



Radio Mutterings – Gareth Hall Memorial Trophy Rally Sunday 18th August 2024.

Another early Sunday morning start and I head across the Mersey and into North Wales, heading towards the Ranges Motorsport Centre, Trawsfynydd and this popular Bala & District Motor Club event. This year with Mark having a couple of trainee Controllers with him I step aside from Control and instead take up an in stage radio position at the infamous triangle complex, Junction 2. I arrive a little after 7:30am and already the Service Area is buzzing with activity as cars are offloaded from their trailers and last minute fettling is under way. I'm soon signed on and thank the organisers for the goody bag, before heading to the buttie wagon for a bacon bap, roll or is it sarnie ?. With breakfast organised I head over to Control and meet up with Mark who hands me one of the Gem Radio Team new Mitex Sport handheld high band radio sets to trial at the event. These new radios on the 'management frequencies' are set to replace some rather aging Tait handhelds of the late great Bill 'Gemini One' vintage.

Once I've set up the car sets it's time to drive the short distance to the triangle complex, used across all planned twelve stages to provide the necessary changes of direction and layout as we switch between the Service Area, Forest and Road End Controls that make up this rather unique if not quirky event. This junction also provides a key focal point for spectators, with numbers picking their favourite spots either at the triangle itself or on the high hillside above. Dave 'Land Rover' Mitchell provides the Safety Car role in his familiar white Defender 90 and opens each stage before the first of the 49 strong field enter the stage.



There is a slight delay to the start of the forest stage as I call Control that there are still numbers of spectators walking down the stage from the Service Area but they are soon cleared and Car 1 leaves the Service Area Start at 09:21. Almost unheard of in my many years of coming to the event, the high hills are dry this year, although there is a threatening grey sky. To be honest SS1 passes in a blur, with silent radios and 49 cars safely in and out of the stage, before I shift my location around the triangle and we set up for a second run, Forest to Road End of the complex.

SS2 proves to be a very different beast and almost straight away, Car 11 pulls off at my junction and limps back up the hill and into Service. More seriously Cambrian 8 calls in the first 'Safety' shout as Car 18 spins off at the Flying Finish. For a few tense seconds we await news of the competitors, but are reassured when Cambrian 8 calls in that they are safely out of the car and appear to be OK. Just as the heart rate begins to slow down there is another call from exactly the same location as Car 21 is reported rolled off the stage, also at the Flying Finish. Once again time appears to stand still as we wait the call that the crew are out and OK. With two cars off at the same critical point the Clerk of Course calls a halt to the stage at 10:11 and once I report all started cars are through my Junction, Maverick and Gem Recovery, followed by Cam Rescue make their way to the incident site. Crews are checked over by the Paramedic who report all are OK and the recovery teams soon have both cars recovered, Maverick pull Car 18 back through the triangle and Gem Recovery drags Car 21 back onto the stage and they self recover back through the triangle and into the Service Area. Sensibly the Clerk asks that a verbal warning about the change of road surface and water on the stage around the Flying Finish is issued at the Start Line. Immediate drama over the stage resumes with a sweep of the Safety Car at 10:40 (as the stage has been halted for over twenty minutes) followed by Car 28 in at 10:44. SS2 has a further sting in the tale as the ever busy Cambrian 8 calls in Car 35 off at the same location, crew out, stage clear and OK Board displayed. In the end of the 49 starters only 45 make it through the Road End Stop Line.



SS3 is a complete reversal of the previous stage and once the stage layout is altered, Control has permission to start the first competitor at 11:08. Hardly has the message been received and we have reports from Gem 70 that Car 1 has flown off the stage around Junction 10 at the Forest End, exactly the same as the major accident there the previous year. Taking no chances the stage is immediately halted while we all await news of the crew of Car 1. Mercifully despite the major off the crew climb out of the cars windows and are shaken but reported as not hurt, so the stage action resumes. Photographs from the scene are soon messaged to the Clerk, indicating the severity of the accident despite all of the organisers preventive actions, including barriers and 'caution' in the roadbook. After a subsequent assessment by Debs in Maverick Recovery the cars recovery is listed as 'after the event' and at least a two recovery unit job. Phew, only three stage in and the Ranges Complex is certainly proving a major challenge.

