

## **The Kynaston Autoservices** **Smeatharpe Rally**

As some of you will already know, my vertically challenged rallying buddy (that could be Mike Perkin, or Paul Price, there's a short theme going on here) Mike Perkin Esq, a Sparky (he may think he's better than that but we all know better) from Tavistock purchased an ex works built (ex Kris Meeke JWRC) Ford Puma S1600 a couple of years ago to tackle a selection of tarmac rallies around the country over the coming years. The car had been fitted with a 260 BHP 2.0 zetec unit as it had been used for some Rallycross in Ireland prior to Mike and the team collecting the car in early 2008 from south of Belfast, the story of the build of the car can be found on the club website ([www.plymouthmotorclub.co.uk](http://www.plymouthmotorclub.co.uk)) in the Gallery section where we recorded the renovation of the car and the conversion of it from left hand drive to right hand drive.

2009 saw a series of random events tackled while we got used to the car and settled it in mechanically, finding the need for a major rebuild of both the engine and the gearbox after some technical issues (the gearbox blew up and the engine wasn't far behind) across a couple of events, but from mid season onwards the car was running reliably and we tackled the final Epynt of the year in August 2009, only for half the stages to be cancelled due to accidents, and the rest to be run in poor weather, thus leaving us somewhat disappointed (thoroughly dejected, rejected, and assed off) and ultimately meaning that due to a variety of work issues the car was not to be used for the rest of the year.

Over the winter period, as we all do, we had planned to do a winter rebuild of the car, knowing there were no major issues to undertake, more of a spanner check, mechanical poke around and perhaps tart the bodywork up a little, as the 2010 plan was to tackle the BTRDA national sealed surface series, which suited our time available to the T as it meant that we could pick 5 or 6 events from a 9 event calendar and thus not spend every spare moment working on the car, providing us with less grief at home and also concentrating on both of our respective businesses in what is going to be another challenging year all round. For us the choice would be to do The Tour of Epynt in March, the Rally of the Midlands in June, the Tyneside Rally near Newcastle, and the Mewla Rally again at Epynt, both in August, and the Patriot Stages at Caerwent in September.

As with all winter rebuilds, it didn't really get of the ground, so in the end I suggested to Mike that we enter the Smeatharpe Stages in early January on the 9th, thus giving us a target to work towards, and a good test of the car, and time in the seat for Mike prior to going to Epynt, this was a late decision some week or so before the event, giving us a few challenges to overcome initially, but we were keen and threw ourselves in to the traditional lastminute.com rebuild of the car,

trying to get it all done in a week, as you can imagine my wife was hugely impressed with this idea. Unfortunately (fortunately) due to the cold weather and the 5" of snow that we had over that period, the event was postponed until 20<sup>th</sup> Feb which gave us a bit of an opportunity to actually start the winter rebuild properly. As it turned out we were lucky as we realised on the eve of the original date of the event that the seatbelts were out of date, and that the MOT had run out on the car as well, so we would have been totally unprepared should the event have gone ahead on its original date. No surprises there for team "why do it tomorrow, when next week will do"

So with some extra time in hand we did what all good rally teams do, and didn't touch the car for a good few weeks, and by the time we finally got around to starting the much discussed winter rebuild before the new rally date, We didn't actually have much time again. Ahhh the joys of rallying. Again, a few late nights as we took the car apart, principally to check it over, we decided to fix a few niggling oil leaks on the dry sump system and the drive shaft oil seals. We also whipped the gearbox out and decided to have a poke around inside, for those of you who have never disassembled a six speed sequential front wheel drive Hewland PCT gearbox, you should try it someday if you have one hanging around, its fun, at least as much fun as the Rubix cube. A couple of small technical issues held us up for a few days, but nothing of relevance, and the car was reassembled and presented for its MOT just two days before the rally, thankfully it passed with no issues, as with most rally cars they are better put together than your average road cars of a similar age, so we were ready for the event without any problems overall.

