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# RALLY STAR

Eric Richardson finds a different way of going for a relaxing drive in the country. Get the back out and aim for that puddle...

When Rob Henchoz asks if I fancy a drive in the country, I know he's not talking about an amble down some hedge-lined lanes. You see, Rob, who runs Amazon Cars in Suffolk, is my occasional rallying partner, and the drive was part of the Audi South West Enduro Rally – in the historic category, of course. It was a promise of a day and half's rallying in Devon and Cornwall, crossing the counties to various test locations while passing through some of England's most beautiful scenery in Rob's well-prepared Volvo 142.

Of course, we're not talking World Rally Championship here – far from it. Unlike stage rallying, the tests are not a straightforward blast through a forest but are designed to keep the average speed to 30mph. This is done by the use of cones, which you may need to make a complete 360 around before you continue, or a code board being displayed bearing a series of letters and numbers that have to be written down on your timecard before you continue. Being a good friend, I could not be so rude as to refuse Rob's invitation.

On 10 March we met at Newton Abbot racecourse, where we caught up with friends who were also competing. Duncan Stonier and Bernard Northmore were reunited in Duncan's Volvo 144, a car they took to a bronze medal in Le Jog in 2005. Chris Winter, also running a 144 – or the 'Red Brick' as he calls it – had dusted off his Le Jog navigator Charles Hamilton and put him in charge of maps, timing and, unusually for a rally car, the CD player, from which the occasional Abba or Kylie song could be heard. Very STIG-like, I'm sure.

Scrutineering usually involves much wailing

and gnashing of teeth, mainly from the scrutineer, but not this time. Casting his eyes over the car was a chap by the name of John Cooper, who was pleased to see some historic cars out. "The public are quite accepting of these rather than a Subaru covered in stickers popping and banging away," he said. We agreed, as you always do with a scrutineer – no matter what the question. Within five minutes, and thankfully very little teeth sucking, we were declared fit to continue. So was the car.

Thanks to some excellent work between the organising team and the Newton Abbot Town Partnership, who were very keen to host the start, we reached minor celebrity status as we parked the car on a closed road, chatted to locals and were then flagged away in front of the local media and TV crews. For a moment, we did almost feel like WRC superstars.

We headed back to the racecourse for our first test, allowing me a total of two miles to become acquainted with the car. What would the brakes be like, how will it handle, will I stall it on the start line? No fear, I thought, as I lined up for the first test and tensed myself for the countdown. "FIVE, FOUR, THREE..." I hold the engine at 5000rpm. "TWO, ONE, GO!" I bring up the clutch quickly, but smoothly. The car scrabbles for grip then squats down as we set off. It

In the good old days they just pushed them onto



Rob calculates the route to the panelbeaters



'Red Brick' doing its going fast stood still trick



Hello Dolly



## DRIVER

Eric Richardson is a regular CM contributor and like our own Mike has a deep affection for square Swedes.

## CO-DRIVER

Rob Henchoz of Amazon Cars in Suffolk owns the 142. He asked Eric to drive, that way he was able to watch the scenery, up close.

## VOLVO 142

Rare two saloon which has aged well and now exudes an understated classic quality. Well it did until Eric got to drive it.



"For the doors Rob not to protect your seat..."

redlines at 7000rpm and I slam into second. To everyone outside it always looks far more exuberant than it needs to be, but with the cam only getting on song at 3000rpm, you have to make sure you get away cleanly or else you kangaroo down the road looking like it's your first driving lesson. Trust me, I know.

We approach our first code board and I jump on the brakes and stop. Swinging into action

“We rounded the bend to find Duncan’s Volvo stuck in a ditch at the side of the road”

like a well-oiled oily thing, I shout out the letters on the board: “A, G, J, 4, 5, G.” I then give the car 5000rpm and we’re off again. We come to a halt at the finish, where a marshal leans in at the window. “Well done lads, nice to see these historic cars out,” he says. “Did you enjoy that?” “Superb,” was Rob’s reply. “Fantastic,” was all I could manage, grinning like a fool. As we head out through the popular tourist areas of Teignmouth and Dawlish, I realise

that the next test will be the first time I have ever driven the car on a loose surface. “The back end lets go in a very controlled way,” Rob assured me as I mentioned my concerns. “I’m sure you’ll be fine.” The selectif went past in a blur, and one mile and a little over two minutes later and that inane grin had returned. Rob’s comments were spot on. On a 90 right the back end had

