

## **Radio Mutterings – Heroes Stages Rally in Memory of Les Fragle Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August 2024.**

Sunday morning and I head north up the M6, onto the M55 and head for the Weeton Army Camp for the return of this Garstang and Preston & Pendle District Motor Clubs event, in memory of our late Gemini friend and much loved colleague Les Fragle. Arriving just after 7am, I find the service area somewhat chaotic as I thread my way carefully past the competitors setting up and find the club gazebo to 'sign in' as solo Radio Controller for this event. With meal voucher in hand, a bacon buttie is the first order of the day as the radio crews begin to arrive and make themselves known to me. With many familiar faces and one or two newcomers I soon have the radios checked in and find a safe place to locate Radio Control opposite the club gazebo, just as the cars head towards the start line.



By 08:30 I have the radio checks completed and all of the radio crews and rally emergency services are in position and primed for the days action ahead. As the Clerk and Stewards make their final runs through the stages, the rain returns, making for some glass like surfaces on those parts of the stage that pass over the former RAF base concrete hanger bases !. After some 'tweaks' to the Stop Line timing equipment we get the Junior Rally under way at 09:07 with the Bangers & Cash, Charlie Mathewson VW. The juniors are always great entertainment, and they don't disappoint sliding and slipping their way around the tight and twisty Weeton stage. By 09:22 all of the 12 Juniors are in and importantly safely out of this first stage and with the Clerks permission we get the main field started a couple of minutes later with Car 1 Martin Farrar and Andy Ward in their very smartly presented Scooby. Maybe it's the early rain and the first opportunity to explore the stage but everyone seems to be on their best behaviour and just before the stroke of ten o'clock we have all 47 cars in and out of the stage. The only drama is the fuel loss pouring out of the filler cap of Car 47, a problem they seem to struggle to resolve.

With the Juniors already queuing up at the Start, we get SS2 up and running two minutes after the last of the main field has crossed the Stop Line and Oak 8 calls in the tally of cars out of the stage. Maverick 23 on the Start fires them in and I come back to Oak 8 for the formal closing details for the first stage. Like clockwork the 12 Juniors fly, OK maybe not 'fly' through the stage, but by 10:16 all are once again safely in and out of the stage. The main field is quickly into the stage and the action resumes as the earlier rain showers seem to pass. Another incident free stage passes quickly by and by 10:49 I'm alerting the change around crews that they are free to enter the stage and a couple of the radios need to relocate for the amended stage layout for the second pair of stages.

The Juniors start SS3 at 11:22 and this time they seem to have fired themselves up somewhat and the action appears to step up a notch or two. The first 'safety' shout of the morning then comes from Maverick 12, who report that Car 64 has stopped around Junction 26, crew out and the car clear of the stage. After a pause Maverick 12 comes back to report that the crew have recovered themselves, off stage and back into Service, so no business yet for Merlin or Lake 3 Recovery. There is a slight delay to the end of the Junior run as one of the cars is reported by Silk 24 as enjoying an additional lap !. After waiting for our 'lost sheep' to complete the stage, Maverick 23 gets the main field warmed up and fires the first car in at 11:42. A busy Maverick 12 then reports that Car 24 has a puncture and apparently short cuts into Service. One of the cars then follows the Junior's example and goes for an additional lap past Silk 24. Various radios then call in a very noisy Car 26, who variously has their exhaust or skid plate running along the ground making quite some racket. The mystery is resolved by Oak 8 at the Stop Line who report that the whole of the middle section of the exhaust is the source of the racket dragging along the ground. Just after noon the last of the 47 cars is into the stage and by 12:13 all are out and back in the Service Area.

Continuing the slick starts so far, the first of the Juniors is into SS4 at 12:15. This time around the luck runs out for Car 69, who lose a wheel at Junction 19 and are called in by Gem 71 Alpha on scene with the car. The reports into Control are that the stage is clear to run, this is subsequently and quite rightly corrected by the Sector Marshal Howard 13 Alpha that the car is in fact in a dangerous position for the passing of the main field. After liaising with the Deputy Clerk, we both agree that the car will have to be moved to a safer position once the last of the Juniors is clear. As the main field is held, I alert Merlin Recovery and Merlin 3 who then make their way from their mid-point position to pull the stricken car into a safer position to allow the main field to start. A slick recovery sees the Merlin Team move the car off into the trailer park area and back in location in less than ten minutes.

By 12:41 we have SS4 back up and running for the main field, not suspecting that a new set of challenges is just around the corner. Hardly have we got Car 1 off the line and the shout comes in from Gem 59 that a car has rolled over in the Junction 14-15 complex. I immediately alert the Clerk via the management channel and await an update from the scene. Time seems to pass very slowly in these circumstances but very quickly the Sector Marshal Howard 13 Alpha is soon updating that the crew are out of the Car and OK, marshals having to initially slow cars down past the incident. Something rather odd and certainly not experienced before than happens, although one car paused or stopped at the scene, with the crew out and stage passable we had no need to 'Red Flag' or otherwise stop the stage. However, for some unexplained

reason cars than began to crawl at a non-competitive speed through the stage, almost proceeding as if in convoy. Across from Control we then had the spectacle of a group of very slow cars, then being caught by several individual cars going at a full ten tenths speed on the stage !!. With the Clerk and Deputy alongside me the decision is reached that this is clearly potentially a very dangerous situation and with the Start paused as an understandable 'safety' reaction to a convoy of very slow cars passing alongside them, the Stage is formally halted and subsequently cancelled. I don't suppose we will ever really understand what happened on this stage, but the domino effect of Car 2 rolling set off a chain of events that ultimately led to the cancellation of the stage after 20 cars.