As I was travelling with work on the Friday before the event I didn't get to Team Perkin until reasonably late in the evening, so we loaded the van up with all the crap you take to rallies and I set off home for 4 hours sleep before getting up again at 4.30am to leave for Mikes at 5.00am, picking up Perkin Senior on the way, who as always was assisting with the works and servicing for the weekend, but only if we had promised to build him a powered wheel chair for when he gets older, so not long really. With the weather forecast showing very cold overnight with a possibility of snow on higher ground, we were all preying for some decent weather for the event, as Smeatharpe sits on an old airfield, and is therefore higher up, so leaving home at 5am it was clear that whilst there was some ice around, it was nothing serious on the Plymouth – Tavistock road, so I collected Dave (father, cook, service engineer, tracking specialist) and we arrived at Mikes on time, dropped the trailer on to the rear of my van, only to find that the rear lights were faulty on the van to trailer link, so we spent an hour poking it and then reached the point at which we had no option to go, rightly or wrongly, with no rear trailer lights. This was in part a tradition of the team, its rare that we have ever actually arrived on time in all the years we have worked together, so we felt comfortable in leaving late, its what we did. Its what we still do.

However, in this instance there was a fly in the ointment as they say, upon leaving Tavistock, already aware of the lateness of the hour, we thought we would be fine until some 5 miles in to our journey it became clear that snow was falling reasonably heavily as we approached Oakhampton to pick up the A30, and travel was becoming more and more difficult as we drove into heavy early morning snow, with the downhill bits proving hard as we had no steering or brakes, and the uphill bits worse as we had no traction, thus our progress was slower than Paul Price on a road rally. He would have given us a good run for our money I can tell you. By the time we reached Oakhampton for the fuel station, we struggled to manage the small shallow climb to fuel, and then when I turned in to the fuel station, the van went straight on, narrowly missing the Shell sign, a low wall, and a deep kerb, even struggling for traction on the fuel forecourt. All in all, and you can see from the picture, it was a very interesting first part of the journey, we were well behind time, and the weather wasn't looking any better as we joined the A30 for the Exeter leg of the journey, for the first section, we were on a main dual carriageway, running downhill, with again no brakes, no steering, and approx £40,000 worth of van, trailer and rally car.



With the weather as it is, we rang ahead to the organisers of Smeatharpe to pre-warn them that we may well be late, only to find that a further mile or so up the road, the A30 was all clear with no snow in site, so we were off to the venue north of Honiton and no further transport issues, arriving within the correct time just about. The venue was clear of snow, with a little ice floating around, but no snow. Did I say no snow, yup, not a flake.

And then the car wouldn't start. It does that sometimes, so we dragged it along behind the van, breaking a number of tow ropes, before it eventually kicked in to life, then getting a bollocking from the marshals as we weren't supposed to run the car until after 9.30am due to noise restrictions on the venue after it had been lost for a year or so for such issues. The Puma isn't the quietest car going and we had to warm it up a little just to make sure it ran OK. We claimed a service spot, and it was off to scrutineering for the Team Cornwall scrutineers, whilst the team of Perkin Senior (Dave) and our fellow member Shortstuff Price (Paul) joining us at the venue, set up the awning and tools etc, being last car through due to our untimely arrival, we were not unnaturally at the rear of the queue. And as we queued, it started to lightly flake with snow, just lightly. As we actually got to the front of the queue, it was snowing, that white stuff that's already caused so many issues this year, and it was settling as well, as the ground temperature was low after the months of cold weather we've already had. Scrutineering and signing out of the way, we were back to our service spot to look at tyres and such like, prior to waiting for our start time. And it was still snowing. Heavily.

As the first stage started, it was still snowing, but the top cars cleared a track, and as the field went through times were improving, and it had also stopped snowing, so the later runners had the advantage over the top runners. Seeded at car 9 but running at 15<sup>th</sup> car on the road due to other late entries, we didn't suffer as bad as some, but certainly dropped a lot of time on stage one, Adrian Brown in his powerful Mk 1 escort was typical of the front runners suffering from the conditions, and ended the first stage in last place overall due to the lack of traction in a powerful RWD car, whilst the 6R4 of Karl Broad, and the Subaru of James Harvey/Nick Fewins faired much better in the conditions. By the time the second stage ran, the stage was far clearer, and the stage was some 1 minute quicker for us, and the same applied for a lot of the front runners, with many of the quickest cars still towards the mid to rear positions at this stage.

On his first event in his own car as a driver, Pete Bold (Pete has navigated Dave Parnell to the 2008 ASWMC championship amongst others for many years), driving his 1800cc Fiesta, ably assisted by Anton Shaw who had built the car and driven it on a number of events, was having a blast in the right hand seat for a change, its fair to say before the event Pete was somewhat nervous, and indeed could well have kept the makers of Imodium in business on his own during the run up to the event.

