**Granite City Rally 1997**

**Rogers Ramblings**

**Granite Garnerings**

Aberdeen - sunshine, blue skies, no snow forecast - I was beginning to wonder if I had got the wrong weekend on alighting from the Easy-Jet flight from Luton on Thursday morning at 8 am. Excellent value for £29. Easy-Jet will knock British Airways into a cocked hat, with Stewardesses who are actually pleasant and care about your comfort. OK you have to pay for Tea, Coffee and the like but it was only £1 for any drink and the overall saving was amazing, all we have to do now is persuade them to fly to the Isle of Man and we have got it cracked! Having had a 2 am start it seemed like a good idea to have an hour as they say, however my room was not ready and I made the fatal mistake of finding Gerry Potter and Barry Johnstone and offering my services. I knew I had made a mistake when out of the corner of my eye I spied two large lorries laden with straw bales - yes the large round ones! I have to say that at 10:30 am there were three car parks and by 3:30 pm we had a stage. However an extremely knackered RLE was seen to stagger off towards the Hotel. I was delighted to hear the local radio - Northsound - promoting the live spectacular action the following evening with a competition to win some free tickets - good publicity. First crew to arrive were the Priority Team from way down south on Thursday evening followed by the ever-cheerful Stokoe brothers, and the very smart Sunseeker Powerboats outfit of Marcus Dodd. It seemed that the furthest to travle arrived first!

Friday saw a press day for the local TV and media held using part of the car park stage run in reverse. Brian Lyall, Dave Weston, Richie Holfield, Steve Harron, Sandy Delgarno et al gave of their time and tyres to give many entertaining trips for the TV and journalists. Thus ensuring much quality exposure in that evening's outputs. There was a good 1.5 mins slot resulting on Grampian TV which served an excellent part in promoting the evening 'Superspecial'. Aberdeen & District M.C. were to be congratulated on the idea of running a floodlight 'Superspecial' for the local spectators. We all know what a pain it is to interrupt the schedule of the teams pre-rally, although seemingly unpopular with some competitors, all of you commented that it was a must for the publicity of the event, the Series and your sponsors.

Scrutiny and documentation took place in the Aberdeen Conference Centre using the excellent undercover facilities. Series Scrutineer Mike Harris was casting a beady eye over the newly homologated Ford *kA*'s (does anyone know what the plural of *kA* is? answers on a plain postcard to RLE - we will find some prize for the best attempt!) four examples were making a world motorsport debut including the development version entrusted to current Teleflorist champion Andrea Hall who was running in class B9 not A5 as the championship contenders. Gethin Jones was looking forward to the challenge from Lars Andersson in the Boland Motorsport prepared *kA*. Despite lack of time to prepare them, all four examples were a credit to the dedication of each team, and did not belie available time for the preparation. A motorsport show had been arranged in the main hall and the spectators were also allowed to walk around the cars parked inside before the start of the Superspecial.

Well Well what a surprise, on leaving documentation at 8:45 pm for the short walk to the adjoining car parks I have never seen so many people in one place to watch a UK rally in my life. Conservative estimates were put at 5 to 6000 howevere I felt it was many more than that. The organisers had arranged with the help of Grampian Authority for the public road to be closed as a spectator vantage point so all the spectators were able to be kept at a safe distance from the action whilst retaining a reasonable view. RAC Steward Rod Parkin was headr to say at 8:00 pm when observing from a nearby hotel, two lines of cars bumper to bumper on the dual carriageway outside and thousands of pedestrians walking in the direction of the conference centre, assuming that there was a pop concert or the like, "I do hope all these people for this other event will not interfere with the running of the rally!" The atmosphere was electric as the clock ticked away to the 9:30 pm start.

Lars Andersson in the Ford *kA* looked pensive on the start ramp under the floodlights as he led the field off the start ramp and immediately on the the start line of Stage 1. the 19 1300 class contenders run at the front of the field for the Granite. This was to be a rally of firsts for Lars Andersson: he was to be the first to rally a *kA*, he was to be the first to lead a rally away in a *kA*, sadly he was the first to bend a *kA* in competition as he got a little too close to a large straw bale and stove in a side panel; all this in 1 min 38 secs of the competition debut!

