

The Subaru Rally Experience Nightmare Rally

Paul Price and I have recently competed (well, we took part anyway) on The Subaru Rally Experience Nightmare Road Rally, based in Kingsbridge for this year, and taking in the infamous roads and junctions of OS map 202, considered by many to be the finest road rally area in the UK, and with the event attracting some 40 entries from across the country, including star driver James Wozencroft, out at car 1 in a Subaru (and event sponsor), it was sure to be a fun event, the roads were slippery by all accounts, and knobbles were thought to be the order of the day. Sadly, the only knobbles we had were staying in my pants, and Paul was never going to get his hands on them, ever.

This was the second round of the 2010 ASWMC navigational road rally series, a championship taking in night events covering Wales, the southwest, and into the south east on night events, each of between 150 – 200 miles. The Subaru Rally Experience Nightmare Rally was run by South Hams motor club, who have had a busy period, as only the week before they were running the Kynaston Autoservices stage rally at Smeatharpe, and for any motor club a single event can be a challenge, but to run two championship events in 2 weeks is good going indeed, congratulations to South Hams on this.

For this particular event, there was to be a high level of police visibility, as a few events in recent times had attracted the attention of the police for various reasons, predominantly due to spectators it would appear, although some complaints from locals en route had attracted the attention of Devon and Cornwall's finest, and for the Nightmare Rally, they were very open, and very clear as to why they were there, taking part in the pre event competitors briefing to reassure us that they were indeed out to make sure that the event ran well, and with no issues. Key focus was to be on driving standards, such as noise, general driving, and speed. Fortunately Paul scores very low on all of these, so I felt confident that we would be OK in the presence of the law. They wouldn't catch us lol, we were far too clever for them, we could easily go slow and careful, we practised it with each event. The strangest thing was that during the competitors briefing before the event actually started, and when the officer took to the stage, Paul started to sweat, started emptying his pockets, and tried to sneak out the back way shouting "look out, it's the bizzys". Yes, as you may already know, Paul, deny it or not, is indeed a scouser. So I think a few jokes are in order at this point.

What should you do if you see a scouser jogging?
Trip him up and give the lady's purse back to her.

How do you make a scouser run faster?
stick a video player under his arm

What's the difference between Batman and a Scouser?
Batman can go anywhere without Robin.

Aaaaaany way, back to the rally. The event featured pre printed maps, which is a technique becoming favoured on many of the championships around the country at this time, so our job was simply to follow the route, sounds easy that doesn't it, but its not called the nightmare for nothing, as we were to find out. During the pre event formalities, the weather was kind, and it was indeed a warm evening on the quay in Kingsbridge at the signing-on venue, but as us navigators awaited our allotted time to collect the route info, the drizzle started to come down, and this was to be a sign of worse things to come during the night. All of the weather forecasts for this weekend had said a storm was approaching from the Mediterranean, and this was going to bring a full on windy and wet storm (sounds like a helluva curry) supposedly for later that night. With the past week not offering much in the way of sunshine, the roads whilst predominantly dry, were clearly covered in mud, and again, this was to be a sign for the event.

As I collected our route info and raced (ok, waddled) to the car for the run out to the first control, we headed off into the wilderness that was south hams, looking forwards to a great event. At the first control, we awaited our time, and we were off, within the first few miles, we travelled a white (unsurfaced track) was simply a mud bath, on the downhill bits, both Paul and I were passengers (unusual for Paul, if he's a passenger normally it might well be sat next to the bizzys, but that's only a rumour) with the car following the ruts left by the top cars, and on the uphill bits we were scrabbling for traction all the way. Certainly brought a smile to Pauls face, prior to the event we had been offered the loan of a set of knobbles by Phil Harris of South Hams, as in his words, knobbles were going to be the choice tyre, unfortunately the time got the better of us and we didn't manage to get the tyres fitted to the car before the event, so were running on Pauls trusty Silverstone van tyres, on this first white, it was clear that for at least some aspects of the 2010 Nightmare Rally, knobbles would be a very good choice.

As the event went on, we kept on the pace, dropping no time initially, until a short 2 mile/4 minute section which took in another tricky white, and ended up costing us our clean sheet and dropping three minutes, closely followed by an interesting section across Thurlestone Beach in the dark, which was very slippery, pot holed and fun, lots and lots of fun, and with lots of NAM (not as map triangles) slowing us down, we were actually going very well to keep our pace. The final section before petrol sadly cost us another 2 minutes, as we were on another short loop around the back of Langage where we once again came across a band of friendly Policemen, which in its self was fine as they were, as throughout the entire event,

helpful and friendly, but in this instance, just as we were pulling in to the control to get our minute, a police car stopped just in front of us, chatted with the marshal, and drove on, slowly, almost exactly as our minute came up, thus we had to follow the officer through the short section, again with only 4 minutes to do the section, we dropped a further two by the time the boys in blue (do they still wear blue, pink is sooooo much more in vogue now) turned right, and we could turn left and crack on, so by petrol, we had dropped 5 minutes in total, with the leaders on between zero and 5 on average, by my reckoning, we were on the borders of the top ten with some ease.