For Mike and I in the puma, all was well, we pushed our way around in what was essentially a test of the car before Epynt, and thoroughly enjoyed the stage layouts and the fast pace of the event, there was relatively little service time between the stages so very little hanging about, and plenty of opportunity on the stages to chase other cars, some of which got in the way, and others of which were quicker than

us, but we did have a good blast. One of the main problems as the event went on was that we kept clipping door mirrors, and after about 5 stages, we had lost both sides so therefore had no concept of how close any chasing cars were which was novel when you could see a car getting close, but had no idea if they were trying to pass, and if so on what side they were passing, and decided on one occasion to let a car past thinking he was closer than he was, and then realising that he was actually slower than us and then getting held up by the car after we let him through. Amusing but our own fault (Mikes fault as it was him hitting the chicanes as we straight-lined them, although it was me who told him to try and drive them faster).

Our only major moment, and I say major on behalf of Mike, was a flat in sixth gear 100mph sideways drift early in to stage 6 where the stage featured a series of long fast lefts and long fast rights. As we went through the first long left, then in to the right, the tyres were cold, and the car started to drift out, typically on the navigators side, as it does, and we were heading towards a pile of pallets being used to denote the outside of the stage, as I looked out of my passengers side window, and I say the side as we were very sideways, I watched the pallets coming towards me and decided that there was nothing I could do holding a stage diagram in my hand, and that the pallets were our target, it was just dependant on how much of a target. I therefore decided to encourage Mike to keep his foot in and get on with it, and to not worry about the pallets. It wasn't as if I could ask them to move or anything. They were there, and we were heading in their direction. As I looked away, I felt a series of bangs and then something solid hitting the car, we had sustained damage, it was just a question of how much damage.

Now for me, I have a history of sitting next to Anton Shaw, so full lock sideways was simply a daily occurrence on an event with Anton in the Escort, if you didn't go sideways, then invariably you were in the service area, or on the trailer. It was therefore just another sideways corner for me, but for Mike it was sooooo much more, apparently, but he kept it together and pushed the car harder, it was clear that we hadn't done any mechanical damage as the car was driving fine and our pace was good, the only problem I had was that the window on my side was creeping down, not smashed, but by the end of the stage it was nearly all the way down. As we arrived in the service area, it was clear that the pallets had caught the rear bumper, smashing it and the rear light on the navigators side (always the navigators side isn't it) and a cone had imprinted itself neatly on the navigators door, pushing the door in and breaking the electric window mechanism, nothing which the team couldn't sort out, with Dave and Paul on it like a rash (I've advised them both that you can get cream, but in Dave's case due to his age, its bed sores, not a rash), pushing the door back out and temporarily holding the window up with the good old tywrap.

Stages 7 and 8 were the final to run, and with hindsight for us (you remember hindsight Dean) we should have changed tyres, but we had made the decision to

run the ones we had on the car until the limit, and as always, it was the wrong decision, as they were way past the limit already, and we dropped time on this stage, so prior to the final stage we swapped tyres for some Pirellis we had and needed to use up, again this cost us some time in the stage, and went on to prove something we already knew, to go fast, you need to have the right rubber in contact with the road, and using up old tyres, whilst fun, simply doesn't give you the traction you need, although in this case as the event was more of a test for us, it was never going to be the end of the world (that happens when Mike gets the invoice for the new tyres) it would have been nice to have had a couple of better stages and to show the potential of the car, but it was overall about the reliability of the car and the team for this event.

One thing that became clear from Smeatharpe is how many quick cars and drivers are out there, on what was a relatively simple (but well run, nice one South Hams) club event with 46 entries, the quality of the field was high and the event proved to be ultra competitive, we eventually finished in 17<sup>th</sup> place overall, not a fabulous result, but in comparison, we learnt a little more and the car was solid and reliable, with no issues whatsoever with the car, we were very pleased with the way the car ran, and with Epynt coming up in a few weeks we only have the (reasonably major) body works to contend with which shouldn't cause any real issues for the (very) amateur team to repair.

Onwards and upwards to the British National sealed surface series taking us to Epynt in the Brecon Beacons in March, we have a new (proper, deeper pockets) navigator for this one so keep an eye out for the next report from Team MD Perkin/AC Haines Ford Puma soon.

Regards

Alf (sideways is an emotional state) Chanter

On behalf of Team MD Perkin/AC Haines

