

The Southwest Sweepers Pasties and Cream Portreath Sprint.

Otherwise known as “Whos the daddy”.

Otherwise known as “Not you this time bigboy”

Otherwise known as “Nil points for you”

Otherwise known as “Only winners write articles”

Otherwise known as “Mikes not writing this article”

In 1963, Martin Luther King gave a speech to the peoples of America, about the freedom of his people in the USA, it was a monumental speech, powerful, meaningful and emotive, it has become entitled “I have a dream” and is often quoted as one of the most important speeches of modern time. If your feeling monumental, then look on YouTube, its there somewhere. Its actually quite inspiring.

Im not entirely sure where I was going with that, I think it was the entire I have a dream bit, whilst hard and possibly unfair to compare the two, we all have dreams of one type or another. Some of us have wet ones, others have scary ones, Im sure Martin Luther Kings dream was a bit more profound than that. In my case, the return of Portreath sprint by South Hams Motor Club has been talked about for a couple of years now, and I had been going to the sprints at Portreath years ago so remembered them well, and as we go to Portreath for rallies from time to time, Ive always fancied a crack at Portreath, so my dream was to do the sprint this year.

Dreams are often things that don't happen, you dream of flying without an airplane, or laying on a hot beach, or with a hot chic for that matter (sorry ladies, im not a sexist pig honest), I was determined that my dream would come true, and eventually, it did.

Mid June, some 8 weeks before the event, and a similar time after a successful Werrington Park, I decided that I should start to sort my Peugeot 106 XSI out, principally as I was going to fit a roll cage, plus the rules say that you can remove carpets and other bits and bobs, essentially making the car slightly lighter, which considering that the roll cage was approx 45kg, I felt was a good idea. Some may well say that an easy way to make the car lighter was to eat less pies myself, as I do carry a few pounds extra (apparently) but that's far too easy, besides which I quite fancied the challenge. And the pies.

As with all good works on your car prior to competing, you need to make sure that you follow the rules as laid out in the MSA Blur Book, so a few evenings with a cuppa and the 2010 competitors yearbook made sure I understood (understood, and the bluebook, not 2 words you often see in the same sentence) what was what re the roll cage and a few other bits I wanted to do, meant I could get my spanners out and poke and prod the car, which inherently already handled and stopped ok, so in that respect it was simply the interior mods that I had to look at plus a few essential mechanical tasks to keep it running.

Now considering that I had about 8 weeks to do it, the progress should have been easy, relaxed, and stress free. It started well, the interior, dash and wiring were stripped out complete, as I wanted to rewire certain aspects of the dash clocks etc, something im not experienced at but fancied trying, leaving the interior of the car empty of everything. A blank canvas so to speak.

I moved everything I had stripped out in to my workshop at home and tinkered, slowly, as I was in no rush. Within a couple of weeks everything was done ish, and I had got my cage back from the powder coaters who had made it look shiney and new and painted it white for me in an attempt to keep the interior nice and bright. I also went through the process of making up some alloy doorcards and rear interior qtr panels, as the original ones were in a battered condition, and weighed plenty, so some nice thin aluminium panels were marked out, and then dropped in to Sorensen Road Sport down at Faraday Mill for them to be flocked, which looks fab, and I was particularly pleased with the work they had done as it really looked fantastic.

By this time July had arrived and it was the height of summer. And then it started to rain, and rain, and rain, and basically for most of the next 5 weeks, it rained fairly consistently day in and day out, whenever I seemed to have spare time, it rained. So progress slowed ever so slightly. And then it was August, and the count down to the sprint was in the double figures, the low double figures I should say, and the weekend before the event I finally got my ass in to gear and got on with it, with MOT booked for the Monday before the event, I had to get everything in and together to drive the car to the MOT station, which was one of the priority's, nothing to complicated but plenty to do to achieve arrival at Star Garage for Mondays deadline. Essentially the entire weekend was spent doing small jobs, fitting a seat and harness, securing the cage, finishing off welding the cage base plates in, tidying up my much modified loom to suit the new clocks, then fitting it all back together so as it worked. The clocks themselves were a problem as being a cheapskate, I had bought a series of cheapo clocks from ebay, which whilst looking ok, none of the temperature sensors were any good, and the tacho lagged behind massively with real time revs, when your into valve bounce, the digital tacho was near 1000 rpm behind it, and simply wasn't any good. More thought to go in to that I think.

