

CLASSICAL GAS

February 2003

About Classic Trials and Falcon Motor Club Events and Personalities

Exeter Trial 2003



Clive Booth and John Allsop on Simms

The 2003 Exeter ran very smoothly, despite all the rain the week before and being very cold on the night. However, some of the hills were very rough and will surely generate more debate on damaging sections. It was a very different trial depending what class you were in. The sevens and eight's with high power to weight ratios thought it was easy, the lower classes thought it was hard!



Michael Leete and Peter Thompson competed on the Cleve Hills Trial. It was a suburb trial but ground clearance was at a premium in the mud and ruts, causing delays at Hungerford and Round Oak where these Beetles patiently wait for their turn at the hill. Full report next month.

Even on the journey to the start it was clearly going to be a cold night. Mike Pearson had bike competitor Richard Nixon in the passengers seat so he should be hardy enough! It was really nice to see David Alderson at the start. He was well wrapped up, as it was a bit cooler than Turkey! David was driving Peter James's Troll. The plan was for Peter to navigate, but unfortunately he hasn't been very well recently, so David had another passenger. David had a clear run for a gold medal so he hasn't lost his touch. Ed Nickel didn't start as the Imp had a bad water leak that he couldn't fix in time. Neil Bray appeared with Dave Nash in a very smart Skoda Fastback. It looked really super but why was it in class seven? The answer came with a peak under the bonnet where two point something litres of Mr Rovers V8 resided under the hood. It's a very neat installation. All the external trim and bumpers are in place and everything fits neatly under the original silhouette. The suspension was raised quite a bit, although not as much as Neil's normal "YEG" and he was soon to find lack of ground clearance to be a big problem.

The run down to the Haynes Motor Museum in Sparkford was classed as a Touring Assembly. This meant that competitors were free to devise their own route to the start. There were quicker ways to get to the start of the Trial proper than specified in the Route card and quite a few took advantage of this to get to Haynes early, fitting in some extra rest rather than go round the museum in the middle of the night. It was un-eventful for most, but not Clive Booth who hit a deer to the detriment of his Dellow Replica's nose cone. Later numbers taking the official route regretted it when they arrived to find all the hot food had all gone!

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Windmill Hill – The first hill may have had an unfamiliar name to many, but Lands End competitors recognised it when they got there, as it was the lane normally used to exit from Sugg Lane. It was dry and well surfaced so didn't present any problems. Sugg Lane was different though, muddy with a lot of water running down the descent. This certainly kept the bikers alert, as did the cold on the forty-mile down to Bovey Woods.

Normans Hump – This was the usual hill, with the start line facing straight at the gradient, so there was no confusing stuff, like steering, to complicate life. That was for the cars, which could stay in the ruts. Life was different for the bikes. John Lees managed to stay in the middle for a clean climb, but this was easier said than done and most ended up in one of the ruts, whether they wanted to or not. Brian Sussex was one of many to fail this way although he cleaned



Top Right Michael Leete and Mike Hayward pick their way up Tillerton, ever mindful of the rocks just waiting to rip the bottom off the floor!

Above Top – Fred Gregory and Steve Boakes enjoyed their Exeter in Fred's Rickman Ranger.

Bottom – Fred leaving the start on Bulverton Steep taking care not to under-steer into the trees on the first corner!

everything else to gain Silver.

It was tough for the cars as well. The bottom part of the hill had very deep ruts with huge holes and a lot of loose rock. There was plenty of grip, it was just a case of how confident you were that your car would hold together if you went up at any speed while the underside was abraded away! Added to this classes six, seven and eight had their usual restart at the cross track. This reduced the possibility to attack the steep bit immediately after and this bought both Fred Gregory (Rickman Ranger) and Neil Bray (Skoda V8) to a halt. Ross Nuten had problems as well, he found his diff had locked up and he decided to limp home while the Dellow was still mobile.

Normans wasn't kind to Imps and both Richard Tompkins and Stuart Cairney stopped when they ran out of ground clearance. It was possible to get up in one of Linwood's little marvels, as Ian Moss proved when he flew up in his smart new yellow Imp. In class seven Simon Robson was the only Liege to get to the top. Most of the Marlins made successful climbs, but Verdun Webley fluffed to a halt with fuel starvation at high revs, a problem that was to bedevil him through most of the event and even riding mechanic Arnold Lane couldn't cure the problem.

Clinton Bottom – Frankly I am not sure what version of Clinton this was, although it wasn't the longest one as we started at least part way up the hill. There was no restart and after Normans Hump it was as smooth as a Billiard Table! It

was still a problem though and Stuart Cairney was one of many failures. After Normans Stuart decided to pump the tyres up to 25 lbs and took off at maximum revs. He still found too much grip the car dropped into one of the many holes, practically stalling the motor and loosing so much momentum that Stuart stopped soon after. Leaving the woods Stuart noticed an ominous clunking noise from the rear. Stuart checked the car over by jacking each rear wheel in turn and running it under load by applying the handbrake. The clunking noise could clearly be heard as soon as the handbrake was applied. Consensus was that one of the crown wheel teeth was damaged so he sadly retired from the event and went down to Simms as a spectator.

