crew OK and just about clear of the stage. Minutes later Jay Jay 25 at Junction 8 calls in Car 36 as off in a ditch, crew Ok but going nowhere.

Just as we are speculating about what might happen next, Gem 70 radios in that Car 48 has rolled around Junction 2+ and an SoS Board is reported as being shown. A quick nod to Richard as Clerk and I have the stage stopped, red flags displayed and EMMU Rescue1, MoMo134 and Extractor 3 Recovery scrambled from their Start positions. Barely two minutes from the alert, the emergency services are on the scene of the incident. The crew are OK, but due to the position of the car offroad, they could not extricate themselves from the car without assistance, fearing a second car landing on top of them (an understandable risk). In light of the position of the car, recovery proves necessary, so as Extractor 3 sets about their task, I mobilise with the Clerk's permission Lake 3 Recovery from their mid-point location to investigate the earlier reported cars off, numbers 36 and 26 who are in close proximity to each other.

Time for a brew, as the Recovery teams set about their business, with all competitors having already started the stage before the red flags. Unfortunately our brew is interrupted by a call from Lake 3 who can't apparently restart the Landie !!. As we leave them to try and resolve their mechanical issues, we alert Trooper 2 the Sweeper / Closing 4x4, who may be needed to assist Lake 3. In the end we can stand them down as the Recovery Unit fires back into life and is able to pull 36 out of their ditch and then tow 26 back out through the Stop Line. With the teams back at the Start from attending the rolled 48, we are nearly ready to restart the action with SS2.

Stage 2, after the stoppage delays, eventually starts at 10:48 with Car 1 once again. Repeating the pattern of the first stage to begin with things run smoothly and then Jay Jay 12 reports a car struggling past Junction 27 ?. Moments later the call is that the car is on fire underneath as it passes, I immediately warn the Stop Line and also the Clerk. With marshals on foot from Junction 27 to investigate, we hold our collective breaths in Control. A minute later Jay Jay 12 shouts up from the Flying Finish that a crew member from Car 33 has walked to them to report that the fire is not out, cue red flags for the second time and we dispatch Lake 3 Recovery from Junction 9 to the incident. Meanwhile coincidentally Car 32 is also off the stage in the same location more or less. Lake 3 are soon on scene and report that the fire appears out, but they have deployed a foam extinguisher to cool things down.

With the stage stopped we get Lake 3 to then recover Car 33 out through the Stop Line, on the way reviewing and leaving the other Car 32 in a safe position until the end of the stage. By 11:53 we are able to restart what is only the second stage of the day and eventually get 54 cars out through the Stop Line. With everyone accounted for the stage change over crews begin the business of getting things ready for the planned second pair of stages, including relocating the Stop Line to the other end of the forest complex.

As we prepare things in Rally Control the relative peace is then shattered by the news of a 'medical emergency' out on the road section in one of the competing cars coming back into the Service Area. With Richard the CoCs permission I immediately dispatch EMMU Rescue 2 from the Service Area, followed by MoMo134 and the Chief Medical Officer to the scene, followed moments later by the Sweeper Car, Trooper 2. In less than three minutes the rally emergency team are on scene and almost immediately I get the radio call no Controller wants to hear 'immediate emergency ambulance needed'. By now 'autopilot' kicks in as I make the 999 call and are connected with the North West Ambulance Service Control. As I speak to NWAS and help is arranged, I stay on the line and relay information coming into Control from Trooper 2 on scene, who act as our valuable radio link. Despite the valiant efforts of the rally rescue and medical team and the rapid attendance of NWAS, followed by the Great North Air Ambulance the competitor very sadly passed away at the scene.

Understandably this news is devastating to all and a deep dark cloud descends over Greystoke. Led by Richard and with support from us all, including the MSUK Steward another Richard, Safety Delegate Kevin and Stage Commander Mark the decision is swiftly made to bring the rally to a halt. With competitors briefed by Richard and Mark's team traversing through the stage to advise marshals and radio crews of what has occurred we all gather our own thoughts as the afternoon slowly draws in and we begin to derig Rally Control. It's a long sad journey home back to Liverpool.

The thoughts and condolences of Motorsport UK, West Cumbria Motorsport Club and Eden Valley Motor Club and Gem Rally Radio go to the competitors family, friends and loved ones.

**Ian Davies**

**Gem 23 and MSUK Radio Controller.**