something large and important falling off rang through the car. “Oh damn, that’s irritating,” said Rob, holding up his window winder, which had made contact with the roll cage in its bid for escape. When we arrived at the entrance to the Soussons selectif there was a queue of five cars, so Rob asked Duncan, in the four door version of our car, if we could have one of their rear window winders to replace ours. Five minutes later Rob was proudly winding his window up and down. “Navigators are easily pleased,” I thought as we were counted down on the start line. About half way through the selectif we came around a corner to find some spectators waving frantically to slow us down. Backing off, we rounded the bend to find Duncan and Bernard’s Volvo stuck in a ditch at

the side of the road. They were out of the car, which was good to see. As we passed I glanced in my mirror to look at the car, which seemed to be the right shape still, though they clearly were going to need a tow. The event was picking up pace now as we headed south through Buckfastleigh, and on to Kingsbridge and the evening supper halt at Burton Farm near Malborough. Here we learned that the Cooper S of Peter Horsburgh and Anthony Preston had damaged its exhaust in the forests, and though Peter managed to fix it at the rest halt they decided to head for Plymouth while they could – and retirement. Adding further excitement, Stuart and Linda Cariss’s Escort 1300 Sport had clipped the bank exiting the hairpin on the Burton selectif. Stuart was ready to retire until the competitor liaison officer, Andy Ballantyne, arranged for a skilled operator of large hammers to make some delicate bodywork adjustments. When we returned, after a fantastic curry in an open

barn, we found Stuart’s Escort was back to an almost perfect shape and ready to tackle the night section. Leaving Burton I had my first fall from grace. Within a mile of the start I had gone off a very muddy track, not once but twice – first into a hedge and then into a metal gate post, where I made a mental note that swearing has no effect on the direction or velocity of a car: this is

“A skilled operator of large hammers made some delicate adjustments”

Richardson’s first law of motion. The gate post had dented the bonnet and, more worryingly, pushed the bumper back into the wing causing it to foul the nearside wheel. Luckily, at the start of the next section half a mile away, we found the support teams who attached a winch to the bumper and pulled it clear of the wing, which then came away from the wheel. What made both of these incidents irritating was that they occurred at less than walking pace. Arriving back at Plymouth later that evening ➤

“Don’t tree stumps grow fast in the forest Rob?”

Historic rallying

Based on different rules to enduro rallying, historic road rallying permits much more in terms of modifications to the car. However, these modifications must have been available when the cars were rallying originally, so no trying to get through scrutineering with a Honda VTEC engine in your MK 1 Mini. Regulations with regard to safety are roughly the same for enduro and historic road rallying. Because the majority of historic road rallying is based on regularity rallying, where you are aiming to achieve an average set speed of up to 30mph, with much shorter handling tests than those in enduro, there is no requirement for a roll cage, but it is recommended. The Historic Rally Car Register runs a full championship each year as well as holding regular training schools for novices.



Enduro rallying

Enduro rallying is a relatively new discipline that was ratified by the MSA in 2003. The aim of enduro rallying is to put as much emphasis on driver skill as possible, by limiting the cars and the changes that can be made to them.

Key rules

- Car must be less than 1400cc if petrol, 1900cc if diesel, and based on a four-seat design.
- Cars must be to the exact showroom spec. The engine and gearbox cannot be modified or lightened in any way.
- Brakes may be improved through different pads or brake fluid, and protection can be added.
- Strengthening and uprating the suspension is permitted.
- A rollover hoop with two back stays, as a minimum, must be fitted.
- A minimum of four-point harness safety belts must be fitted.
- The car must carry a readily accessible fire extinguisher.
- The car must run on Colway Road Plus tyres.
- Front windscreen must be made of laminated glass.
- There must be mud flaps for all four wheels.
- You must carry a first aid kit, warning triangle, tow rope and SOS/OK board.





Chocolate dip for the Honda!



You are here

### ERIC'S ENDURO ROUTE

Starting at Newton Abbott Racecourse it was onto the roads heading for Teignmouth and Dawlish. Through the Selectif and onto Moretonhampstead and the Dartmoor National Park to the Soussons Selectif. Then south to Buckfastleigh onto Kingsbridge and supper at Marlborough. The night section resumed on the Burton Selectif and the gatepost. And so to Plymouth. Next day it was back over Dartmoor to Princetown, Fernworthy Forest and Okehampton. Witherdon Selectif and that tree stump next. Missing Selectifs to make up time meant north to Bideford to rejoin the rally. Cornwall and a rest at Kilkhampton next and onto Launceston, and the Havana Plantation on Bodmin Moor. Then the A30 back into Cornwall. Penhale near Newquay and the final Selectif before back over Bodmin Moor back to Plymouth .



### “It was memorable for the deep, long puddle that saw several of the modern cars being towed out”

we had a beer with Duncan and Bernard, who had sadly had to retire as their excursion had bent the 144's lower wishbone. Duncan tried to blame us: "The car's natural fine balance was ruined by the removal of the window winder from one door." I looked at him. "Really?" He laughed: "Of course not, the red mist was down trying to beat you lot!" Honest, if nothing else.

