**Steyr-Puch Manx Rally 1997**

**Rogers Ramblings**

**Manx Mumblings**

Heysham docks, 21:30 hrs Thursday, yours truly and Peter G. and a Scorpio Estate courtesy of Mr Ford (Thank You Mr Ford) ready to catch the "Red Eye Special" ferry to the IOM. Informed that the ferry would be boarding at midnight, we decided to explore the culinary delights of Heysham.

Well that failed as it seems that Heysham was closed, next look for a pub, where at least we could get a pint and a packet of crisps. The good news was, we found one, the bad news was Jeremy Easson and "Dangerous" were also there. Jeremy was bubbling over with enthusiasm for his newly acquired EVO IV, which he had recently collected from Holland. He was aiming to have the car ready for the Enterprise Print Rally in July, however it was not beyond the realms of possibility for it to be wheeled out for the Kerridge so look out Group N. Also in the little haven of Heysham were the Horiba Rally Mini Team, unveiling plans for another attack on the 1000 Lakes. Amazing stories are available from Trevor Godwin about his previous adventures there, just ask him.

Promptly thrown out of the pub at 23.00 hrs. SHAME! We took our place in the queue for the boat. Another heart stopping moment when out of the corner of my eye I spied the Priority Airfreight Team arriving, the last thing I wanted was a session with Andy Smith on a ferry!, however, I was spared, it was the boys from Promax Motorsport with the car, Andy was already on the island. The thought of Jeremy, Dangerous and him was too much - I remember Swansea last year. The little *kA*'s (no entries for the [competition](http://archive.djames.org.uk/1997/granite/roger.html#competition) yet I see.) of the Brooklyn Team and Boland Motorsport looked pristine ready for the second round of the Series, I must admit the shape is beginning to grow on me.

Loading on the ferry started at 00:30 hrs, with the Scorpio safely aboard PG was seconded to enquire of the availability of a cabin, which seemed a lot safer than spending the night with the motley crew in the bar. The good news was they had one, the bad news was the predicted 06:30 hrs arrival at Douglas turned out to be 05:15 am so it was hardly worth it.

Next problem was checking in at the Hotel who were expecting some of us, but obviously not the party of drunks from 'Plumb Centre', who were to spend the weekend on the Island for a conference. The only conference I suspect that they were to have was to be long and thorough with the Isle of Man Brewery!. Some of us managed to be allocated a room, not so fortunate was Alan Brown of Questmead who was seen curled up in the Lounge until mid-day.

First sight of John Skinner, the Clerk of the Course, was in blazer and tie - I was impressed, however, it seemed that he had been summoned to the Minister's office of the Manx Government to clarify the use of one of the stages, and fortunately the injunction pending was not upheld.

Reports from the crews were that the recce had gone well, with all crews managing to keep to the rules, and no pending exclusions for recce misdemeanours. There was an amusing memo regarding "Offensive Language in the Workplace" circulating at signing on, copies are available for the usual financial consideration! Joanne White who was in charge of organising timekeepers for the event had also managed to complete her dissertation during the week, whilst also ensuring all the stages were manned with timekeepers - good luck Joanne for your degree. Scrutineering and documentation went without drama.

The main conversation was of the weather, after a beautiful Friday in Douglas it seemed that the weather was to change for Saturday the weather prediction was grim with heavy showers in the morning. The interloping Metro's of Jim McRae (with some times Manx resident Rob Arthur) and Tony Davies were arousing interest as both had registered for the Series (a condition of running a 2.5 6R4 on the event). Competitors waited with interest for the following morning to see if the regulation championship stickers would be in place thus making them eligible for points.

06:45 hrs. and yours truly, Alan Brown and Mark Neal set off for the Grandstand for the customary annual erection - (banners for the use of!). We were dismayed to find a Kawasaki banner occupying the prime spot on the bridge over the road however some other prime spots were found and a return for breakfast at the hotel before the start.

Dilys Rogers had been roped in to run the start control and it was not long before she in turn had roped me in too. I was aware that many of the crews were looking and feeling apprehensive as reports of the stages in the south being wet were coming back to the Grandstand area.