I was expecting the car to fail the MOT first time, and fail it did, as there were a few scabby bits that I knew about, fortunately, although I had a list of some 13 jobs to undertake for its retest, most were completed in an hour, bulbs, wiper blades, locking fuel cap, the list went on. A couple of patches were needed on the chassis, so into work for that as it was raining again, I had done most of the work at home on my drive simply to make it easier to fool the wife into thinking I was at home with the family, rather than spending hours in work. By the Wednesday evening most of the work was done and a day off work on the Thursday ensured that it went back to Star Garage for its retest on the afternoon, where a solid gold invaluable ticket was passed my way by the inspector, and it was off home. To start again.

Sadly I still wasn't finished as I needed to change the clutch, finish the roll cage, fit a passenger's seat and harness, sort some tyres out, and tidy the wiring up so as it looked presentable for scrutineering, never good to turn up with an untidy looking car for the scrutineering team to poke around. The Thursday evening before the event therefore saw me jacking the car up again on my drive, and whipping the gearbox out, much to my neighbour's amusement, he had watched me over the last couple of weeks and clearly thought I was mad starting to do a clutch at 6pm on a rainy evening on the drive at home, luckily the rain stayed away and I was able to get on with a relatively simple job. Or so it should have been, one of the bolts holding the gearbox in at the rear of the engine was as tight as Andy Pearce's wallet and I simply couldn't get the bolt undone, so I had to strip the rear of the engine under the induction and managed to get a grinder in to the gap just about, and proceeded to carefully grind the head of the bolt off, this eventually worked out ok and the box was on the floor, but had taken me near 2 hours to drop.

Straight on with the job, the clutch was replaced with a standard unit, and the box straight back in again, helped by No 1 son Frazier, who assisted with the difficult bit of lining the box up as I lifted it in to the small space, they fall out easy when they are loose, but laying flat on your back on the drive its never easy to pop it back in again, but this time with his help it almost went straight in, so I was smiling under the car then.

By now it was clear that the job wasn't going to be finished that evening, so a quick call to my partner in work to see if there was anything pressing for me to attend to Friday, and another day off was to follow, within an hour in the morning, the box was finished all but the Peugeot gear linkages, one of which was completely shot, and the others were soft, so I rang around the main dealers, and Vosper's had one, whilst either Launceston or Torbay had the others, so off to Torbay I went, as it was an easy drive with good roads. Sadly the traffic was a nightmare, and the journey took me 3 ½ hours door to door to get the parts, so returning home after lunch, still with a list of jobs to do. Fortunately the linkages went straight on, the other jobs just fell in to place, in to Sorenson Roadsport for numbers, home to wash and polish the car and I was done, Mike arrived at about 8pm, we loaded the car on to his Brian James and off he went, for me to meet him in Tavistock early the following morning and tow it to Portreath.

With Mike Perkin and I double driving the car on the Saturday, and just myself driving on Sunday, we set off for Portreath, just North of Redruth, and arrived not long after the gates opened, took our service spot and awaited the banter with Mr John Cooper, chief scrutineer for the weekend, the banter is often unprintable, but amusing, as John went through the car checking it over, I had used John's advice in a number of areas ref fitting the cage etc, so was keen for him check it through, thankfully no issues and we were away, signed on, three layer duvet race suit at the ready and off we went.

With the venue being new to most of the sprinting chaps, a convoy was to take place first thing as we weren't allowed to walk the course due to the nature of the MOD

establishment, and it was important to familiarise the competitors with the layout of the course prior to attacking it at speed. Our only problem of the weekend was queuing for the convoy, we turned the car off, only to find that it wouldn't start again, and I was forced to push it while Mike drove, luckily it started easy enough with a shove from my solid mass, and after the convoy run, the battery seemed fine.

The sprint started well, with all cars in our class (A1 - road going saloons under 1400cc) going steady, and our Pug 106 XSI was performing well, we were the least powerful car in the entire field with a standard engine and gearbox, but knew that the car had sufficient power, good gearing, and handled well, for what was clearly going to be a fast course, so we were always hopeful of going well. Initially we had Jerry Walters, leader of the Cornish speed sprint championship out in front on his second practice time, but it was obvious as he came in that all wasn't well, and after a failure of his engine at the St Eval sprint the week before, and a subsequent rebuild of his engine during the week before Portreath, he suffered the same problem at Portreath, luckily for Jerry, who was keen to score well here to maintain his slim championship lead, Barry Chapman (he of the PMC website) offered Jerry the drive in Horace, Barry's bright orange Mini in the same class, so Jerry was game on again.

