

## **The Equinox Rally 2011**

As I write this initially, ive not been awake long after doing one of the longest and hardest night rallies ive ever done, nearly 7 hours non-stop in the car, and sleep deprivation that red bull and energy shots can't even think about dealing with. So if the first bit (some may well say that my reports always read like this) seems a bit random, it's because im typing this with my eyes shut. Apparently, according to my wife at least, it would have been be a shame to waste an entire day in bed so she woke me up after 4 hours sleep. That and she wanted me to go shopping as well. So here I am typing.

Ive been road rallying since approx 1985, and yes, you may well point out that my trophy shelf isn't exactly overloaded with pots for one with this many years in, imagine if Seb Loeb gave up quickly, that's how I look at it, a few non wins shouldn't put a keen man off. Having said that ive done ok and like to think ive got the hang of it, im never trying to compare myself to the chaps at the front who are frankly gods taking their drivers to wins dropping just a few marks here and there on all night events, but im ok. I also do it as I enjoy it, and thankfully champagne has been much a taste for me.

When I started on ASWMC rounds in approx 1990 all night events seemed easier on the body, im sure that when we stop nowadays at the petrol halt (approx 2am in the morning) somebody has been punching me in the legs for the last 4 hours, and by the finish I feel that ive been awake for days and days, such is the state of my body (no funny comments please) as I ache and ache like nothing before. Years ago we would do 170 miles in the lanes and then go straight to another event the next day, currently im lucky to be able to open my eyes the day after an event let alone go and do another full day in the car competing. I would imagine that my relatively young years and my fitness levels (still early 40s you know) are a testament to how I have worshipped my figure over these last 20 years by force feeding it chocolate, pizza, kebabs, beer and curry, and as a direct result my body feels that after an event it deserves a rest. Apparently.

Anyway, back to rallying.

The Equinox Rally is a new offering to south west road rally types (and I say types as we are defo types of some sort) from Exmouth Motor Club, all taking

place on the lanes on map 193 covering an area between roughly Honiton down to the coast taking in East Devon and west Dorset just about. Some beautiful lanes with lots of tight twisty stuff, and after the last couple of years of severe (well, it was a bit chilly wasn't it) cold weather wreaking havoc on tarmac, more than its fair share of potholes as well. All in all an excellent map for road events with something for everyone in its roads and coastline.

The 2011 ASWMC series kicked off with the Nightmare recently, and the Equinox is the second round of the series, a series which has suffered over recent years from a downturn in entries for various reasons, some economic, some possibly due to a lack of new blood doing all night road rallying, but things are afoot to improve this aspect of road events by developing a series of "classic" events, well respected, and well thought out, and with less events generally in this year's series it's looking hopeful that the 2011 year will be stronger than recent years.

And where do I come in to this you may ask, while, I was sat at home generally chilling out on the Thursday before the event when the phone went (ring ring for those of you who like special effects) and there was this chap on the phone explaining that he was booked to do a rally and had been let down, and was hoping I could help, turns out to be Adrian Crawford, for those with long memories (and probably old gits like me) Adrian Crawford was a name from the 80s who did ASWMC road events and club rallies, and then subsequently some international Tarmac events during the late 80s in a Gp N Suzuki, some of which was well publicised locally as he had some degree of success, winning his class notably a number of times. Adrian was just finishing road rallying as I was starting, which brings it in to prospective, and we are of similar years in age as well. Since 1989 Adrian hasn't so much as ridden in a rally car, and his last road rally was 25 years ago on the Nightmare Rally 1986.

The time had come for Adrian to take to the lanes again, in a kind of exploratory way, and he had been booked originally to do the Nightmare, earlier this year, but a navigator mix up at the very last minute meant that he had missed that one, so was down to do the Equinox instead, with his original navigator from the 80s, sadly due to work commitments, Ted, the would be navigator, was unable to make it at the last minute, and with Adrian keen to take to the lanes again, he was making calls to see who he could find.

