

The Cleve Hills Trial – 19th January 2020. A report by Jonathan Toulmin.

My involvement in this year's Cleve Hills Trial was a very modest one. Simon Woodall was the man in charge (as the Clerk of the Course). He was 'celebrating' the fortieth anniversary of his first Cleve Trial as CoC! Simon was greatly assisted by Adrian Tucker-Peake, Graham Austin and Richard Houlgate in putting the event together – something that seems to get more bureaucratic every year. Added complexity was imposed by significant changes to the regulations imposed by Motorsport UK and by a complex contract with Forest England for the club to use sections on the Long Mynd and at Strefford Wood.

The basic format of the event was unchanged from recent years – the event starting and finishing at Ludlow, and visiting Craven Arms, Much Wenlock, Church Stretton and over the Long Mynd to Far Gatten and Priors Holt. The tried and tested 'double loop' figure of eight system was used again, with the motorcycles and those driving kit-cars and trials 'specials' going west first and doing the east loop in the afternoon, and those driving production cars, and those in Class 0, heading east in the morning and saw the stunning sights from the top of the Long Mynd in the afternoon sunshine.

This year, my event responsibilities were limited to the printing of the route books in the club office (my thanks to Lucy for the help), doing the route marking, and being one of two 'course closers'. The eighty-mile route was marked out with the usual coloured card markers on the Friday, a couple of days before the trial. At the very top of the Long Mynd at about lunchtime, it was snowing quite hard, and, obviously, there would be no flying there that day as visibility was down to a hundred yards or so. But things change, and on the day of the event, it was a bright and sunny day. Other things change too. We received a most-encouraging 75 entries (good for such an event these days) of which eleven were motorcycles (Honda x 4, Beta x 4 and BSA x 3), and eleven 'class 8' (trials specials) cars of the Cannon/VW Buggy/Troll types, and a further eleven kit cars (Marlin/Liege/Dutton and a lone Smart Roadster).

Of the 'production car' classes, there were four VW Beetles and four pre-war cars (Ford Model A, Austin 7, Riley Nine). Class 5 for Sports Cars had eight entries comprising BMW Z3, Suzuki GV2000, Scimitar, MX5 and an 1172cc Coates Orthoptera – you don't see one those every day! There are now so many Suzuki X-90s in trials that they have their own class and we had seven of them on the event (although two were in class 0). In yesteryear, the 'conventional saloon car' with an engine at the front, and driving the rear wheels dominated the entry lists, but this year there were just two – a BMW 318 and a Morris Minor competing against each other, but then variety is the spice of life they say! That just left the sixteen competitors in "Class 0" – an MAC invention of 1994, now adopted by almost all other clubs, which was aimed at those wishing for a slightly easier event as the most difficult and rough sections are omitted or have easier tracks substituted. This was a real mixed bag from Dellow to Citroen 2CV, Austin 7 to MGB, Ford Ka to BMW Compact and I am reluctant to mention a Nissan Micra and two Peugeot 106s, who were excluded from the results for failing to follow the instructions of the route book and for bad driving on private land. We sincerely hope that their inconsiderate actions will not prevent us from using the stunningly beautiful route along the Portway (the very top of the Long Mynd) in future years.

Other than those in Class 0, who had eleven sections to tackle, competitors in the main event attempted thirteen sections, but some of these differed between the 'bikes/trials cars and the production car classes, so that in total, the club used 20 discreet sections on the event – a bit of a marshalling challenge, but one to which our chief marshal, Adrian Tucker-Peake, rose with distinction, getting about 80 marshals. The club is fortunate that the hills of south Shropshire (Wenlock Edge and the Long Mynd and others) provide a great variety of terrain – grass, soil, mud, stones, gravel, rock, tree roots – we have them all! Some are long, and some are short, some are rough, some quite smooth, some very steep, some almost level.

We have historic sections such as Meadowley, Ratlinghope, Strefford Wood and the Jenny Wind (the old winch-cable railway near Much Wenlock), all of which have been used by the trial for seventy years or more, and still stopping cars. The long and dramatic 'Hungerford Steps' section had been re-opened with the removal of part of a truly massive oak tree which had blocked the track last year. Richard Houlgate organised major remedial works on the Easthope 1 section with the kind and helpful co-operation of the National Trust area warden Mr Heath. Simon Woodall added a hairpin bend to the Priors Holt 1 section which defeated many.

Castle Hill, at All Stretton, is believed to have been used in a 1939 trial and is as dramatic a section as you will find almost anywhere. It runs between extremely high banks and has severe camber changes to add to the rock outcrops, soil and tons of dead leaves, yet it stopped very few. Three in class 0, two 'bikes and just one car (an MX5) from the whole trial failed there. At **Gatten's Gamble**, with superb views into Wales, there were just two who did not get to the top without penalty – surprisingly both were 'bikes. In **Priors Holt**, section **PH4** stopped all but two (Ian Davis and Stewart Green) in class 8, as the Class 8 competitors had a most severe Restart and had high tyre pressure limits too. In the remainder of the main car classes, just 5 failed. Class 0 did the easier "**PH5**" instead, but eight of the twelve drivers got 6 penalties there. A few hundred yards further on, "**PH6**" was a real challenge as it incorporated ruts, chicanes, and slippery mud with almost no run at it, and about half the entry got penalties there. Then it was on to another ultimate trials section "**PH1**" which this year included "**The Slab**". It starts on gravel, becomes solid rock, then a hairpin on grass (or mud for the later runners) and onto the old PH1 section with a rutted corner and increasingly steep surface of loose stones. Only two cars, Adrian Marfell in his VW Special and Ray Ferguson's Liege, saw the top, but five 'bikes went 'clean' there. Best of the production cars were Gary Browning's VW Beetle and Stuart Highwood's Reliant Scimitar, both dropping 4 points. In class 0, only George Houghton (Dellow) and Andy Fox (Austin 7) climbed '**The Slab**'. George was driving in his first ever classic trial in his recently purchased ex-Nightingale 1172cc Dellow. He went on to easily win his class with only a third of the penalties of the 2nd-placed Fox.