First retirement seemed to be Marcus Dodd in the Sunseeker Escort with no reasons given, fears were that he had had another mischief. Thankfully it was a radiator hose burst about 3 miles into the test and Marcus switched off when the gauges climbed, to live to fight another day, a great disappointment however his luck must change some day - and look out when it does. Another for an early bath was Phil Morgan in the 306 Peugeot with terminal engine problems - he reckoned that the blow up was so comprehensive that it would be cheaper to re-shell the car than rebuild the engine such was the damage! Geoff Smith in the Priority Escort was seen sneaking back to the grandstand earlier than expected with problems, apparently of his own making having wiped a corner off on a wall in SS1. Another with serious problems was Alister Tough who opened the sweep for best accident damage with a comprehensive roll on SS3. Avon Cayzer in the RS 2000 was another in trouble on SS3 damaging the o/s front of his normally immaculate car on a wall.

Up at the front a battle royal was raging, Tony Davies fastest on the first stage by 3 seconds from Brian Lyall these two being clear of Steve Hill by a further 7 secs and 3 seconds to a fast-starting Alister Tough (all to end in tears as previously mentioned). Tony Davies however blitzed everyone on SS2 being fastest by 21 secs. Leaving most people shaking heads in disbelief, Murray Grierson responded upping the pace to pip Davies by a second on SS3 but the Metro led the field by a comfortable 30 seconds at first service at St. Johns. Bryan Lyall was second and Murray Grierson third, a further 3 seconds in arrears. Steve Hill was having a steady start 5 seconds behind the ICI Impreza with John Price and Jim McRae 12 secs further back holding on to the pack. Davies suffered a lapse of concentration in SS7 clipping a bank and pulling a wishbone out, there was much feverish action in the service area but to no avail and a dominant run ended there.

Murray Grierson headed the time sheets by 26 secs from Lyall with Steve Hill a further 17 sec back, Jim McRae was moving up the order having cured an early misfire and was beginning to look threatening to the leader board. A sudden downpour dramatically changed the leader board with Murray caught out on slicks, dropping the Impreza into a ditch for 4 minutes or so dropping down to 6th place and little hope of catching up with the leaders. A little bit of luck for Jim McRae who was on intermediates 15 seconds quicker than the field giving him the head of the time sheets for the first time, by 3 seconds from Lyall. Lyall was in no mood to give up responding to lead McRae by a scant 2 seconds into the last stage.

There were tense faces at the stage finish of the short tricky last test, all to play for with McRae commenting that there was only one result which he could go home with after Colin's last stage on the recent Tour of Corsica! He would never live it down if he was second. True to his word he stopped the clocks a full 5 seconds faster than Lyall giving Ian Corkhill Motorsport the first win for the Ex-Circuit racing car. Many suspected that Brian Lyall had been aware that points make prizes at the end of the day and settled for maximum points instead of outright victory, we will never know.

So a delighted Jim McRae returned to the Grandstand for the champagne spoils.

In Group N an equally close battle was taking place with Roger Davies (who was having an unusually fraught day finding a poor tyre choice in the morning had cost him 35 seconds or so to the pack) just 5 seconds behind leader Richie Holfeld going into the last stage. Davies managed to pull back just 4 of those precious seconds, leaving Holfeld the delighted victor in Group N by the smallest of margins. The Cannell Nissan Sunny was heading the Formula 2 battle by a comfortable margin and they were well placed on the overall leader board until they too fell foul of the weather conditions with an off on SS8 for 4 mins or so. Nick Barrow had been also on the pace for the day, however a 4 minute road penalty made him look very despondent at lunch. It came as a great surprise to him to learn of victory in the F2 Category after the demise of the Cannell's charge in the afternoon. Class victories for Dave Blades, Miles Jude, Paul Thomas - making up for his Granite disappointments, and Gethin Jones winning the battle of the *kA*.

So scores on the doors going to Kerridge National have Steve Hill leading the Series on 62 points from Murray Grierson 58, Steve Smith 51, and Brian Lyall on 50. Lyall having dropped a score on Bournemouth. Group N Roger Davies leads on 67, from Richie Holfeld 61, and Miles Jude 48. Guy Anderson continues to lead F2 by 7 clear points from Miles Jude, a good battle developing here for the free entry to the Network Q.

Peter Griffiths entertained all at the prize giving in Summerland where a surprised Dave Taunt was presented with a finishers award, this was in recognition of about 15 years of support for the Manx rallies as course car, however 1997 recorded his first ever completion of that duty! The winner of the draw for the return of entry fee was Murray Grierson, organised by Dilys supported by Mark Higgins Rallying and drawn by his brother David who was spectating and representing the family on the island.

Back on the boat, at 7:30 pm Vince Whetton and his team entertained all with antics on the motorcycle simulator, reminiscent of the old days at the Onchan Head Go-Karts in the early 70's. Into Liverpool at 12:30 am for the long trek South to Wales, into bed at 4.00 am,it's tough at the bottom!.