With SS4 scrubbed, the set up crews enter the stage and get things changed around, and I get Lake 3 Recovery to look after the rolled Car 2. With everything finally sorted and back in order, we look to getting SS5 underway around 2pm leaving time for some refreshment. The Juniors keen as ever are soon queuing outside the time control and at 14:03 Car 61 is back in action on SS5. Hopes of a 'q...t' run are soon dashed as Car 68 stops in the dead leg area around Junction 29, having gone straight on at the previous Junction. In sight of the Stop Line, Oak 8 goes to investigate, and the car self recovers off stage and back into the Service Area, leaving 9 Juniors to complete the stage.

The main field is soon back in action and immediately Maverick 31 calls in that Car 1 has hit something and lost a wheel around Junction 3. With additional reports suggesting that the car is not in the greatest of positions I dispatch one of the organising team the short distance from the Start on foot to assess and report back. Thankfully they report back that the car is in a safe position and there is not a need to stop the stage. Gem 59 then reports that Car 20 is stopped with them changing a wheel, but then Ilkley Delta shouts up that Car 13 is stopped with no drive out at Junction 24. Hardly have I put the pen down and Swift 40 Alpha on the ground calls in that Car 33 is off but OK at Junction 21. A final call from Maverick 12 reports that Car 42 is stopped at Junction -30. Just as I'm trying to organise my notes it then becomes clear that before the next stage we will in fact have to pull Car 1 off the stage (a job for Merlin Recovery) and also pull Car 33 out of the bushes (a job for Lake 3 Recovery) before we can think about safely setting the Juniors into SS6.

With both recoveries quickly but more importantly safely completed I get permission from the Clerk to ask Maverick 23 to get the first of the Juniors into SS6, "time as and when". With the Juniors all quickly into the stage by 15:12, I'm just talking to Maverick 23 about the closing details, when a somewhat late but within their OTL, Car 68 rolls up to the Start Line. After conferring with the Clerk, they have permission to run and after a four minute gap they enter the stage for their run around, eventually making for 11 in and out of the stage. As soon as Oak 8 confirms they are all out we get the first car which is now Car 49 into SS6. Repeating the earlier pattern, almost immediately I get a safety shout from Gem 16 that a car has stopped just after them and out of sight at Junction 37/38. With cars flying past at breakneck speed it takes a few moments for the marshals to safely reach the car and then report back that it's Car 3, crew out and OK but a likely suspended tow needed. After Silk 24 reports a stopped Car 14 changing a wheel, I then hear Gem 59 shout out that Car 20 is stopped around Junction 19 in a dangerous position, marshals slowing cars down and another suspended tow needed. Car 50 then decides to stop a short distance further on into

the stage but will then eventually self-recover off the stage route. With a total of 36 cars into this run, only 33 emerge from the challenge of SS6. As the change around crews enter, it's a challenge of eight stopped cars across SS5 & 6 for Merlin and Lake 3 Recovery to shift, if possible before the final pair of stages.



With the combined recovery teams experience and thorough professionalism, the recoveries are all completed, just as the Clerks and Steward enter the stage to run through and check the final set up for the final pair of stages of the day. At 16:40 Car 61 the first of the Juniors is back in action, just as a heavy rain shower dumps itself on Weeton. An exposed gully just on the exit of the first hairpin means a prudent verbal warning to crews on the Start Line. The 11 Juniors are soon through the new stage and clear of the Stop Line. A little before 5 o'clock Car 49 leads the main field into their penultimate run of the day. After a 'calm' start Caron 3 then calls in that Car 30 is passing slowly past Junction 34, quickly changed to a report that they have stopped with an engine out and will need recovery. As I add them to the recovery list Car 29 stops at Junction 24, after apparently hitting one of the boundary metal gates quite hard. For this penultimate run this adds up to 32 cars in and 30 remaining cars clear of the stage.

A little before half past five the Juniors are back in action and all 11 remaining cars are it seems very quickly in and out of the stage. The main field then have their final chance to pit themselves against the Weeton scenery. With the cars queuing up in front of me and the rain passed I notice for the first time on the rear screen of Car 27, a 'beige' Morris or is it BL Marina a sign that reads "This is not an abandoned vehicle", it made

me smile and they were going on to finish the event, so well done. Meanwhile back in Control the airwaves perk up for the final time with Car 16 off around Junction 34+, with Caron 3, a final car for the recovery teams as 29 cars finish the stage.

As everyone sets about packing up I organise the final three recoveries of the day and stay on the air as they are completed and I can finally stand down Control and head off home after an enjoyable but challenging days rallying. I mustn't forget to thank the organising clubs for the £10 expenses given to all of the marshals, a much appreciated gesture on top of the meal voucher. Next stop the Ranges Motorsport Centre at Trawsfynydd in a couple of weeks time, more about that later.

**Ian Davies**

**Gem 23 and MSUK Radio Controller.**