

RBR: Car 22

by Ben Hobson

Where do I begin? I got the usual phone call from Andrew Pearce in March asking what I was doing the weekend of October 3rd, tried to explain that due to one of my shift colleagues leaving, getting annual leave might be a problem, to which I got the standard answer, "Too late, I've entered you in the run". I had to inform my supervisor up here at sunny (glowing) Sellafield that I was having that weekend off whether he liked it or not. Luckily for me my supervisor, Mike, is a very nice person and used to work with Andrew many years ago in the vitrification plant just up the road from my building.

Having had at least half an hour's fun on the speaker phone at work trying to get the voice-activated ticket purchasing system to work, I finally managed to buy myself a return ticket to London for £44, which isn't bad. Believe me, the voice-activated system doesn't know any swear words and has never heard of anywhere you want to go to.

Having arrived in London on the Thursday, I was determined this time not to go out and get hammered so I didn't feel 'cream crackered' the next day when we set off. Well that idea went right out of the window after the first pint, we managed to find the only bar in Twickenham open until twelve o'clock.

Luckily, on the Friday morning Andrew had done just about everything needed for the trip; all that was left to do was give the old thing a wash (and the car) and set off.

As per usual, we had to negotiate the M25, the hour's journey from Andrew's is quite an eye opener for me, we probably passed more cars in an hour than I see in a year up here in little old Cumbria.

We arrived and parked up. For some reason we were there at about 2.30ish, so we had a little bit of lunch and then spent the next four hours chewing the fat and looking at other Triumphs, catching up with some of the 10CR crews I hadn't seen since last year.

It was soon 7 pm and before you new it they were in, they were under starter's orders and they were off... Big T... has got a flyer... (I am sure anyone who has listened to Derek and Clive will know the rest of this very funny horse race sketch).

We trundled out of the start with more CDs than HMV and more pasties and pies than Gregg's. Just remember the pies and pasties.

We were soon at our first stop some way off Blyth as we only set off with half a tank of fuel, so a quick top up, oh and some more pies. On the way to Blythe I decided that a top Ginsters pie was called for and tucked in, it wasn't until I was almost halfway into it that I started to think it was a bit chewy, I discovered that I had in fact eaten the cardboard backing that comes with the pie as well as the lovely filling!

We were soon in and out of Blythe and before long heading out over the fells of Northumbria – my sort of roads – virtually on my back doorstep.

We called in at Corbridge for yes, you guessed it, more petrol and more pies. We supped the contents of the Thermos – a potent coffee called rocket fuel – as we pushed the car to the pumps (to cut down on noise). Andrew was by now starting to wonder whether I would spend more cash on petrol, or more on pies.

The roads from Corbridge to Edinburgh are just like the ones around my way. In fact, I have driven some of these on a Sunday trip out on my motorbike. Andrew, having come from up this way,

handled them with no problem, which was a good feeling, especially as when we rounded one corner we encountered a car trying to demolish a bridge

Once at the airport, we quickly nipped inside for the use of Edinburgh airport's finest porcelain and, not wanting a 'cuppa', popped back to the car for a drink of Red Bull, supplemented with Pro-Plus and, of course, I had another pie.

We did the quick stint up to Perth services and, after re-fuelling (and buying some more petrol for the car), I took over the driving. "I don't mind doing the bit from here to Inverness," I said, "it's easy and it's straight, with sections of duel carriageway. I don't drive these old types of vehicles that often so it is a nice bit of road to break myself in." You have to remember that, until Perth services, I had never driven this car, or one like it, in my life. I have always done this run in one of Andrew's 2000s, which are a bit roomier than the GT6. A friend sent me a text message asking me what the car was like; I replied that it was like trying to fit a six pound cod into a sardine tin.

The road to Inverness was a nightmare; it poured down the whole way making driving a bit hazardous.

We passed Aviemore, again: one day I will get to see this place in daylight.

We landed at Inverness and it was a beautiful morning. More petrol, quick oil check, pie, drink, Red Bull, Pro-Plus etc. (I forgot to mention the four packets of monster munch I had on the way to Blyth services). Andrew took over driving after sleeping most of the way from Perth.

The run up to John O Groats was, as usual, stunning – the scenery is amazing. Apart from the oil rigs it's the desolation, the remoteness. I'm quite sure there were some folk, first time out on the run, and probably more used to living in civilisation, who thought to themselves 'Where the hell are we?'

