

## **Clee Hills Trial 2020 – a canter through a Dellow’s ups and downs by Hilary Farbowski**

The forecast was much better than last year; there was no oil on the clutch plate, and we got scrutineered the night before. So, all set for a fabulous Clee Hills on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> January, is what we thought...

Having booked a nice B&B about two miles further on from The Squirrel, we left Cheltenham about 3.30pm on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> January. The weather was bright: sunshine, blue skies, winter chill and the Dellow was running extremely well (unlike last year, when Andrew noticed the clutch slipping - on the way there, on the Leominster bypass). We made it to Ludlow in about an hour and a half, checked in at the B&B then retraced our steps to The Squirrel.



*All scrutineered and raring to go*

We were second or third car at scrutineering, and had no issues. After signing on, it was back to our B&B and then a pleasant walk into town for a tasty meal at the Thai restaurant. Ludlow has some fine old buildings and an elegant, ruined castle.

Next morning, we were up early for breakfast. It had been a cold night and the Dellow’s windscreen was frozen inside and out. Some nocturnal creature had left tiny paw prints in the frost on the tonneau cover. We scraped both sides of the screen, carefully folded the stiff tonneau cover back, then of course, found the car would not start. It was not used to life outside in winter, and the battery was too cold. We were too, but that was soon remedied by some aggressive pushing of the car around the quiet cul de sac and down a fortuitously close, but sadly gentle, hill.

Andrew got in, I kept pushing, struggling for grip on the icy, frosty road. Eventually the engine started and, relieved, we headed for The Squirrel and the start.



*George Houghton and Andrew Isherwood  
contemplate what lies ahead*

We met some fellow competitors that we knew: George Houghton and John Harris in another Mk1 Dellow. Unfortunately, Simon Knight who had entered in Class 8 in his recently acquired Dellow, had had to withdraw, suffering with a shoulder injury. Brian Partridge and Lee Peck were looking lively in their Ridge Cannon and Roger Ashby very happy in his special, the Coates Orthoptera. We saw Matt Johnston (a fellow Dellow member), in one of his Cannons, with accomplished trialer Emma Wall. Everyone was bright and cheery, like the weather. What an improvement on the previous year when it had been dull, overcast and damp.

Shortly before we were due to leave, another Dellow member, Tony Martin turned up. He was keen to spectate on one of the hills. Unfortunately, we had no time to discuss, where the best place might be, and advised him to seek advice from the trial officials in The Squirrel. Clearly the advice he got was good as I later found out Tony had spent about three thoroughly enjoyable hours at The Slab. Then 09:12 came and we set off, full of excitement in the crisp, clear winter sunshine.

Our first hill was Harton Wood. En route, beautiful countryside and charming villages, and in one field, we glimpsed above the hedgerows, strange plumes of steam or smoke rising at fixed intervals. Who knows? Silage drying huts? Badger houses? With sheet ice on the smaller roads, and frost everywhere, it made for an interesting drive. We passed a car, which had been ahead of us: No 58, the black and white Morris Minor. They thought the supercharger had gone.....

We arrived at the holding point for Harton Wood and were advised it would be a rolling start, off the road and then left into the section: there was too much mud to start at the foot of the hill. Bumpy, rutted but we got up it. Some confusion at the top – a marshal, with the sun in her eyes,



seemed to wave us left, so we continued a short while then realised we should have turned right. We blew up the tyres then retraced our route and exited the correct way.



*John Harris waiting at Flounders Folly*

On to Flounders Folly, up a track after a grass triangle. We waited in a queue of about six cars, started at the top of the lane on the marshal's whistle: immediately right through a gate then left. It was very muddy, slippery and bouncing did not help. We could not make it beyond 8 – the wheels were just spinning in mud. George Houghton did much better. Thick with mud, we retreated, blew up the tyres in the car park and left, a bit dejected, for Jenny Wind.

Low sun on the road made driving very tricky. We arrived at Jenny Wind - always a sense of foreboding as we remembered the steepness at the top. We had cleaned it in the past – it must have been a dry year. No worries about the steepness this time. We got nowhere near the top: only as far as 8. After reversing out we continued along the track and turned left at a small orange flag, up a track that was almost as challenging as an observed section. Steep, grassy, slippery, we needed 1<sup>st</sup> gear to get up it. The track eventually led to a gate, which we had to open and close, then onto a main road where a small *Clee Hills* sign on the verge reassured us that this exit was intended for trials cars. We turned right and followed the road, looking for a dip, all the way to Longville village, without finding Ippikins Rock – then we remembered we had had the same problem last year.