Waterloo – A few words of explanation for those that don't know this hill. It starts on a gentle gradient with an open gate a few yards ahead. The only thing is that you don't go through the gate, there's a 90 right immediately before. Once round this blind corner a steep slope immediately confronts competitors. This was a real problem this year as there was a lot of loose material on the surface and grip was at a premium. It was the downfall of many of the cars, including Neil Bray and Fred Gregory, who to add insult to injury picked up a puncture on the escape road! The initial slope also defeated the West Country class one trio of Michael Collins and David Haizelden in their Golf's and Paul Allaway in his Astra. Along came Adrian Toker-Peake a few cars later and he stormed up but to

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no avail as nobody else in class one made it to the top so the hill was scrubbed for class one.

Stretes – This was a nice simple hill with a special test at the top, which provided a welcome “rest” before the unknown quantity of the next hill.

Higher Rill (Sandy Lane) was only a few yards up the road from Stretes. It has not been used on the Exeter for some time. Tucker’s notes in the MCC book say it was “In use in 1931 for stop-and-restart (9 failed). Approaches too bad for 1965 event”. In 2003 the approach was interesting but the hill itself presented few problems.

Bulverton Steep – The route passed through Sidford for the second time on the way to the woods at Bulverton Hill for two sections. Bulverton Steep started with a sharp ninety-left on a steep gradient. This was muddy and slippery and it was very easy to under-steer off into the trees, as John Bennett in his smart Renault Gordini was to prove.

Passaford Lane – There was quite a run along the forestry tracks to reach the next section at Passaford Lane where there was delay for mid-field runners while David Spraggetts stricken Morgan was removed from the section. The hill itself wasn’t too difficult, even though it started to rut up at the top as the event went on.

Exeter Services – There was a nice run to the rest halt, with a marvellous view out to the sea at Sidmouth. There were dire threats of exclusion if anyone as much as looked at a spanner at Exeter Services, so many nipped out on the road outside, or went down to the lorry park, to check over the mechanicals, or in Fred Gregory’s case get some help changing a tube. There were problems for some as a Midget had gone up the bank and overturned just before the halt. It looked terrible as the car had no roll cage and the screen was flattened, but the crew appear to have survived with only a few scratches so the main damage will be to the blood pressure of the MCC committee!

Tillerton Steep – Classes seven and eight had it easy here, they had to restart! The lower classes had a clear run and could drive over the terribly rough and rocky middle section as fast as they liked, or their car would stand! Most had sufficient speed to get through but Richard Tompkins took things easy to spare the car and paid for his lack of

speed with a stop. Fred Gregory, Neil Bray and Verdun Webley were among the re-starters to fail the hill and in Neil’s case he wasn’t to go much further. The car was handling really strangely after the hill. Neil found the nearside rear suspension-mounting bolt was half out, allowing the wheel to move back and forth. By this time Michael Leete and Mike Hayward had stopped to help and with a lot of heaving, shoving and hammering helped Neil and Dave Nash get the bolt back in against the tension of the suspension rubber. A quick run up the road revealed the car still had a problem; the offside wheel was very badly buckled. Jacking the wheel up revealed a broken driveshaft and the V8 Skoda was added to the retirement list.

Fingle – There was a diff test just before the section. The old hill itself wasn’t a problem but the corners were noticeably cut-up compared to usual.

Wooston Steep – Only seven and eight had to go up the steep bit this year. The problem appeared to be the slippery bit just after the re-start and this stopped quite a few. It’s a delicate balance between grip and bogging down and sadly Andrew Brown didn’t get it quite right on his new tyres. Stuart Harrold and Chris Phillips had plenty of grunt and plenty of grip in their Troll and accelerated all the way up to the hairpin right. Falcon’s Ian Davis, Mike Pearson and John Parsons all had successful climbs as well, but in class seven neither Simon Robson, Verdun Webley or Fred Gregory could get past the slippery section on the lower slopes. The lower classes had it easy of course, turning left and finishing just before the gradient really started.

Simms – Competitors had a chance to mentally prepare themselves for Simms with a 25 mile run onto Dartmoor. The old hill was in fine form again. It’s all about momentum here. Cars with a high power to weight ratio were able to build enough speed to blast over the step but those without enough speed found there was very little grip on the slimy, slippery rock. There were plenty of triallers here to watch the fun, including Duncan Stephens and Ed Nikel and retirees Stuart Cairney and Mike Furse. They saw a spirited and successful climb by Stuart Harrold, re-starting very high on the left, flooring the throttle and driving straight up the middle. There was a lot of leaping and banging before Stuart had to brake the Troll at



Top – Another month, another Classical Gas and another picture of Neil Bray under his Skoda! Only this time it was “The Beast”, Neil’s exciting V8 powered Rapide

Middle – Unfortunately the drive shaft had sheered. It couldn’t be fixed so Neil and Dave Nash had to retire. However, the new car was going very well before the breakage.