For SS4 I shift around the triangle and we head into one of the very short runs from the Forest End back into the Service Area. Whilst setting up Caron 9 at the Road End Stop calls in that Car 23 has retired with them. The action kicks off with Car 2 into the stage at 11:54, down this run to 42 runners. With the extreme drama of the previous two stages, the cars seem to get the message to take things easy and get themselves back into Service. The only casualty of this run is Car 41 who fails to start with a broken hub reported and who requires recovery back into the Paddock.



Once we have the triangle changes made it is soon time for the action to restart with SS5 Service Area to Forest End. Unfortunately there is some confusion as whilst Gem Recovery move Car 41 at the Forest End the stage is started with Car 2. It seems that those on the ground with the officials at the Start Line, those in Radio Control and finally those out in the stage somehow got their wires crossed, not helped by the intermittent radio comms out across the hill and down to the Forest End. In the end no harm is done and the risks were minimal as Gem Recovery is reported by Caron 1 as clear of the Stop Line area. Sport 2 then calls in that Car 21 has pulled off with them at Junction 3 with a mechanical issue. Summit 7 Alpha aka Jason then calls in that the Co-driver of Car 22 appears to be holding their door shut, something to check out at the Stop Line. This time around and post Service, we are back to 45 cars in and in the end 44 out at the other end.



Halfway through the event we set up for the return from the Forest End back across the base of the triangle complex and through to the Road End finish. Car 2 once again leads off the field at 13:10, keeping up the rapid progress of the event, despite the two earlier stoppages. Not much to report really from this run as everyone safely makes it through the stage and 44 cars remain in the hunt.

The next stage is another return run back up from the Road End and through to the Forest End, via a quick jink left and right around the triangle at my location. By now the spectator numbers are looking at around 100 plus in front of me. The mix of ages and apparent interest is huge from the old timers reminising about previous drivers

and rides; the wives and kids dragged along so Dad can have a day out; and finally the paparazzi with in some cases camera lenses longer than their IQs as they look for that perfect rally picture. With the odd one or two dogs thrown into the mix the spectator hoards are complete. Back to SS7 and the action resumes at 13:48, as Car 2 continues their rapid progress. Some cars however can't seem to square the circle of speed and handling and the barriers head on as the car turn sharp left into the triangle take somewhat of a battering.



SS7 is rapidly over with apart from the drama of cars locking up into the triangle, all 44 are in and through the stage.

For the eighth stage, the run is Forest End back into the Service Area and the action is soon back underway at 14:42. Another 'quiet' run means nothing to report as the cars head back into Service for some much deserved TLC. For the next stage we move once again to a Service Area start for the short run back to the Road End Stop Line. Car 2 enters the stage at 15:02 and the crews seem to have the bit between their teeth as the action seems to step up a notch or two as we head towards the final few

stages. Bizzarely the weather stays dry, although not exactly tropical temperatures. The stage begins at a pace and it's not too long before Summit 7 Alpha calls up from Junction 6 that Car 19 has lost drive and pulled off the stage another job for Maverick Recovery. This proves to be the only loss of the stage and 41 cars make it to the end.

A quick turnaround and we are soon heading into SS10 and the longer run from the Road End thorough to the Forest End Stop Line. The run is a clean one, drama free and all forty of the remaining cars make it to the Stop Line, more or less in one piece. For the penultimate run it's a quick reverse of direction to finish at the Road End for the final time. Our luck continues and the run passes without any incident, I guess many crews are thinking about the final stage and making it safely to the end of the event.

For the twelvth and final stage of the day we start at the Road End for the short blast back up past the triangle and into the Service Area finish. I'm joined at the triangle by radio crews from the deadleg down to the Forest End which is not used for this last stage, providing the radio crews and a few marshals the chance to see the action up close and personal at Junction 2. The competitors don't dissapoint and slip and power slide their way past the triangle and down to the Service Area, all forty remaining cars making it out a little after five o'clock. The event has been thoroughly enjoyable this year, deposite the earlier drama. For me I just need to hand the trial radio back to Mark and head home. Unfortunately for Maverick and Gem Recovery and their guardian angels in Cam Rescue the day isn't over as they have to stay behind to tackle the monster recovery of Car 1 that remains outstanding.

Ian Davies

Gem 23 and MSUK Radio Controller.