Saturday dawned and under crisp, clear skies we headed out of Plymouth, back over Dartmoor, on to Princetown and a re-run of the selectif that had caused Duncan's retirement. Drama-free, we headed to Fernworthy Forest and four more tests, before a long transport section took us through Okehampton and on to the Witherdon selectif near Holworthy, which saw me disgrace myself further.

As I tackled a 360-degree turn around a cone I went wide but pressed on through the undergrowth thinking, 'That bush will move' – which it did, uncovering a tree stump behind it that pushed in the driver's door and rear wing as I made a bid to escape it. It held us tight until we were pulled out by the course closing car. We were down on time now so Rob calculated a new route, missing some selectifs so we could rejoin the rally. Sadly, my stupidity cost us 50 minutes in penalties.

Aiming to make up time, we pressed on north to Bideford where we rejoined the rally, which then dropped down into Cornwall and our afternoon rest halt at Kilkhampton near Bude. An hour later we left, fully refreshed. Not so the Dolomite of Roger Pinder and Jon Cater,

which had the bonnet up and two exasperated crew members working frantically on it. It was not until much later that we learned they had retired with a broken water pump.

As we filled up at Launceston we were joined by Martin Baker in his Honda S800. He explained that the studs holding the nearside wheel on had worked loose, necessitating a quick roadside rebuild of the hub to get everything secure but, like us, his chances of a win had faded as they too had missed some tests to get back into the rally.

With two Volvos, an S800 and the Escort upholding the honour of the historic cars, we set off for the Halvana Plantation on Bodmin Moor, which was as memorable for the deep, long puddle that saw several of the modern cars being towed out of it as it was for the section itself.

Once completed, it was then a long run down the A30 to deepest Cornwall, past the Honda in a lay-by with the bonnet up. We pondered the possibilities of the earlier puddle having caused him some electrical problems. Finally, we arrived at Penhale military training area near Newquay and took our place in the queue. A car pulled in behind us – it was Chris who leapt out of the car in a state of near apoplexy. "HAVE YOU GOT A LONG HANDLED SCREWDRIVER?! I think there's a stone wedged between the sump and the sump guard, and I'm concerned it's going to puncture the sump," he spluttered desperately. Rob jumped out of our car and between them they managed to get the stone removed, much to Chris' relief.

As we waited on the start line for the final selectif, the Honda appeared in my mirrors, for the last time I was to see it because their lights failed completely on their run though the selectif. Able to limp out, they found a suitable spot and summoned the breakdown services to get back to Plymouth, their rally over.

Having completed two regularity road sections, and negotiated that puddle in Bodmin Moor once more,



When the Plymouth locals liked us...



Newton Abbott's Town Crier - "What's O Yeah in

### Rally preparation

Full Safety Devices roll cage  
Sparco Evo 2 & TRW bucket seats  
Five-point harnesses  
FIA foam filled 65 litre alloy tank, mounted over axle – to Rob's own design  
Suspension runs 20mm lowered progressive springs all round  
Steering and sump guards  
Lamination electronic ignition (Post Historic eligible)  
Centre console designed to confuse the unwary

### Further information

Endurance Rally Organisation  
[www.siteset.co.uk/endurance](http://www.siteset.co.uk/endurance)  
01235 851291

Historic Rally Car Register  
[www.hrcr.co.uk](http://www.hrcr.co.uk)  
01332 672533

South Hams Motor Club  
<http://www.shmc.co.uk/>

we finally arrived at the finish at 11pm and settled down with some drinks, swapping tales of derring-do and hairy moments on gravel. While toasting Chris and Charlie on their win, I was also drowning my sorrows as I contemplated the three excursions of the route that had cost us so dearly. We slept well.

Sunday's award ceremony saw Chris and Charles pick up their awards for first historic, with Stuart and Linda taking the class win. Chris used his winner's speech to thank the organisers for such a fantastic rally, and myself and Rob for going off the road. By his own admission, Chris had set out to drive steadily and not set the world alight with his test times, a plan that worked as he had seen the other crews fall by the wayside from both mechanical and driver failure.

Handing out the prizes to the modern crews,

Andy Russell, the MD of the event sponsor Audi South West, pledged his commitment to next year's event, which was excellent news. But it got me thinking... Audi produced one of the most iconic rally cars ever in the form of the Quattro – I wondered if Andy could get his hands on one.

Andy, if you're reading this, you have my number. Leave it two weeks before you call though – first I have to knock some dents out of a Volvo. 🚗

### THANKS TO

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