However he made his point second only to the flying Nova of local hero Nick Runcie who stopped the clock on 1 min 35 sec. Just 6 seconds covering the top 5 places in the event so far. The crowd waited in anticipation of the big bangers growling in the night air, warming engines at the start ramp. First to go was Andy Horne in the 6R4 who took things cautiously and was a little off the pace, the same applied to Raymond Munro who also took things steadily. Brian Lyall however did not take things in a similar manner, throwing caution to the wind, throwing the barking and spitting Subaru with abandon delighting the cheering and whistling crowd with his antics, stopping the clock on 1 min 25 sec. Just clear of Steve Smith in the Integrale who also showed that this car is not as outdated as people think. Steve Hill was next up with Steve Harron and Jimmy Patterson also in Subaru's. First blood in the Group N battle went to Malloch Nichol in the Escort Cosworth from Steve Petch and Roger Davies. F2 leader was Dave Weston who was still 1 sec shy of 1300 Nova pilot Runcie. The crowds were delighted by the show and by the sales of programmes it was hoped that many of them would take the opportunity to spectate the following day. Off to bed for some hard-earned rest. Poor Paul Thomas snapped a shaft in the stage and went OTL before being able to repair it, a real disappointment for him after his long trip North. After taking the banners down I eventually managed a pint at 12:30 am before retiring myself.

The event restarted at 7:00 am for the 1300's and at 8:00 am for the main field. The day was again dry and bright, no sign of the rain, snow & hail of past Granites! 3 stages: Bennachie, Gartly and Clash before service at Huntly. Andy Horne took the honours on the first from Brian Lyall and Munro and a fast-starting Dalgarno. Marcus Dodd was the only Sassenach to be able to mix it with the Scottish regulars. Shrugged shoulders from Steve Hill and Steve Smith who were unexplainably down at 14th and 15th places. The first visit to Clash saw the lead change with Andy Horne taking 28 seconds from Lyall and 8 from Dalgarno. However gearbox problems on Stage 5 handed the lead back to Lyall. Raymond Munro also blotted his copybook in Clash with a gentle roll in front of the AMTV cameras costing him 1½ mins to the leaders and the Series lead also. The top 10 looked like a Scottish benefit, with only Dodd, a woken-up Steve Hill, and Chris Birkbeck seemingly able to hack it with the locals. The Ford *kA* field had been halved with the loss of Gethin Jones who lost all cooling water after a minor skirmish with a large piece of Clash, only to find parking alongside him Andrea Hall, out with a wire off the master switch. The other two *kA*'s were seemingly trouble-free out of the box, with the Pugh brothers beaming from ear to ear on their first outing in the forests, commenting that they only put petrol in all day.

Back to the front: a fast, a furious battle for 2nd place on ensued: Horne, Dalgarno, Grierson & Dougan were swapping seconds in an unbelievable up front pace, with Lyall serenely disappearing into the distance with a lead of almost a minute. Marcus Dodd was in adetermined mood, at service in the Motor Museum he had set his sights on John Burn and Peter Vassallo who were a few seconds up. Into Stage 8 and as good as his word he took 7 off everyone, however the mobile phones were sadly enquiring as to the availability of another new shell after coming to grief in Stage 9 where the car slipped off the road and lander heavily on two large bits of Glenfarquar! One day soon Marcus will have a little more luck and look out!

Group N had settled to Steve Petch who had reeled in early leader Malloch Nichol after 5 stages with Roger Davies having a points building exercise in the Priority Escort.

Formula 2 was the battle of the day between Guy Anderson and Phil Morgan. Both Peugeot-mounted these two were separated by the smallest of margins after a full day of sport. The event lost Andy Horne after further transmission maladies, this time terminal in the last stage. Neil Dougan made a do or die effort on the last stage to pip Murray Grierson by two seconds for third place. A delighted Chris Mellors was seen at the finish congratulating a team 1,2,3 with Brian Lyall winning his home event for the first time.

Scores on the doors going to the Manx show Steve Hill on 40 from Murray grierson, Raymond Munro, Sandy Dalgarno, Steve Smith and Peter Vassallo all covered by 6 points. The Mintex national Series is alive and well and all of us are looking forward to a fast and furious Steyr-Puch Manx.

It was splendid to see the ANCRO Chairman sporting his new Mintex Gear delivered by Exilla who had made the long trip from Wales. Please note my new contact telephone numbers (office 01656 863888, fax 01656 863800) and Email (rle.m3@lineone.net) for you Internet surfers.

I had my ear bent in Aberdeen by many competitors who are against the use of pace notes for future rounds; we only wish to supply you with what you want, so please have a chat with either myself or Dilys at Manx to enable us to advise the organising events accordingly - please help us to help you; your opinion is important and we try to react to your wishes.

Plea from Peter Griffiths who does the Start & Finish ramp ceremonies and most of the Prize Presentations: can you advise him of Sponsors' names if you are a prize winner as we all know it helps to mention them correctly. Finally a plea from the press office and our tireless Press Officer, Keith McGhie: please can you feed him with all your info on event to enable you to get the coverage you deserve, media coverage is increased again this year so help him to help you, please.

Happy Days