

Radio Mutterings – Altratech SMC Stages Sunday 14th April 2024.

It's an early start as I head across the Mersey and into North Wales, destination the Anglesey Racing Circuit and the Altratech SMC Stages 2024. It's a fine but cold blustery morning as I arrive about 07:15 to join Ian Winterburn and daughter Helen in the Tower as Radio Controllers and Paddock Runner for today's event. The paperwork as ever with Stockport 061 MC is first class and the marshals meal ticket and neck warmer are much appreciated. Ian W already has the radios set up in Control and we are soon checking off radio crews and the safety team as they arrive for today's action, but first breakfast is the order of the day !.



By 08:15 radio crews are in position around the circuit, and we carry out the necessary radio check, with the organisers completing their final runs around the circuit and last minute jobs. Once the Steward has been round to check things over, just before 9am we have permission from the CoC to start the first car on their due time. Gem 59 on the Start Line gets ready and spot on 09:00 Car 1 launches themselves off the line and the action begins. High up on the second floor of the Tower we get a great view

of the action, far better than last months 11 ½ hours behind the cowshed on the North West Stages !!. With a dry'ish circuit and sodden infield, everyone tries their best to stick to the black stuff. Unfortunately, the first car to hit trouble is Car 8, who with bodywork flapping pulls off at Junction 15 in a dead leg across from the Tower. Via Maverick 31 we get the marshals to push the car a little further off the circuit, as the crew set about repairs, eventually rejoining the circuit via the dead leg. Dean 6 at Junction 12 is next to call in with Car 17 stopped with them at Junction 12, reason unknown ?. Car 29 has less luck, only managing a few hundred metres from the Start before stopping. Jason, Sumit 7 has the first of what will prove to be a busy day with Car 48 stopped just prior to the Flying Finish, although they later cross the line. Gem 59 then reports that Car 55 has approached the start but not initially started and has returned into service. By 09:43 the last of the 82 strong field is into the first stage and we eventually see a total of 80 cars through the Stop Line.

With a tight time schedule to see eight special stages, we soon have permission to start Stage 2 at 09:59 with Car 1. Almost immediately there is a 'safety' shout from Sport 4 as Car 4 stops around Junction 22+ with a reported broken wheel. Car 86, running up the order then stops before the yump with an apparent steering arm problem. The first of several punctures across the event, sees Car 52 correctly follow procedure and stop at Junction 6- to change a wheel before proceeding. Car 76 then has a problem with their fuel pump and stops to bodge a temporary repair before proceeding. By 10:40 we have 76 cars out of the second stage, and we set about the various recoveries between Gem Recovery and Crossrigg 2 Recovery, along with the latter 'shadow' Crossrigg 5 in training. Unfortunately, the reports from Crossrigg on Car 4 are that the broken wheel and disc have sunk in to the sodden ground meaning a difficult and possibly lengthy recovery. In the end a practical solution is arrived at and after borrowing longer forks from the local farmer the circuits Telehandler lifts the car back to the Paddock after Stage 4.



Once all of the stage changes are made, we have CoCs permission and the action resumes with Car 1 into Stage 3 at 11:13. Ian and I are kept busy as various cars take their chances with the very wet infield, although most manage to squirrel their way back onto the tarmac. Car 23 is soon reported by Caron 3 as stopped with them at Junction 5/6 with a "mechanical" issue ?. Car 73 is then reported as "limping" around the circuit, before shortcutting back into service. Car 55 who has had previous problems on the Start Line, manages to start OK, but then the heater matrix gives out and they lose all water at Junction 14 with Quinton 5, more

custom later for the Gem and Crossrigg Recovery Teams. In the end we see a total of 73 cars into the stage and 71 out by 11:58.

With little delay, we have Stage 4 operational by 12:06, as the wind picks up and the temperatures fall. From the top floor of the Tower, we are afforded some excellent views of the action below the Tower as the crews really push hard as we reach the midpoint of the event. Quintin 5 has another customer in the shape of Car 22 who stops with them out at Junction 14, followed a short while later by Maverick 31 calling in Car 66 at Junction 17. The third loss of the stage is Car 78, stopped about 300m after the Start. This all makes for 73 cars in and 70 out of the stage and more to be added to the recovery lists.