We stopped in Wick for a top up of all the usual things. We were a little shocked by the petrol prices, I think it was about 97.9 p per litre, which is amazing really, considering the oil rigs are only just off the coast. We headed into John O' Groats and I will have to admit I wasn't quite prepared for the shock. The hotel was amazing. Having done this event a few times before, I'm sure some of the other entrants who have done this before will agree that it has been transformed. Full marks to the owners of the hotel.

After a well-needed breakfast, we were off down the coast, past the sister plant of my place of work and on to the tight, twisty roads leading back down to Inverness.

We had the afternoon stop and whilst Andrew tightened his wheel bearing, I indulged in some coffee and a few sandwiches, etc. We got our flask refilled by the rather nice, French-sounding waitress. We set off for Fort William and it was at this point I had my first bit of real sleep.

In Fort William, we stopped at a rather nice fish and chip shop and I tucked into steak pie and chips. Andrew only had chips and couldn't finish them so I had those as well! Fort William was very wet, I only ran twenty yards to the chip-shop and came back soaked, never mind. I was rather hoping that, just for once, I might get to see Glencoe soaked in sunlight but it wasn't to be, so on we went down to Sterling.

We stopped for a very welcome pie, drink and fuel. I drove from

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there down what is one of my favourite bits of motorway. Once you hit Beattock Summit it's flat out, downhill all the way to Carlisle and we were more than impressed with the copious amounts of sheet lightning that made the trip down just a little bit more exciting. We stopped at a certain motorway service station (name withheld so you lot aren't queueing for the shower next time) for our halfway shower, having just battled through some of Cumbria's finest weather, which is not unusual for me since I live there, but for some others it is probably a little bit different. We rolled up to the petrol station and it was at this point that the heavens opened; Andrew was only on the other side of the car but I couldn't hear him over the deluge of rain and marble-sized hail hitting the garage canopy. The next few hours went well, helped by Dale in front who showed us the way to Oswestry.

Another pit stop, another pie... but something a bit special this time, a meat and potato one. The next few hours were okay, apart from the little diversion around Shrewsbury. Everybody else probably went round it, we went into it, and around the inside of it like the lottery balls in the machine before, eventually, coming out on the right road. From here on it was plain sailing, I was asleep! We went into Bristol services for the usual and the usual, on to the M5, and then the A30, the road to Land's End. I drove: I love this road, it is just amazing at four in the morning. I can remember ten-or-so years ago travelling with Andrew and a few friends to St Ives in an old black, ex-ministry Rover P5 of Andrew's; it was single lane all the way from the end of the M5, so today this bit of road is a luxury with its dual carriageway sections.

After the usual great breakfast at Land's End, another can of Red Bull and some Pro-Plus we set off. I was quite tired by this point and found myself falling asleep – I hadn't even realised! Andrew was navigating himself, again! This had to be the hardest part of this run.

Dartmoor was interesting, especially the person in the silver people carrier that held everybody up for at least twenty minutes; he couldn't judge his distances, didn't like skinny country roads... oh yeah, that's right, he couldn't drive. We didn't stop long at the halt, only long enough to take on more petrol and more food. I managed to raise another fiver for my sponsorship from a woman

in the petrol station who had seen the cars and wanted to donate to CWL.

The run up to Goodwood was pretty uneventful with just a load of slow drivers, farmers who think they own the roads, and lots more traffic – civilisation?

Goodwood was great, I have never been there before. The run back to north London was spoiled by a bus that only did 30 mph and a little moment when a modern Volvo, with modern brakes, stopped dead in front of us. Andrew had to pilot the car around the Volvo and slot it back in in front of it. The manoeuvre worked a treat, but I think there could be a small stain on the seat I was in. As soon as we got over the shock it was just the little trip back to London.

Trying to avoid roadworks on the M25, Andrew had us skirting into London then out again only to end up stuck on the M25 in very bad traffic. Do people not have homes to go to on Sunday evenings? We made it, guiding in a stricken Dolomite that had lost its headlights.

We spent some time in The Plough before saying our goodbyes and heading back round the motorway to Andrew's house, which involved yet another detour round London, avoiding the traffic on the M25.

On arriving at Andrew's house it was straight into the shower and then a take-away pizza. I climbed into bed that night and never even managed get my hand over to the light switch to turn it off; I was out, unlike the light, which was still on the next morning when I woke up. I headed back up to Cumbria on one of Mr Branson's all-singing, all-dancing, all-tilting trains, missing the GT6, the noise, the rain, the smell and the pies...