Bottom – Fred Gregory and Simon Robson queue for Tillerton. Yes the blue sign in front does say “Unsuitable for Motors”.

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Michael's Musings

I thought the Exeter was a good trial, a bit rough but a nice event. It was controversial for those who take these things more seriously than I though, and there has been a lot of chat about two particular issues.

For some it showed the increasing gap between class eight and the lower classes and has re-started the debate on "what do we do with class eight?"

It was also the first MCC event with the "two up for the hill to count" rule. This has really upset some well-known MCC stalwarts whose opinion is that it devalues the Triple. The new rule certainly affected the results. For example Adrian Tucker-Peake was the only class one competitor to climb Tillerton and Dave Haizelden Simms. However, neither hill counted and Terry Coventry (who climbed neither) won the class on special test times.

There are other rumblings of unhappiness too, which are a little more personal. I hope these things can be brought to the surface and openly debated. Lets hope for a bumper attendance at the MCC AGM which provides the ideal forum for open debate, although you have to look the other fellow in the eye!

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the stop board. John Parsons in the VW Buggy gave it some of the same treatment but Mike Pearson's more considered approach in his Dellow Replica wasn't successful and he spun to a stop. This was annoying as Nick Wollett had a successful climb just before in his Dellow and Tim Wellock immediately afterwards in the Fugitive.

Ian Davis was on song and set for a clean climb when his throttle cable broke on the restart. He tried to get up on tick-over but this wasn't possible so Ian had to slide down back to the bottom to fix it. When all was well mechanically he persuaded the marshals to let him have a go up the hill itself "for fun" and he drove up easily. None of the class Seven Falcon's were successful, Simon Robson, Fred Gregory and Verdun Webley all spun to a stop and so did ACTC rights of way officer Andrew Brown in his Marlin.

The saloon car classes' struggled and Michael Leete stopped on the slab. It was certainly possible to clean the hill in class four as Ian Moss proved in his "new" car. He stormed up at a time when there was very little grip. Ian's Imp was immaculate at the start but by Simms was showing some battle scars with stress-induced ripples around the rear wheel arches. In Class Five Peter Manning didn't get to the top but neither did anyone else in his class so Peter's stop didn't count and he went on to get gold and win class five. Peter actually got past the "A" boards but a following Keith Pettit didn't so this counted for a fail, relegating Keith to a Silver.

Tipley – After Simms it was left at the crossroads at the top and down the track to Tipley. The gradient isn't too severe here and there aren't any corners, this hill is all about its rocks. There weren't any loose ones and although it was very rough it was possible to ease off and pick your way around the bad bits.

Slippery Sam – It looked innocuous at the bottom and the restart was pretty easy but boy were the corners at the top rough. They had really cut-up on the inside and there was a lot of loose rock as well. Unlike Tipley it wasn't easy to select your own line and cars cleaned the hill to the accompaniment of crashing and banging as the rocks tried to hammer their way through the floor-pan! There was worst to come. Competitors are well used to the lakes of red clay on the exit road. However, the big problem this year was overhanging branches. Goodness knows what it was like on a bike, especially a chair with the bike on the right. Even cars running at the end of the field had to fend of the overhanging briars, which was very unpleasant in an open car.

So that was Exeter 2003. There was of course a Class 0, which is an excellent idea, taking in some of the less damaging sections of the main event, together with some unique sections, including the escape roads on Waterloo, Simms and Wooston. The whole thing was rounded off by the usual evening at The Trecarn Hotel, a very nice finish to the event where the sections were re-run over a glass or two 🍷

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| John Parsons | Gold |
| Ian Davis | Silver (failed Simms) |
| David Alderson | Gold |
| Michael Leete | Silver (failed Simms) |
| Neil Bray | Retired – broken drive shaft |
| Fred Gregory | Failed Waterloo, Tillerton, Wooston, Simms |
| Simon Robson | Bronze (fail Wooston & Simms) |
| Keith Oakes | Bronze (fail Tillerton & Simms) |
| Clive Booth | Fail Tillerton, Wooston and Simms |
| Stuart Cairney | Retired – Broken Diff |
| Peter Manning | Class 5 Winner |
| Keith Pettit | Silver (failed Simms) |
| Peter Thompson | Failed Normans, Waterloo & Simms |
| Ross Nuten | Retired – Broken Diff |
| Richard Thompkins | Failed Normans, Clinton, Waterloo, Tillerton and others |
| Owen Briggs | Bronze (failed Tilleron and Wooston) |
| Verdun Webley | Failed Normns, Tillerton and others |
| Mike Pearson | Bronze (failed Passaford Lane & Simms) |