With the second pair of stage complete the Recovery Units are soon out on stage picking up the casualties from Stages 3 & 4, as the organisers begin the stage turnaround, and we manage a swift lunch break in Control.

After the necessary stage changes are made and importantly checked, by 13:25 the second half action resumes, with the flying Car 1. After a quiet start to the stage the airwaves begin to pick up as the second half of the field challenge the outer limits of the circuit and in some cases abilities!. The fine original Mini, Car 57 is first to hit a problem and stops close to Gem Recovery out at Junction 9/10. They are followed by Car 76 who with repeated throttle problems stops first at Junction 2/3 with Sumit 7, restarts and then stops at Junction 22 with Sport 2, before restarting again and making it out of the finish. So fifth time around we have 72 cars in and a very creditable 72 cars out past Oak 8 on the Stop Line.

Keeping up the momentum for the day we are soon into Stage 6 at 14:12, once again with the ultra-fast and apparently reliable Car 1. This stage proves to be a busy one in Control as radio crews call in misdemeanours of every shape and impact. Car 6 is first reported, stopped across from us by Maverick 31, pulled to the side of the stage safely alongside the tyre wall. Next we have another shout from the busy Sumit 7 as Car 23 loses fluids at Junction 2/3, although they eventually manage to restart. Less fortunate is repeat caller Car 55 stopped at Junction 21 with Silk 24 and a broken throttle body. Finally in this stage, Car 53 stops at Junction 14/15 with Quinton 5 with an engine issue. As we pull together another recovery list, we hear from Oak 8 that there are 67 finishers from the 70 cars into this sixth stage.

With the gods still smiling on the organisers, Stage 7 is underway by 15:31, with the fast and furious action continuing. This time around there is little radio traffic and the stage runs smoothly until Car 22, another 'repeat caller' stops at Junction 12 with Dean 6. After looking under the bonnet and after much head shaking, the car restarts and competes the stage on hazards, Less fortunate is Car 45, with a broken throttle cable out at Junction 17, neatly parked in front of Maverick 31 and in sight across from the Tower. With a few changes after the previous service, we have 66 cars in and 65 reported out by Oak 8.



A mere two minutes after the last car is clear of Stage 7, we have the final stage of the day underway at 16:16 and what a busy final stage we have. Who else but Sumit 7 has the first call of the stage as Car 27 pulls off with Jason, possible "diff" problem ?, although they restart on hazards a shortwhile later. Car 50 then stops briefly at Junction 50 before restarting and clearing the stage. Car 28 unfortunately then stops with Silk 24 at Junction 21, with a blown gearboax and is added to the final recovery list. A very sickly Car 27 is then reported as traveling very slowly on hazards through the stage and we soon have sight of the car from the Tower. Although at a crawling pace, to be fair the crew are aware of other cars and pull off or to the side of the stage to let others pass. In the end they limp into the pitlane beneath us and jump out of the car, neatly parked at the rear of their garage and have the OK Board and triangle out in rapid fashion. Our final shout of the day is for Car 71, stopped at Junction 21 with Silk 24, with no clutch. As Oak 8 reports the final car of 60 finishers through the Stop Line at 16:57 we organise the final recoveries of the day.

A well organised and resourced day, sees all eight of the planned stages completed, despite twenty plus recoveries. The benefits of two licenced recovery units plus the Crossrigg trainee meant that through the day we keep on top of the numerous

recoveries and did not delay or adversely impact upon the event schedule, important when the event has a finite envelope in which to complete as many stages as possible. Despite the clear bribery of an excellent piece of homemade Jamie Dodger blondie cake from Crossrigg 2 brought into Control, I call the battle of the recovery crews a score draw, as all have performed magnificently !. A final thanks to Extractor Rescue and their Paramedic Julie, for checking over one of the radio crews who took a tumble on the wet and uneven ground.

Ian Davies

Gem 23 and MSUK Radio Controller.