I would just like to say that I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of this trip and, yes, I will be doing it again. The car went well and behaved itself, not even a splutter. Oh, and the pie thing... Well, it's true they are full of junk: having successfully munched my way through the best part of a Ginsters warehouse and a few chips here and there, I managed to put on over two-and-a-half kilos in less than three days, so pie-eaters beware!

Thanks again to Andrew for inviting me, and also to everyone else I met that weekend.

RBRR: Car 54 – Part 1

by Mark and Jo McLean

"You're doing what?" That is the normal response to the discovery of what the Round Britain Reliability Run is all about. And we shouldn't be surprised really: taking a 30-year-old car on a non-stop, 2000 mile journey around the UK is not something a sane person would attempt, surely. Well let me tell you, they don't know what they are missing!

This was our third RBRR, but it was different to our previous entries, as we had our daughter Isobel to consider this time, and there was the small technical detail that my own Dolomite Sprint was off the road. We finally decided three weeks before the event

to take the plunge and leave Isobel with her grandparents for the weekend of the event, and as regards the car, my very good friend Carl Shakespeare was prepared to lend me one of his Sprints, on the basis that he and Beckie could use their Mark IV Spitfire instead.

Without the usual fuss and panic for me over the state of my car, there wasn't much I could do in terms of car preparation. Carl had decided to tidy up the front end of the car and to fit some new doors to smarten its appearance and I agreed to polish it all up. Apart from the usual checks for fluids and tyre pressures, that was as much as I needed, and was able, to do. I did put a fair stock of spares in the

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boot, along with plenty of tools and an emergency triangle (which was to come in handy on the run). Jo and I also tried to familiarise ourselves with the car, having not driven my Sprint for at least 6 months, and of course, they are all different, aren't they?

With the car polished, hoovered, and the RBRR decals applied, the car looked good, and we dropped Isobel off with her grandparents on the Friday afternoon. Isobel enjoyed being in 'Daddy's car' – she clearly has great taste in cars! To be honest, we weren't sure whether we were going to be able to take part in the RBRR as late as the night before, because Isobel picked up a horrible chest infection and a high temperature, and as well as the prospect of having to leave a very poorly 18-month-old with someone else for the first time ever, there was the minor detail of having had little sleep for the previous couple of nights. Of course, we were not able to get a lie-in to 'stock up' on sleep, either. Still, we made our decision to go for it (with Isobel having perked up on the Friday) and we are delighted that we did.

The journey to the start was fine and we arrived at The Plough in good time, had a bite to eat, took some photos and video footage, and had a natter to some of the other RBRR old hands. The atmosphere was buzzing as usual, with a packed car park due to the full entry list of 81 cars. As we neared the time for departure, I realised that I had not brought my warm clothes with me, and Jo duly rushed in to pick up a CWL fleece for me, in exchange for a donation. Thank goodness I spotted it in time – it gets a bit nippy 'oop north' this time of year! *[Nay, lad, frame thissen! Why didst tha need a fleece, it wor nobbut October? Tha'd be proper starved up 'ere cum December when it's reet cowl. 'Appen tha doan't knaw ha ta spell t'word 'up', neither! – Ed.]*

Seven o'clock came around, and, with no sight of Jeremy Beadle, who was scheduled to be flagging us all off, 81 cars processed from The Plough with much waving and tooting of horns. As usual, the sight of this many Triumphs zooming up the A10 must have been quite something to the commuters, and we were very proud to be part of this spectacle. We did not feel the same adrenalin at the start as we have in the past, although it built as the event progressed – probably the reverse of previous years. Unlike in 2002, Jo and I managed to get some video footage of the momentous occasion without falling out. Some spirited driving was going on already and a couple of Spitfires came zooming past us. We noticed that they appeared to have deviated from the suggested route at one junction and, with a convoy of cars behind us, I can remember asking Jo whether she was absolutely sure that we were on the right road. I had visions of a fleet of Triumphs doing laps around the roundabout with the A505 in Cambridgeshire. As usual, Jo's directions were spot on, of course!

The dry weather disappeared as we progressed up the A1(M) and passing the lorries was a bit scary in places due to the spray. Nonetheless, we arrived at Blyth Services safely in plenty of time, probably too much time in fact, as we were waiting around to get our book signed with apparently the whole of the field. We were keen to get going, but it was nice to be greeted by a Dolomite Club member and his son who remembered us from last time. The son suggested his dad ought to get his Sprint ready for 2006. Sound advice we would say!