Basically, as in the case frequently with my life, I was a last minute no other options kinda choice. But a choice all the same, he could have decided to give up at the first hurdle, but no, he decided that any navigator was better than no navigator, and after a short chat, I agreed to sit with him and give it some on the Equinox. So an email was fired off to the organisers informing them of the last minute changes, and Adrian was reseeded from the back to the front, with us running at car 12 as I am a semi expert (A popular definition of semi is as follows, ***A prefix signifying half, and sometimes partly or imperfectly.*** Can you believe the imperfect bit, that's just not on)

Whilst I'm a friendly kinda guy generally, I tend to avoid doing road events with people I don't know, as you're in the car for many hours, in close proximity, and reliant upon each other, and if you simply don't get on, then it makes for a very long night indeed, so I've always avoided doing this in the past with only one real exception, sitting with Gary White from oop north on the Enduros in 2008 and 2009, which was a great relationship and a thoroughly good time was had by all, so truth be told I was slightly apprehensive, and with Adrian having some history from the past, you do (I do anyways) have a certain amount of trepidation when doing something like this. For me it's predominantly a selfish thing, as I like to enjoy my road rallies, and if I'm sat with a total arse, or someone who thinks I'm a total arse (can you believe that could ever happen!!!!!!!) then I wouldn't enjoy myself, drivers are a bit like friends, you either like 'em or you don't, and as my sense of humour and way of thinking isn't everyone's cup of tea, I am indeed an acquired taste sometimes.

Here we are 1200 words in and we haven't turned a wheel yet. Best I get on with the rallying. Saturday evening came and Adrian duly arrived at my house on time to pick me up for the short drive to Dunkeswell airfield where the event was to be based, the weapon of choice for the night was his wife's Vauxhall Corsa, and in standard road going form at that, a nice example to be honest, so the pressure to not let Adrian damage the car was on. This was a first for me as I hadn't road rallied in a standard car before, with standard seats, seatbelts, suspension and everything to go with it. A part of me was wondering how it would cope with 180 odd miles of narrow twisty lanes, and a part of me was wondering how it would look with the remains of my last meal spread across the dashboard, which was Adrian's fault as one of the first things he had asked me during my telephone interview/last ditch effort to find someone went something like "Are you a chucker" to which my mind started to work overtime on, as once in a while I do tend to barff, dependant on the drivers

style really, and I would imagine that a standard road car would cause me to be thrown around more and the bouncy bouncy nature of the cars suspension wasn't going to help. Only time would tell.

During the trip up Adrian and I got to know each other a little better and Adrian soon realised that I was the font of all knowledge when it comes to bullshit, so we had a great chat and were soon relaxed in each other's company and by the time we arrived at Dunkeswell, we were like old friends, and it was clear enough that we were going to get on well, and the car was fortunately a semi sporty little number with at least some side capture on the sports seats, and the suspension was less tigger and more poo (it didn't bounce much anyways).

Signed on and scrutineered with no problems, noise test was barely audible due to the cars standard nature, it was plotting that was to give the first challenge, with three sheets of map refs for the night taking us through 76 passage checks, 51 time controls and 4 main controls with some 200 odd references to plot, each with an approach and a depart direction, plus 40 not as map diagrams for small triangles etc to keep us honest, this was clearly going to be a mammoth task, fortunately we had in the region of 3 hours to plot this before the game commenced. On top of this as we were to do the full route on 1 map, pretty much every road was used, with many roads running very close to others, so the route info on the map was extremely compact with the route, the controls, the not as map junctions all squeezed in to a very small space, and in such a way as I could read it through the rally. In the end it took me nearly 2 ½ hours to get everything plotted, and this was fairly intense as it was obviously important to get it right and make sure I was up for the challenge. Adrian has history you know.

As our allotted time approached we settled in to the car, talked about how we would do things generally, and made sure we were ready, happy and comfortable. And we were off. (1800 words and we have finally started a rally).

Adrians previous road events were a different format than current, in the 80s it was more of a blast, 2011 with so many controls we were stop go stop go all night, and if Im honest there was so much information to give plus reading the map over some very twisty and exciting roads, it was all quite frantic at my end, Adrian was doing a good job at setting his pace, which was keeping us honest initially and we managed to get through the first few sections with no issues.

