

The Clee Hills Trial 2025 by Tony Branson

I'll get my excuses in first. The last trial Eric and I did was the 2024 Clee. I did do the Land's End, and the car had been out on the Edinburgh and Exeter but not in my hands. So, we were a bit rusty.

Our start was a civilised 08.45 and we found our way to Harton Wood without deviation, repetition or hesitation. I remembered this as not too difficult but with some deep ruts, so I decided to take it very gently in first gear. As we set off it quickly became apparent that this was not the gear I had selected. I contemplated a downshift but with a bit of clutch slip and speed we rocketed out of the section in 3rd.

We cleared Heywood Common and then set about avoiding the ruts on the right. Last year doing this led to an unplanned excursion into the hedge. It may have been the discussion and recollection of this which led to us not noticing Wall under Heywood and the Plough. Consequently, we missed the turning to the Coats, and it was only when we reached Longville, we realised we had gone too far and turned back.

I knocked over several cones doing the Coats farm test 2 years ago so this time I took it very gently and returned a time described by the marshal as 'majestic' although not quite as majestic as that of Michael Leete.

We arrived at the section behind the MGF of Dave Lancaster who was shifting vast amounts of mud but not the car. It took a lot of Land Rover effort to extract him, and this further stirred up the first bit of the section. I had my doubts that we would reach the 12 marker but with a lot of bouncing we got onto the slope unfortunately we hadn't gathered any speed. We made it to the 7 marker and then ran out of grip. Thomas Hunt could only manage a 12.

I thought I had the measure of Easthope 1 but although we got going well, we fell into a hole I hadn't seen and stopped.

The problem with Ippikins Rock is the corner. The first time I missed it altogether, two years ago I turned in early, cut the corner and ended up beached on the apex. This year I took the corner very wide. This required a spectacular climb up the bank on the opposite side, however this brought us round the corner and up to section ends.

The route to Harley Bank took us past the foot of the Jenny Wind which I gather has now become impossible to use due to permission issues which is sad.

Harley Bank has never been a favourite section of mine. It seemed that the available scores for me were 12, 11 or on a very good day 10. The bit above the 10 marker looked easier if only one could reach it. It seems to me that how much you like a section is often inversely proportional to the score you achieve. Well, this year Harley Bank rose considerably in my estimation as we got past the 10 marker and as expected made it to the section ends

A brief fuel and loo stop, and we were at the holding control for Meadowley. While waiting there we saw the VW of Paul Jones which had attempted some weight reduction by ripping the rear bumper off. A bit of hammering and some zip ties and they were on their way.

There are 2 deep bumps on Meadowley about halfway up, get these right and the top is soon achieved. We got the second one wrong and stopped for a 5 which was a disappointment.

Whether it was the disappointment or having seen the damaged VW at the control we decided to follow the old route back to the control rather than the route card with the right turn to Underton.

We retraced our steps and got back onto the route a bit further back in the field which may have contributed to our subsequent problems.

At Hillside there was a bit of a hold up. Someone, I don't know if it was a marshal or spectator, had slipped and hurt his ankle. He was recovering by the time I reached the hill above the scene so I didn't feel I could contribute anything medical by climbing down to him. He was very efficiently inserted into a trials BMW and had the excitement of a ride out of the section. I hope he has recovered well.

The two Hillside section were the high point of the trial for us. I think this was the case for many others. The deviation on Hillside 2 was terrific. All I could see was red bonnet and markers coming towards me. Whether we missed them due to or despite my frantic steering efforts is not known to me, but we cleared the section with whoops of pleasure.

Oak Dingle looked terribly slippery, and I was pleasantly surprised to reach Celia Walton at the restart. Even better was that we got away, but grip deserted us for a 3.

We returned past the Squirrel to the Burwarton group of sections. The first, the Goggin was approached down a very steep and slippery slope. We were advised to keep to the right at the foot of the section. I don't think that made

any difference as the whole area had become a quagmire. Despite serious understeer we made it past the 12 marker.

It appears that there should have been an escape road from the bottom of the section but this was not available as the key for the gate didn't work. We were instructed to retrace our route up the slippery slope and this proved our downfall. After 4 attempts I had got close to but not quite to the top. The engine then decided to boil despite having the fan switched on. A Land Rover arrived and towed us out. After allowing the engine to cool and topping up the water. I started it but discovered that the throttle had jammed in the closed position.

I had already decided to give the final 2 sections a miss and this confirmed my decision.

I rigged a piece of string from the throttle coming out under the bonnet which enabled us to drive back to the Squirrel.

Our scores somewhat belie the enjoyment we had on the event which was as ever very well organised. The new Hillside sections were the high point, but all the sections were good regardless of how far we got up them. Our thanks to the organisers and especially the marshals.