So, we turned around in Longville and returned, now looking on the left for our turn and found it this time after a "Hidden dip" sign. Along a bouncy track, we came to the steep approach leading to Ippikins Rock. A Suzuki X90 (car 64) ahead of us had two goes at getting up the approach track to Ippikins Rock and had to reverse. We managed to nip in before their third, successful, attempt and managed to get up the approach road. Once on Ippikins, we found the hairpin right quite straightforward, as Andrew remembered it from last year and steered wide in the corner. It was a bit muddy but generally straightforward.

And so on to Longville – we had travelled the road already that morning. By 11:45 we reached the section start and realised the hill did not open until 12:10. Never mind, that gave us time for a chat with George Houghton and John Harris in the only other Dellow and Andy Fox and Alex Hewitson in the Austin 7 (car 67).





*Hanging out at Longville*

Around 12:00 the hill marshal arrived, gave us some useful warnings about the top of the hill, as it exited onto the road then we were off. Two bends, 90 right 90 left – all good. Then sure enough, at the summit there was a nasty dip on the left just before the track went up and over onto tarmac.

Onwards. En route for Heywood Common, we recognised the left turn where the main road headed right and uphill and reached

the section start. While Andrew reduced his tyre pressures, I thought it odd that there was a fence across the track, soon after the start. In fact the track bent sharply round to the left before the fence, behind which was a turkey farm. We set off on what looked like an innocuous track, swinging left to avoid the turkeys. However, muddy ruts soon got the better of us and we had to reverse back down, turning around by the turkey farm, under the watchful gaze of one of the feathery residents.



A bit crestfallen, we headed for Church Stretton and a welcome break at the Applegreen Garage. After refreshments we set off again bound for Castle Hill. Last year I remember waiting to start this hill in front of a 1929 Ford Model A. Back then, we were all a bit damp as the weather had been drizzly most of the day. This year we had had big blue skies, mostly, and a crisp winter chill. Andrew reduced the tyre pressures, there was no queue and we were off. What a scream! The section was like a rollercoaster. Deep ruts on left and right – off camber. I did some of my best



leaning, in an attempt to keep the car balanced and personally feel more secure. Rough, muddy it was incredible how the car got through the section; it just seemed so bumpy. There were a few overhanging branches but they were forgotten in the excitement of the ride. What a blast.

Next it was on to Ratlinghope Observed Test and Ratlinghope (Section 2A). There was a ford just before the test and Andrew stopped this side of it to adjust his tyre



pressures. The test was fine and Andrew did a respectable time (we found out later he had been quickest). Straight into the section: deep ruts on the left and as I heard Andrew say “We’re out (of the ruts), we’re out .... we’re in” the deep ruts on the left seemed to call to us and we finally dropped into them, but they soon grew shallower

and we made it to the top and to a gate which had to be opened/ closed. The hill was challenging but as nothing after Castle Hill.

Next up, the gliding club, via Dangerous Hill (which wasn't). We arrived at the Control along with the George Houghton's Dellow KOH 189 and the Austin 7 of Clare and Robert Renshaw. What a fabulous drive over the moorland to The Portway.



Once the control marshal had given us the "all clear" to drive past the glider landing area, we made our way across the Portway track and into the forest. After I had opened and closed a couple of gates, we arrived at Priors Holt 5, an innocuous enough looking hill; aren't they all?



Priors Holt 5: we did not have to worry about what to do at the summit as we only got about 25 yards along the track, described as "track over grass". It was more like track through deep mud and the occasional pothole. We lost speed and the wheels started to spin. I did some sideways shimmying and we seemed to start moving again but then a serious clatter from underneath the car gave us a hint we might have a problem. I managed to push the car back towards the start, where a marshal joined in and helped move it out of the way.



Andrew jacked the car up and I got out my trusty Waitrose carrier bag as a makeshift ground sheet.



The news was not good. Nothing to see but as we pushed the car backwards and forwards, the back wheels jammed. Luckily for us, two local chocolate Labradors were passing with their owner, who kindly offered us a tow out of the forest back to tarmac, where we were able to arrange transport home. Unluckily for us (!) we missed The Slab.

Back home and further investigation revealed we had broken teeth off the diff pinion and they intermittently caused the axle to jam. Despite our unfortunate and abrupt ending, we nevertheless thoroughly enjoyed our day out in the winter sun and the fabulous countryside, among great, like-minded enthusiasts – marshals and competitors. Better luck next year maybe, when we return to play in the Clee Hills.