

CLASSICAL GAS

March 2005

About Classic Trials and Falcon Motor Club Events and Personalities

Adrian Marfell's Claggy Clee



There was snow on the Shropshire Hills for this years Clee Hills. Fortunately not enough to bring things to a halt, but quite enough to make conditions difficult. Adrian Marfell (pictured at the start of Gattens Gamble) mastered the difficult conditions in his Beetle to win overall, dropping only four marks. Adrian Dommett was second in his Class 2 Wolsley Hornet. Also pictured is Simon Groves on the Longville ST.

Like last year the field was split and went on two separate loops. Classes 0 to Five tackled the Western loop first, embarking on a long detour around The Long Mynd because of the treacherous conditions. Ratlinghope came first, a special test, then a section which was cleaned by everyone. A long descent followed, crossing a road to the farm at the foot of Gattens Gamble.

There was a new section this year, the route turning left at the tank to Phils Folly. This was new section on an old coach road that is now privately owned. The section started on a level rutted track, hair-pinning right where the gradient started up a muddy tree lined track. Unfortunately Jeff Buchanan couldn't get his ex Dennis Greenslade Reliant round the corner, neither could David Bowlas who was following in his Midget. Extracting the cars took so long that

the section had to be cancelled.

By the time the higher classes came along in the afternoon the farmer had scrapped the mud off the hairpin and there was plenty of traction. The problem was getting round the hairpin. Regrettably there were problems at the top of the section and the exit road, making it rather to hairy for comfort and it was necessary to cancel it again. Gattens Gamble was cleaned by most of the field but Derek Reynolds found his DAF's drive belts struggled with the steep gradient at the start. The views at the top were as magnificent as ever.

After a straightforward Walkmill came Adstone for the lower classes, who descended what was to be Medicot for six, seven and eight in the afternoon. Adstone was not a problem but the descent of Medicot certainly was. The track has really suffered at the hands of 4x4 traffic and the right hand rut

was very, very deep. This caused major problems as cars were leaning so far they were practically on their side. Some suffered damage, including Colin Perryman whose BMW ended up with damaged doors and rear quarter panel.

Ian Davis was the first class eight in the afternoon and described the ascent of Medicot as a nightmare. After a delay waiting for some trail bikes Ian hit a root, throwing the front of his buggy so high in the air it came out of the ruts and beached on the left hand bank. Ian managed to reverse a few yards and get going as there was plenty of traction. Delays built up, causing the section to be cancelled for classes six and seven but not before Stuart Harrold deranged his steering on the same root that caused a problem for Ian Davis.

The route round its way up the hills to the historic Allez 'Oop, first

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Carl's Cotswold Clouds

Stroud attracted their usual full entry for the Cotswold Clouds. The route followed a familiar path, with just a few subtle changes, including, substituting Mackhouse with a new section called Wicked Juniper. Carl Talbot was the winner with the only clean sheet. Best Falcon was Simon Groves who was second in Class Three

There had been a lot of rain on the Saturday, which made the hills very slippery. This affected Crawley, put in to be an easy opener, but proved to be a problem for Murray MacDonald who found that his un-ballasted Mk2 Golf had very little grip and needed pushing to get going. After a similar experience on the lower slopes of Crooked Mustard, Murray and Hazel decided to call it a day and head for home rather than cause more hold ups. But watch out Dave Haizelden, he will be back.

During their inspection the week before the Stroud organisers had reckoned that Crooked Mustard was going to be easier than usual, but the rain on Saturday put paid to that. The first cars had a definite advantage as the rock steps were quite clean, but as the morning went on mud was drawn down from the banks making it more and more slippery.

As Andrew Brown says, "Crooked Mustard is all about taking the right line". The flyweights in Class Eight had a definite advantage as their short wheelbase and ample power to weight ratio's allowed them to revise their strategy if they got it wrong. Most succeeded, as did the buggies of Simon Woodhall and Ian Davis. Two of the best climbs were made by father and son Wall. David storming up early on in the Canhi special and Eric making it all look effortless in his big wheeled Dellow, which has the smoothest, sweetest, engine I have ever heard. Geoff Hodge has quite a wide wheelbase on the RDT and with this disadvantage wasn't able to correct a bad line and failed between the two corners.

Class Seven had a challenge. Their lower power to weight ratio and

longer wheelbases meant they had to have a perfect line to succeed. Only four made-it, three Marlins and Derek Tyler in his Baja Beetle. Rick Neale was one of many to get the line wrong in his Dutton Melos, cutting the corner too tight to the sound of an enormous crack as the transmission broke.