During the day the class lead changed hands more than a few times as we all got more used to the super fast circuit, initially with myself as class leader, then Jerry, then Mike, and then after a storming final drive for Jerry, he was in the lead, with Mike second, myself third and Barry not far behind in 4th. Mikes final run put him back in front again, and then Jerry had a storming drive taking just over ½ second out of Mikes best time, which only left me to be the final runner in our class, I was determined to do my best and had been seeking advice from my colleague Mr Perkin during the day ref suitable gears for each corner etc, the right line through the corner, how much commitment was needed, and as I sat in the queue for the start line I realised I was talking to myself, actually taking myself through each corner, noting the best gear, thinking about the best line, the competitiveness of the event had consumed me to such a point as all I could think of was my next run, I laughed as I rolled up to the start line as its not my way at all, im far to gung ho at this sort of thing to put this much effort in to a measured drive.

Just so as you all know, Mike, Jerry and Barry were talking in the paddock as I sat on the start line preparing to launch myself in to the course for the final time. Mike made a bold statement that I was never going to beat him (I hadn't ever beaten him yet) and was quietly confident of keeping his hold on second place for the weekend, and that he was happy with that. Something to do with eating a hat if I beat him I think.

Ahhhhh the sight of a man eating his hat is ever so sweet, as I returned to the paddock, after what I felt was a very good run, each corner was clean, and committed, my cornering speeds were good, and my dash over the finish line was definitely faster than my previous run (it was very fast over the line, story has it that one of the single seater racing cars hit 150 mph as he crossed the line and just before an open left) and as I

crossed the line I actually shouted at myself in the way of a sort of congratulation at having a good run. The drive back to the paddock took probably 2 minutes or so at a steady pace, and as I approached our allotted parking space, Jerry was waving frantically at me, and I was pleased to see that I had made a fair improvement of some 0.6 seconds putting me in front of Mike and just 0.17 seconds behind Jerry who was 1st in class, with myself taking second place in our class. This equates in real terms to kicking Mikes ass, I just thought id probably mention that as I hadn't beaten Mike before on an event, and technically, he is a better driver than me, but Portreath seemed to favour my style this time, giving me the edge.

Portreath proved to all that it has the makings of a fantastic sprint once again, its perhaps less technical than some places, and a more attacking attitude, for the brave shall we say, pays dividends there as the pace of the corners etc is very fast. One of the points made by South Hams towards the end of the day was as it was their first speed event, any comments from the drivers or marshal's would be welcomed, and as a direct result of this, it was decided that for the following days sprint, a chicane would be put fairly close to the finish line to slow the terminal speeds down, as some had expressed concern that the finish line speeds were fairly high in the more powerful cars, South Hams valued input in to their event from all, and this action went to show that as a team, the organisers and the drivers could all work together towards making improvements across the board on events like this, making it better for the future years, and hopefully securing its place on the calendar for 2011.

With the event being spread across 2 days, the Sunday was to see the ASWMC crews out fighting for points as well, so we were to leave the car on site for the evening, and off to our accommodation for a few relaxing beers (just a couple off course), some excellent grub, and early to bed for a good nights sleep for the next days sport. As Mike was unable to compete on the Sunday due to other commitments, he came along to support me initially, the fight ended up being between Jerry Walters, Barry Chapman and myself. Once again Jerry was looking to bag points for his Cornish campaign, and Barry had kindly offered a continued drive in Horace (if only he knew) for the day, so the game was on again, with the course now featuring a new finish chicane thus in theory slightly slower.

The first runs saw Jerry falling off the road, fortunately with no damage, so this left me to take the initial advantage, and as the day wore on it wasn't until the second timed runs that Jerry had a good clean run and took the lead by 1.5 seconds, which gave me the push I needed for a good clean run which although not faster than Jerry, it wasn't far behind trailing him by some 0.4 seconds, but both knowing that there was more to come from the course as the afternoon wore on.

I was having problems with the car jumping out of third gear, due primarily to a soft engine mount, and was struggling with the final chicane, which for the Pug was just in the wrong place as I was having to change up to fourth gear just before it, then changing down almost immediately to third to get through it, and this wasn't jelling for

me at all, with each run, I was learning from my mistakes, and gradually coming to terms with it. I also struggled a little with the second corner, a fast right, as it tightened more than you would think as you approached it, but I was steadily getting the hang of it. With Jerry ever cautious at pushing hard in someone else's car, it took a little encouragement to get Jerry back in the seat and push for another lap to try and extend his lead, as in the Cornish series, a bigger gap from the second place man meant better points, and with Saturday finishing close, points were needed from the Sunday run to keep Jerry in front of the championship.