About 15 time controls in we came to a junction where we were to use a white part way through, and it was here that I made my first and probably only major mistake of the night, as the lane that we should have used was marked with a dead end sign, so I immediately discounted this lane and went on to what I thought was the correct lane, only to drop a considerable amount of time trying to fathom what had happened as the route simply didn't work after this, fortunately we weren't alone in this as it seemed to have caught lots of crews out, we retraced our steps to the junction that we knew was correct and sat and had a think, and it dawned on me then that the road we wanted probably was a dead end, as the only exit was through a white, which traditionally is used for farm vehicles etc only it may well be marked as a dead end, so down the dead end we went to find the correct route, but by this time it was clear that we had dropped some serious time, so we were then forced to cut a couple of controls to get us back on the time card, also in this first section we came across one of the Subaru's trying to drag a Fiesta out of a ditch where he had not made a clearly marked 90 right on the map, and gone head on in to the ditch, sadly he was well stuck and the power and the benefit of the 4wd Subaru wouldn't shift the fiesta, so the attempt to retrieve him was dropped and we all went on our way with 4 cars in the convoy, and in fairness to Adrian his pace was well within what was needed as we could easily keep with the Subaru in the little standard 1400cc Corsa.

A few moments were had on the next couple of controls in to Petrol in Chard, bouncing off one hedge and having a very wide moment on a 90 left ensuring that we used all the road, and all of the bank/hedge as well, along with clattering over any number of potholes and ditches along the way, but we continued unabated and arrived at Petrol to be surprised to find that clearly there were many crews already missing or dropping back at this time, and after a quick splash and dash for fuel, we found ourselves starting 8<sup>th</sup> car on the road after petrol, cutting a short section of our route in the early stages had kept us still going, and half the battle with road rallying is to keep going regardless, with many having stories of woe losing time here and struggling generally with the navigation (I was on their side defos) so things were looking up at least. The first half had certainly been troubled in a couple of areas for us, and the second longer half was beckoning more of the same challenges, with complicated map work, bumpy roads and tight time scales to keep to. My biggest challenge was possibly the lack of a full harness, as every time we crested, or hit some sort of substantial bump, I was being flung up in the air and was struggling to hang on to the map and keep my eyes on the route.

The second half was very much more organised at my end, although we missed a few passage controls, no idea where they were but possibly due to me plotting my route wrong on any number of the not as map triangles or the more nadgery approach and depart directions, generally we were going well and dropping very little time overall, the route was still a challenge, but maybe we had settled in to it, I wasn't struggling with tiredness particularly and the car seemed to be holding up ok, suffering many many knocks and bangs as we hit pot hole after pothole, I was constantly concerned at getting punctures or breaking something underneath, but all was going well in Adrians hands at that end of the deal. Generally a good second half, although it did seem to go on and on and on. As dawn was starting to break, and the marshals could almost read the paperwork without torches, we neared the final controls, the car was good, the two way feed between Adrian and myself was working well, the times were being stuck to quite well, and things were good, but its fair to say that reaching the final control after what was possibly the longest, hardest and certainly most draining event of my "career" was such a relief.

On a personal level I was disappointed with the first half issue with the Dead End sign, and felt I should have been more switched on to this and just pushed on, but the second half was much better and flowed well, even though we did seem to miss some PCs and there seemed others that were in odd places, in fact there seemed to be too many in some places, but, as with all of these things if my plots weren't accurate or I had put them in the wrong place then I couldn't expect to get them all.

At the finish the traditional long awaited breakfast was served up, eaten, and the eyes started to drop quite quickly as our food needs had been satisfied, but had made us more relaxed, so with a very great need for sleep we decided to make our way back, and I had already warned Adrian that my body shuts down after a rally and I sleep for England in the car on the way back, so the next thing I know is that we are pulling in to my street for arrival at Chez Chanter. Chanter towers as we refer to it, or as a good friend of mine in Guernsey would say, Chanter Manor.

The results showed that actually we finished very well, in 8<sup>th</sup> overall, on what was a very tough rally for both man and machine, whilst a quick look over the car at the finish gave no signs of wear, a better look showed both front wheels and tyres had been battered with rim and sidewall damage probably meaning they were finished, but other than that the Corsa was doing well, as to it being

a good road rally than that is perhaps more open to discussion, as the roads were hard on the suspension, and the ABS brakes gave us a few moments. Ill leave that gem with Adrian to mull over.

My thanks and congratulations go to Adrian for pedalling us around well, avoiding the scenery, and generally getting back in to the entire thing after such a long layoff, he was committed and well up for it, and a thoroughly decent chap generally.

Also thanks go to Exmouth Motor Clubs team of organisers who as with all these things will remain unnamed in their frontage of the club, but they laid on a great event, some fabulous, well used and well thought out roads, the marshals were outstanding as they were everywhere with some teams seemingly at every controls, so well done to them all. Here to 2012 and more of the same.

Adrian Crawford /Alf Chanter

Car 12

2011 Equinox Rally.