Two Class six cars were clean. Gary Browning in the Course Opening car, which doesn't count of course! and Mike Hobbs amongst the competitors. It looked all over for Mike when he cut in too tight on the right hander and lost a lot of speed. He recovered and got things absolutely perfect on the left hander but he had lost so much momentum it looked as if he would come to a stop. Mike kept

itself as he backed down. Adrian tried his hardest but hit the step between corners two and three all wrong and it just wouldn't go over.

Class three provided the biggest spectacle. Tristan White performed perfect walls of death on corners two and three only to stop when a plug lead came off. Simon Grooves tried a similar trick but it didn't quite come off, leaving the Escort with a front wheel four feet in the air and needing a fair few bodies to hang onto it to stop it turning over while he backed down. Then Colin Perryman came along and broke the prop shaft on his nice BMW so it definitely wasn't a Class Three day! Steve Potter deserves an honourable mention, getting his Trojan right up to the third corner before running out of puff but getting a huge handclap from the appreciative spectators.

Nailsworth was a challenge for the re-starters in the higher classes as it was pretty slippery and they had to stop just before the step. The fact it was a challenge was revealed when none other than Dudley Sterry couldn't get away. The lower classes didn't have to restart, their challenge was for their transmissions to survive as they hit the step at speed and leapt into the air. Neither Colin Biles (Midget) nor Nigel Scotford (Escort) diffs survived. Simon Groves' Fack stayed in one piece for him to win the high jump!

Ham Mill incorporated the new deviation pioneered last year and this was where the restart was situated. It was very slippery lower down and Mike Chatwin and Robert Grounds bounced so much they lost their spare wheels. The re start wasn't too bad for the class eights but was a challenge for the lower classes and Simon Groves and Verdun Webley couldn't get away

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his foot down, the Beetle swayed from side to side, and just found enough grip to be the only saloon to go clean. Mark Smith used all the power of his 2-litre motor to throw his Beetle at the left hander but it ploughed into, rather than around, the bank and he came to a halt.

Everyone was looking forward to class Four to see if Ian Moss and Adrian Marfell would get up. We will never know if Ian would have got the right line. His new engine proved too powerful for the transmission, which let go with a loud bang on the lower reaches and could be heard destroying



Left - Geoff Hodge pictured against Nailsworth Ladders famous wall. Unfortunately Geoff had to retire. Right - Ian Davis clawing his way over the hump on Merves Swerve.

cleanly.

Mackhouse was omitted this year and a new section called Wicked Juniper introduced. This is in the same area near Stroud as the famous pre-war trials hill pictured in Austen May's book, but is not the original section. The inspiration for the "Wicked" part of the name probably came from its location in Wick Street. Ian Davis reports that the new section was excellent, much better than Mackhouse. It had a long, steep, muddy climb up a track through trees until the four marker over bare earth. Many didn't get past the initial bend and rise at the ten. There were nine clears including Ian, Simon Woodhall, Paul Bartleman, Dudley Sterry, Tony Young and Brian Phipps in his Marlin. The new section saw the end of Bill Foreshew's Trial when his GVS retired with a holed piston. In the lower classes Adrian Marfell got a long way up but eventually the engine bogged down and he stopped.

The action after lunch commenced with a special test followed by the familiar Freds Folly which has definitely got more difficult over the years. Class eight had to

restart on polished stones which defeated Ian Davis and Robert Gregg who had to retire his Troll with a broken prop shaft.

Merves Swerve was back to the straightforward climb over the hump, without last year's tricky deviation. It didn't matter, the conditions were enough to make it difficult, especially for the class sevens. There were two restarts. The class eights were right up against the hump, the sevens a little further down. The extra distance to attack the hump didn't do any good as it was so slippery none of them got off the line. There was some confusion on the restart as the marshal was standing on the class eight line and quite a few class sevens went up to this instead of stopping on their own line. In some cases they were allowed to back down to their line and have a go. This could have caused some dispute but in the end was nullified as none got away. Most of the top men in class eight got up, despite their restart, but none of the saloons apart from the amazing David Haizelsen could get over the big bump although Simon Groves came very close.

Highwood 1 was very slippery

around the restart as usual, but was cleanable with a struggle. Highwood 2 had a high limit of 16 psi and some of the class 8's struggled for grip. Ian Davis failed at the 9. Fellow Buggy driver Simon Woodhall at the 7 and Paul Bartleman the 4. In Paul and Simons case these were the only marks they lost all day. Tony Young got right up to the two but had already failed to get off the Nailsworth restart. It was left to Carl Talbot in his Class Eight Morris Trialsmaster to prove the section was possible and he flew up to be the only car to reach Andrew Brown who was marshalling the top of the section.

Climperwell was the usual trek through the trees. It had a comparatively easy restart but you had to stay in the ruts to avoid the trees and Ian Davis was one of many who didn't to the detriment of his score.