A phone call to see how Isobel was reassured us, as she was

sound asleep by this point and that lifted a worry from our minds, allowing us to enjoy the event more fully now. We were also delighted to have picked up a message from Jim Hylton, a 2002 entrant and fellow Sprint owner, to see how we were getting on.

We left Blyth as soon as possible, but waited for Carl and Beckie in their Spitfire as they filled with petrol. The sight of a garage full of Triumphs (including the ex-police 2000) was fantastic, and must have been like going back 25 years for any passers-by.

With Jo at the wheel now, we moved onto more twisty A-roads as we came close to the Scottish border, and it started to rain again. We got to CoRBRRidge at around 1 am, having now covered 277 miles. We were greeted by our colleagues from the Triumph Dolomite Club with soup and a roll, some nice biscuits and a coffee. These guys must be raving mad, having turned up at this hour just to provide refreshments, but they were very welcome indeed. CoRBRRidge is always a busy stop with most crews filling with petrol, and the normal peace and quiet of this small village was broken with the buzz of the atmosphere and the noise of this large fleet of Triumph cars. As usual, there was one village idiot who decided that his souped-up 1.1 Vauxhall Nova could make more noise than the Triumphs.

It was my turn at the wheel again for the stretch into Scotland and we set off on the 'roller-coaster' road into Jedburgh. With the rain now having stopped again, it was nonetheless still slippery. Many cars seemed to be in a big hurry and I was quite happy to let them come past me, as I was not familiarised with the handling of the car. As we approached Jedburgh, we were caught by a fleet of big saloons. As we went around a long right-hand bend, I thought I saw the front end of a Spitfire poking out onto the road out of the corner of my eye. I decided to turn around at the nearest opportunity, and we drove back, along with the saloons, with some trepidation. Sure enough, there was a crashed Spitfire (car 52) and as Jo hadn't seen the car, she expected to see it on its roof or something. We were very relieved to find that the drivers were fine, if very shaken. Sadly the car was in a rather worse state, and of course we tried to see whether we could do anything. All that we could do was to place a warning triangle 30 yards up the road and to offer the guys some food and drink while they waited for the recovery vehicle. They insisted that they would be fine and so we pressed on. There had almost been a multi-Triumph pile-up only minutes before, as other entrants slowed and stopped in the road to see what the problem was. As this was on the exit of a long, dark and slippery bend, there was not much time to stop for the temporary Triumph car park and we heard much screeching of tyres as the old cars tried to avoid a further accident. A quick-thinking saloon driver waved the traffic on, and thankfully, no further dents arose. I think that this was a timely reminder to curb some of the spirited driving on the slippery roads for some of the other entrants.

The rest of the journey to Edinburgh airport was, thankfully, uneventful, if a little behind schedule due to the stoppage at Jedburgh. Some of the crews had got lost around the airport and so we were not actually that far behind the rest of the pack. We always look forward to Edinburgh, as we are always greeted with amazing generosity in the form of free coffee and a lovely cake. The time was now 3 am and we had covered 381 miles, not even 20% of the trip.

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After our early morning snack, we left the airport and progressed to the Forth road bridge. Somehow, the toggle from the sleeping bag in the back of the car had managed to get wrapped up in the seat belt mechanism and it meant that Jo's seatbelt would not function correctly. Clearly, this was not a safe situation and we stopped, along with Carl and Beckie, just before the pay stations on the bridge. After much faffing about by the side of the road, I finally lost my temper and a major 'Meldrew moment' occurred with the contents of the rear of the car sent flying in all directions (must have been the lack of sleep – honestly!). To make matters worse, I managed to knock the torch out of Jo's hands, sending it flying across the car, to be buried in the mountain of luggage on the back seat; it took a while to find it! Having wrestled with the mechanism for some time, I finally managed to remove the offending article before the air turned completely blue and we somehow managed to laugh about the incident before we had crossed the bridge, despite the fact that we were now virtually last in the pack – not where we wanted to be.