The Clee Hills Trial – 19th January 2020. A report by Jonathan Toulmin.

The first section on the East-Loop was the lovely **Harton Wood** – it stopped half of class 0, but only two in the production car classes. Next was the extremely slippery “**Flounders Folly**” (see the photographs). The 'bikes and non-production cars took the left fork – longer and much steeper than the right. Only three 'bikes and four cars got up the left fork, but seven got to the top of the right fork, and George Houghton was the best in Class 0, scoring an impressive “one” there. **Hungerford** caught out just five of the twenty-three who tackled it. **Meadowley Wood**, near Morville, was only for the 'bikes and classes 7 & 8. It proved to be too much for all of those on two wheels and seven of those on four. On Wenlock Edge, just a few yards from the A458, ‘**The Jenny Wind**’ was on form and only four 'bikes got to the top, whilst the Smart Roadster of Nicholas Aldridge was the best car, scoring just two penalties, one point better than Adrian Marfell (VW Special) and Dave Middleditch’s Dutton Phaeton. In class 0, George Houghton got twice as far up as anyone else in his class – and, for him, the rest of the trial was easy!

Just one hundred metres further on, was the **Harley Bank** section – just for the bikes and classes 7 and 8. It is so slippery that it is almost impossible to walk up it, but somehow John Kenny got his Beta RR Enduro to the top, and on four wheels Adrian Marfell and Ian Davis got their class 8 cars up – most remarkable. Class 7 had a shorter and much easier route, but still only Middleditch and Aldridge were penalty-free there.

At **Easthope 2**, the 'bikes tackled a section not used for 12 years, and we began to remember why – no one got much over half-way up. However, the cars were doing much better on the repaired **Easthope 1** section where 19 got up including Nick Deacon’s Suzuki X-90, Paul Watson’s BMW Z3 and both the Haizelden (father and son) Reliant Scimitars. The production cars and Class 0 trundled off along the old railway line for a mile to “**Ippikins Rock**” track. The surface is hard, but can be slippery, - the challenge is all about the hairpin bend and it stopped nine cars. The 'bikes and trials cars went further along the railway line to tackle the ‘impossible’ “**Major’s Leap**” section. All the bikes and many of the cars only got a few yards. Hal Branson, in his Marlin, tried a route out of the ruts, but it proved no better than staying in them! The sensations here were Ian Davis (VW Buggy) who scored a “1”, and that amazing Smart Roadster of Nick Aldridge almost as good with a “2” – unbelievable!

The production cars went to **Heywood Common** near Church Stretton – a lovely little section which stopped all of class 0 except for the Dellow of George Houghton and the Austin 7 of Clare Renshaw. Bar three, all the production cars saw the top of the hill.

The final section for the 'bikes and trials cars was the daunting **Strefford Wood**, just a mile or so east of Craven Arms. Only two 'bikes made it ‘clean’ – George Godkin and John Kenny, both riding Beta RRs. Also, just two cars got to the top of Strefford Wood (both in class 8) – the VW Buggy piloted by Ian Davis and the Cannon T5 driven by Matt Johnson. But two in class 7 (kit cars) were impressively close behind, both dropping just two points – Ray and Hannah Ferguson in their Liege, and the Smart Roadster of Nicholas and Thomas Aldridge.

The results showed that the best motorcycle was ridden by John Kenny (27 penalties) and the best car was Nick Deacon’s Suzuki X-90 with just 5 penalties. Best MAC Member (in the main trial) was Mike Henney (VW Beetle on 42 penalties). Class wins went to John Cull (Class A 'bike), Kathy Martin (Class B1 'bike), Robert Hodgkinson (Class 2), Ian Facey (Class 3), Aaron Haizelden (Class 5), Gary Browning (Class 6), Nicholas Aldridge (Class 7), Ian Davis (Class 8) Keith Dobinson (Class 90), and George Houghton (Class 0).

We have received lots of appreciative e-mails from some very happy customers. I quote from a report from our youngest competitor – 16-year old Mary Baxter driving an Austin 7 to a very respectable 8th in class (out of 16 entries):

“All in all, we had a fantastic day out, great sections, none of them too rough (certainly in class 0). It was my first big boy trial and I would recommend it to anyone who is like me and mega up for having a go.”

If you are wondering how a 16-year old could do the trial, her father (as her passenger) drove the Austin in the public road part of the trial whilst Mary drove those sections that were on private land.

Our most grateful thanks to the considerable efforts made by the organising team, and to the marshals who stood out in quite cold conditions and without whom the event simply could not run. We most sincerely thank the land-owners for yet again allowing us onto their properties.