The trial drew to a close with the restarts on Bulls Bank 1 and 2 which got more tricky as the day went on. Ian Davis failed the first one, in front of the marshalling Foreshew family but no problems for Carl Talbot who cleaned both to win the Cotswold Clouds with a clean sheet.



Ian Davis won The Northern Trial outright with the only clean sheet. Simon Groves also made the long trek to Cumbria and was third in Class Three.

Michael's Musings

It was really interesting to stand on the bank at Crooked Mustard. It really showed the advantage the "Sporting Trials" cars had over everyone else. The section has it all, gradient, sharp corners and for the later numbers mud.

As Andrew Brown said on his Website, Crooked Mustard is all about taking the right line, and for most that meant a perfect line. The nimble flyweights had the advantage that if they got the whole thing wrong on one corner they could reposition for the next. As Andrew says "a triumph of engineering over driver skill"

In the past I have sarcastically referred to the flyweights as Class Nine. Perhaps that's not a bad idea!

Simon Groves really entertained the crowd by coming oh so nearly to putting his Escort on its side. I put a video on the Web site, only for it to be so popular that my ISP blocked my site until I removed it because it used so much bandwidth!

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used in 1939 and featured in C.A.N. Mays book Wheelspin. It was grass in those days but has a hard surface now. It was covered in snow and a delightful climb to the summit with its magnificent views where the class three and four competitors waited for each other and a had a snowball fight! Most of the entry got to the summit, but it wasn't a class one friendly hill and three of them got a six.

The Harton Wood special test was all about time but the challenge at the Longville test was actually re-starting after the reverse. After last year most of the experienced competitors were ready for Longville and backed right down to make sure they cleaned the section, rather than worry about the time. Not Tristan White. He and Emma Flay risked a modest reverse and gave the Escort a blast. They made it in a huge cloud of rubber smoke but the time it took was probably as much as backing right down!

Ippikins Rock couldn't be used this year because of logging, so the lower classes tackled Easthope 1 and 2. One was the section new for last year, two was new for this. It wasn't very long, just a short blast up a gully and a sharp right turn up the bank. This was the events stopper and nobody was successful. Simon Woodhall and Mick Workman were the most successful, both reaching the two. Overall winner Adrian Marfell scored four, the only marks he was to drop all day.

After Much Wenlock came The Jenny Wind, an old cable railway incline. This was slippery in the morning for the higher classes and only Andrew Martin in his Dutton Melos reached the summit. Fellow class seven driver Tony Branson didn't get that far in Jonathan Toulmins Marlin which suffered a persistent misfire all day. Conditions had improved in the afternoon and there were some cleans. Adrian Marfell and Adrian Dommatt reached the summit, So did Harvey Waters and the amazing Dave Haizelden in his Golf. The first time a Front Wheel Drive has achieved that distinction.

Harley Bank saw problems for Dick Bolt when the UJ on the end of his prop-shaft broke, possibly

weakened when he broke his CWP on Simms. Fortunately Dick has a two piece shaft on his Escort and carries a spare, so he was able to change it and drive back to the finish although he had to retire. The higher classes had a different section too last year and Ian Davis couldn't get across the frosty grass on the lower reaches, dropping six. Fellow Buggy driver Simon Woodhall did well here, only losing two marks which gave him the class win.

Hungerford was the last section on the Eastern loop for the lower classes and is another to have suffered badly from 4x4 traffic. There were ground clearance problems, both on the section and the exit road, where even some of the class eights had to be towed out. Simon Groves was a little late in arriving at Hungerford, having had no less than four punctures. Because of the penalties on the Clee, for slipping back down the field, his fellow competitors let him back to his place at the head of the class. Simon duly let his tyres down, only to ground out his diff at the six, and had to reverse back down. Seeing this his classmates duly pumped their tyres up to give more ground clearance and cleaned the hill!

The higher classes had to tackle Meadowley, another historic Clee section, but again one that has suffered severe erosion. There was a tree root across the track, followed by a huge hole and that was as far as most competitors got. There were exceptions of course. Two of the flyweights came out the top and March Hare winner Andy Curtis did exceptionally well to get to the two, benefiting from the increased ground clearance he has generated by fitting dropped spindles to the front, even though it gives the buggy a pronounced nose up stance.

Despite the problems caused by the conditions, all the competitors signed off in daylight, and first man home Ian Davis was back at The Craven Arms by 2.30. This years Clee was more difficult than usual, both the snow and 4x4 damage taking their toll. It was still a success though. Beautiful views, historic sections and six different classes in the top ten, all a tribute to Jonathan Toulmin and his team.