No more teddies came out of my pram on the rest of the short journey to Perth. We quickly filled up with fuel and pressed on to the A9. Jo had missed the sunrise in Scotland on our previous two runs and was keen to remedy that this time, so she decided to drive until the Sun came up. I tried to get some sleep and probably grabbed about 10 minutes, which is a record for me! Jo was really tired at this point but pressed on, determined to see the beautiful sunrise. Sadly, although there was some lovely scenery in the half-light, there was no colourful start to the day and Jo was disappointed. We swapped over at the wheel around the Dornoch Firth, with its oil platforms, and Jo tried to grab some sleep. As we progressed further north, the clouds disappeared and the day started in glorious fashion. At the driver changeover, we had been re-passed by some of the Triumphs that Jo and Beckie had overtaken earlier, and so when the dual carriageway presented itself, both cars zoomed past once again. I wasn't sure how fast to go, as I knew the Spitfire had a much smaller engine, and the speedo in the Sprint was a mile out. Beckie said that her speedo touched the ton at one point, but I certainly was nowhere near that kind of speed, so I guess her speedo was also miscalibrated.

As we joined the A99, we were now at the head of a small convoy of Triumphs. There is some truly magnificent scenery at this point of the journey, and exactly what the drivers need to energise their batteries. The sun was bright, the colours were very vivid, and we were hungry and ready for the customary warm welcome at the Sea View Hotel at John O'Groats. We seemed to pull away from the pack a little, and were then caught by a nice Mk I Spitfire who seemed to be having some fun on the twisty mountain roads. I decided to join in and while Jo appreciated the scenery, I enjoyed the driving!

We arrived at our first breakfast stop at 9.30 am in glorious sunshine and decided to grab a shower first. We were delighted to find the rooms had been renovated, and we were able to enjoy refreshing showers in piping hot water for the first time ever on the RBRR this year – bliss! The breakfast was very efficiently served, as usual, and most welcome. We always prefer this breakfast stop to Land's End because of the warm reception from the staff, and the Scottish cooking, but then I would say that wouldn't I? We had

now covered a mere 660 miles – around a third of the mileage. Always feels much further to me!

We grabbed a quick photo at the 'First and Last' shop and then progressed towards Thurso, where we stopped to fill with fuel at the bargain price of 90p per litre! Then it was time for the narrow, single-track roads with passing places. Progress can be slow on this stretch if you get behind a slow car (unless they have manners and use their mirrors), but this year there was very little traffic around. I think that Craig Gingell must have had his braces stuck round our wing mirror, as he kept passing us, in between fuel and other stops! He was certainly enjoying the handling of the Vitesse by the look of it and Jo felt she ought to let him past, not being confident with the brakes on our car, due to the long pedal (modified master cylinder). Craig was certainly on a mission and zoomed off into the distance. We came across a VW camper on this road, who had to stop and reverse for us to get through, and realised that it was being driven by none other than Bill Oddie, the former Goodie – am I showing my age here? I managed to grab another 10 minutes' kip (it's a miracle) and Jo enjoyed hustling the Sprint along the empty road, and the stunning scenery with the vibrant colours made her feel very much alive.

We arrived at Conon Bridge in time for a sausage roll, some sandwiches and a coffee for lunch. The American GT6 had now caught the pack after an earlier, near-disastrous, encounter with a diesel fuel pump – good going indeed! We were pleased to be back on schedule again, and were happy to relax and chat with other crews for a while.

We were keen to get to our Stirling stop in good time this year, to guarantee one of their lovely Scotch Pies after the disappointment of 2002. We duly set off, with me at the wheel again, and the Scottish scenery distracted me from my feelings of tiredness, having only grabbed 20 minutes of sleep (but plenty of closed-eye rest). Glencoe has always been a special place for us and we felt the atmosphere as we drove through. It always seems so massive and eerie.

We arrived at Morrisons garage, the half way point of the RBRR, just after 6pm, and we were ready for some refreshments. We were not disappointed by the Scotch Pies and, as usual, the garage showed us much generosity with plenty of biscuits and bottled water for the journey. Most of the crews try to repay some of the kindness shown by filling with petrol here and the filling station was certainly a busy place. Carl and Beckie tried to fix the zip on their soft-top hood, which had broken very early in the event. I think they were getting a bit fed up with getting wet, as the gaffer tape was not strong enough to hold the window in place! Meanwhile, I noticed a deflated rear tyre and set about pumping it up. This was to be our only problem on the RBRR. With this being a good place to check the cars over, I think that some of the locals were perhaps getting a bit impatient, and one young driver in particular lost his temper, performing a wheelspin across the forecourt to get to a vacant pump. I guess we were holding him up from a night of listening to 'wiggawigga' music and drinking lager shandy – I know where I would rather be! I saw a fleet of saloons leave the garage, with Nigel Gair's monster at the front. He accelerated very hard to mega RPM in first gear and it sounded very sweet indeed...

To be continued in the January issue – Ed.