As Jerry was only just in front, we encouraged Barry to let him have another go in Horace, and I think by now Barry was starting to see how competitive the weekend was turning out with Jerry and I both keen to do well. As with all great things, Jerry and Horace left the line on a blinder, only to fall foul of the very fast third corner, a flat right hander around a bale, where unfortunately the car bit back and threw them both off the road and in to a field, once again luckily the car was fine as was Jerry, and as it arrived back in the paddock under its own steam, Jerry and Barry pounced on it, checking the tracking, wheels etc before Barry's next run. A steady run by Barry showed that the worst thing to happen as a result to Jerry's off was probably that the steering was possibly slightly out, but the car dove fine as all was well. There was perhaps more damage caused by the way of stress to Barry, than there was to Horace.

Then it was my turn to venture out on to the Portreath tarmac for my final run of the day, and it was a case of *déjà vous*, as everything I did on my final run on Saturday went through my mind. I talked to myself as I queued, concentrating mostly on the final chicane, as I knew this was where the majority of my improvement was to come from, and generally egging myself on. Gripping the steering wheel tightly also seemed to help, but in reality all it did was to give my already sore fingers more pain. Looking back on it now I feel a bit daft really, but it only goes to show you how competitive you can get when the situation is right and you feel that you can do better. Off on my final run of a fantastic weekend I went, taking each corner as smooth and fast as I could, the second corner near the safety crew went well, with a little understeer initially, but good speed, turning in to a little oversteer on the exit of the bend, approaching the third corner, the very fast "Stig moment" right hander which Jerry had gone off on, I had the chance to glimpse his tyre marks, but no worries here, on to the next chicane and the long open tightening left hand 90, through the left right chicane by the sheds and on towards the final chicane and corner, both of which were taken as fast as I could go, before heading up the 200 yards or so to the finish chicane, which I had been thinking about since the start, none of which mattered as I approached the chicane, as a last minute thought said "keep it flat" so I just kept my foot planted and drove through it with a tweak of the wheel, and surprisingly, while just brushing the chicane on both sides, I made it through and across the line I went. I was pleased with my run, again actually shouting in the car as I crossed the line, feeling the chicane had gone particularly well, but generally a good run.

Driving slowly back to the paddock I was wondering how my time was, and as I approached the A1 enclosure, it was clear it had been a good one as Jerry was stood by the results tent shaking his fist at me, which I took as I had done a good time, and Jerry confirmed I was in front with a good run off 60.33, nearly a second better than my last run and 0.5seconds better than Jerry's run. Jerry had it all to play for. I don't know who was most worried as Jerry mounted Horace (oooohhh errr missus) for the final time, Jerry chasing championship points, me not wanting to lose my position, or Barry not wanting to lose his car to red mist lol. Jerry went of the line like a Horace outta hell, and we could hear (but not see as the track is mostly out of sight) Jerry pushing hard around the track, but more importantly Barry didn't see any red flags, so hopefully Horace was in safe hands. Naturally Barry was walking back to the paddock area to see his lovely Horace returning safely to his birth, whilst I awaited by the time printout in the results tent, eagerly looking out for the time for car 4a, driven by Jerry Walters, owned by Barry Chapman, and chased by Alf Chanter. As the time came of the printer I had to think, as we were very close, fortunately my mind put the numbers in the right order and I finally understood that 60.33 seconds, was just 0.05 seconds in front of Jerry's time of 60.38, and that could mean only one thing, I had won our (small) class.

As Jerry drove in, I stood near the paddock to give him the good news, that he had improved. Then the bombshell, that it wasn't enough, none of which I have to say was done in a gloating manner unlike my Saturday victory over Mike Perkin, that was different, that was pure pleasure.

Portreath sprint, organised by South Hams MC, gave us in the end an event which was, for me, a fantastic venue, good value, a testing "balls out" circuit, with its share of technical bits, and something which fulfilled my wants across the board, the trusty Pug 106 XSI was probably the lowest powered car in the field, typically as the under 1400cc road cars are, but gave plenty of fun and thrills for myself and Mike over the weekend, more power would be nice, but the event was always about playing at Portreath for me, which was achieved 100%.

Well done to South Hams MC, and many thanks to the marshals on the ground, and behind the scenes, as always we can only have our fun if your are willing to do your bit.

Looking forwards to 2011 hopefully.

Alf Chanter
Car 34
Peugeot 106 XSI
Class A1 Road going saloons under 1400cc