**A Beginner's Tale 1997 – with mention of Richard Craven and David Barber competing in PVW – So we competed against them in the TR4a!**

**This was our first attempt at Historic rallying and in fact Elaine had only navigated on a couple of road rallies back in 1976 and more recently a few 12 cars with the HRCR Staffs and Cheshire group, writes John Hunt.**

After seeing the cars on the Monte Challenge in 1993 we joined the HRCR and decided to have a go at historic rallying. It took a while but we eventually bought our Herald, one previous owner from new but in need of restoration. Whilst the restoration progressed we went marshalling, always a good way to find out what goes on at relatively little cost. We decided to do a few rounds of the Speedsport Championship as a learning exercise, with view to having a more serious attempt at the novice class in 1998

Having missed the first round the Mini Miglia we arrived at Harrogate showground for the Yorkshire Classic, our first rally for nearly 21 years. We were given the entire route at the start but each section was in a sealed envelope and if you opened your envelope before the correct control you got a fail. Each envelope containing a simple route through the current section and the hard route instructions for the next. The rally started with a test round the showground, we followed a red GT6 onto the test, little did we realise that this car driven by Helen and Jonathon Andrews was going to figure so large in the rest of our season. Unfortunately the weather was glorious and the Dales were full of tourists, we suffered severe baulking on the moorland roads. We were the last car back but had completed almost all the route and still within lateness. We had enjoyed our day, and had learnt a lot. The results were late coming out due to computer problems but we had finished 39th, 6th in class.

Soon it was time for the Tour of Anglesey an event we had marshalled on previously. This event uses a very compact route, and excellent special tests using long farm drives, quarries and Ty Croes Racing Circuit. The regularities got steadily harder and longer as the day progressed, and we were beginning to get the hang of the navigation with a good run round the long final regularity in the North East of the island. The locals were brilliant, with competitive sections through small villages and people waving you on, if you hadn't seen anyone for 50 yds you were going the wrong way! We finished 30th, 4th in class.

We had heard that the Ross Traders was a good event so our cheque was in the post as soon as the regs arrived. A good move as this proved to be a truly excellent event with every control manned, super roads, and good tests. We decided that our priority should be to get round without missing any controls and not worry about the timing, a policy which paid off handsomely. Many crews missed controls and by the finish only twenty crews had clean sheets we were l9th and third novice. I have to admit that we did have some luck here, at one point in the afternoon we were unsure of our whereabouts and decided to pull into a lay by to check, only to find a control which most others had at least overshot. Only driving back did we realise that after only three events we would be SEMI EXPERTS next year!

The next round was the Ilkley Jubilee starting with a test in the car park of Harry Ramsdens chip shop an easy regularity to the second test at Skipton which I well and truly screwed up before going onto the Dales. The navigation started easily, but without a trip we found ourselves struggling with the timing, we were managing quite well until the final regularity when we got a bit lost. Adam Wiseberg with Andy Gibson won this event with a total penalty less than our penalty for the tests. But now in the semi expert class we managed to finish 30th, 9th in class.

Well we had got away with good weather so far, and the start of the Regis was no exception but the rest of the event was! The rain was incessant, by lunch time we had two inches of water in the car. During the morning we were going weil, The tests were interesting especially on an army camp where we had a blast between the houses of a mock town. During the afternoon things started to deteriorate for us, we took a wrong slot but recovered, then we had a fire under the dash which eliminated our lighting, we were running out of petrol, and finally hadn't got time to decipher the navigation for the final regularity, so we went for petrol and cut to the end of the section. Some interesting tests at Goodwood and Tangmere rounded off the afternoon. A better than expected result with 34th, 8th in class.

As you can see we had developed an enthusiasm for these events by now, unfortunately that enthusiasm took a knock on the next round the Palladwr, after a couple of straight forward regularities and some tests which unfortunately required extensive use of reverse gear, and our car reluctant to go back into first. The last regularity before lunch proved to be extremely difficult. Cars were travelling in all directions many at high speed in an attempt to recover, we met the GT6 almost head on and for once we were going the right way! We cut to lunch to avoid going OTL then with hardly a break we were off again into a short regularity and onto the A303 were we spent 50 minutes negotiating road works on our way to more tests. By now darkness was falling quickly and the final regularity was an absolute nightmare with more than 70 assorted route instructions, and ten speed changes in a 75 minute section. Again we had to cut to avoid going OTL.

Feeling somewhat despondent on our return to the finish we were suprised to find that many other crews had found the section as hard as we had. However, to add a final insult to injury we found out that we were one of seven crews that had been excluded for a giveaway infringement just after lunch, but not having been told had had to put up with all that frustration unnecessarily. After all that has been written in Old Stager about tests with reversing and difficult navigation causing drivers to take risks I regret to say that this event proved to be a great dissappointment to us.

In the end the novice class became the most competitive of the championship classes with the youngsters Mathew Collier and Paul Doe in the A40 and Richard Craven and David Barber in the Cooper S doing really well with top 5 finishes, at least they will be experts next year! The rest of us turned out for our own campaign for the class places and for the camaraderie and social side which made our season such a pleasure, Other competitors in the class were Simon Rossiter and John Thompson with the incredible MG 1100, if you have seen it in action you will know what I mean, Mick Watkins and Jackie Salter in the Anglia, and Helen and Jonathon in the GT6 who have just beaten us so many times, we must get our own back next year.

We would like to thank Lynn and Dean Jackson for their encouragement, and our fellow competitors, marshals and organisers for making our year so memorable. We will be back for more in'98!