After petrol, we were to undertake much of the same, with a variety of private venues, such as farms and off road sections. Many of which were treacherous as it had started to rain really heavily just prior to the petrol halt, and boy did it rain, not only did the storm come from the Mediterranean, it brought quite a lot of it with it. Paul passed a comment that he had never driven through so much chocolate coloured water as we traversed the route, with every corner throwing something new at us, be it mud, water, muddy water, watery mud, or at one point pure, neat, fresh cow poo, and lots of it. It was in the early sections after petrol that Paul blotted his form, we were on a reasonably fast, downhill through a farmyard sort of section, looking for a slot right on a left hand bend, reasonably clear on the map, but as some of you know, map 202 doesn't always reflect what is actually on the road, and we missed the slot, although I thought that I had just caught it out of the corner of my eye, so I stopped Paul and we reversed. First we reversed in to a wall on the drivers side, ripping a door mirror off, now that was amusing, but better was to come, he corrected his path, went forwards, and then continued back, but further away from the wall on his side as we looked for the junction. This time we reversed in to a solid stone bank, and damaged the rear bumper, and tailgate. He would have been better off if he had been arrested by the bizzys again at the start. The funny thing was, I had mentioned to him that he had no reversing lamps at scrutineering, and he told me that he knew that, but he hadn't got around to fixing it. It appears, apparently, that it's more effective to repair a door mirror and a bumper and tailgate, than it is to fix a simple bulb in a reversing light. I think the term hindsight applies in this instance, ill bet the reversing lamp is working for the next one.

From here on we continued across time cards three and four, with a clean run towards the back of time card 4 with no problems in any form, until we eased off to let a faster (weren't they all) car through, and then went to pull away, to find that we had no clutch for some reason, the cable was there, but it wasn't doing its job, the car was driveable, but with stopping at each junction, we had to turn the car off, put it in gear, and then start the car in gear, thus allowing us to drive on. That's fine as long as the junction is downhill of flat, on the uphill junctions it just wasn't playing the game. We were within a few miles of MTC3 and were desperate to get to the control and see what we could do, but it quickly became clear that stopping

and starting on the gear change every time wasn't doing the car any favours, and having decided that we had already had lots of fun, we decided that for the sake of the gearbox and clutch, it would be better to stop now before doing some serious damage, or possibly even lose control in the lanes as we couldn't use gearbox braking to assist us, and the uphill twisty sections were a pig when you couldn't change gear and the car was slowing quickly to a stop nearly. A number of scenarios, we could possibly hold someone else up if we stopped in a narrow section, we could crash, the gearbox could go bang, all went through our heads, and there was no doubt that a steady drive back to the finish venue was the best choice at this stage.

As we were only 7 miles or so from the finish, we slowly made our way past the two police speed traps (in the middle of the night and in the middle of no where) and arrived at the finish venue for 3.45am, some hour before it was due to open for rally breakfasts, this left us with little choice to sleep in those well known comfortable beds, bucket seats. One hour, and a bad back later, luckily our ploy to retire paid dividends in the end, as we were first in for a splendid breakfast and a warming cup of tea.

So the 2010 Nightmare Rally, was a story of what could have been, we were going well in what was a competitive field for the night, over what was an excellent route laid on by South Hams Motor Club, rallying being rallying is often a case of what might have been, and having compared ourselves after the first set of timecards, it was clear if the final timecard had been kind to us, we would have finished in the region of 10th ish, but as would be hero's, we simply finished our breakfasts, and made our way home steadily, knowing that we had enjoyed the event, that the car was relatively unscathed, and that we were able to be competitive should we have finished the event, always a shame to have a DNF, but eased slightly if you've had a good run and enjoyed yourselves.

Highlights of the night for the event were local South Hams man Paul Watts and his son showing the big guns how its done by taking the overall win, local knowledge on map 202 is clearly an advantage, but their skill in tackling the difficult roads was as much a part of their victory as was the local knowledge. Another interesting competitor, was John Cooper, with local man Kev Wills on the maps in Johns enduro spec Vauxhall Corsa, as many of you know, John is one of the southwest, indeed national scrutineers for rallies etc, and it was good to see him in (an XL) seat for the event, the first since the mid 80s so he told us, love to see a pic of john in his slimmer days in the 80s if anyone has one. John and Kev had a fantastic run to 9th overall on the gamekeeper turned poachers debut in the Corsa, so well done lads (lads !!!!!!!). Plymouth driver Chris Smale had a great run in the novice class to 13th overall with Dion Casey on the maps, considering he was a late entry, he had a great run in the end.

The next event for the championship is the Myotis Rally, organised by Devizes and District Motor Club, a new event for me, but one which leaves me in a dilemma, as it's the same weekend as the Werrington Park weekend, which im intending entering, so it looks like a Sunday entry at Werrington, after a long drive back from the Myotis Rally, and then sleeping in between the runs for Werrington in my Pug 106 XSI. Now that's going to be a weekend of exhaustion, and may well need the Monday off work afterwards Im already thinking.

Hopefully we will also take in the first and second PMC 12 cars by the time of the tiring weekend, so we should all be on form for a full weekend of motorsport.

See you all out there.

Alf Chanter & Half Price