



A Family Affair

It was one of those mornings when staying in bed till lunchtime and then going to the pub had far more going for it than driving to Trisant in freezing fog. And as we slid sideways on black ice down the slip road onto the Shrewsbury by-pass we began to wonder if it was worth it. But it was, the roads cleared somewhere around Welshpool, and the trial was being set by Dave and Matthew Tomley so there was every prospect of a good trial.

It was still bitterly cold when we arrived, but at least it wasn't foggy. I can remember a trial there many years ago where we needed people walking in front of us to shout directions because the fog was so thick we could barely see our bonnets, it was driving by Braille. There was a good turnout as well, eighteen drivers including three new faces, although Prys Morris has trialled with us before a long time ago. So it's good to see him back.

Right down in the far corner the Tomley's had the first section laid out, starting on the rocks and dropping down with the fence as a boundary before a blast up a sand dune and the finish.

It was the drop and the tight turn that caused the problems as everyone tried to avoid the ten point penalty for hitting fences, which everyone did, some were closer than others though. And nobody can moan about it being too tight a turn either, yes, there were five 1's from some of the usual suspects, but Jim got a clear in his 90"

This wasn't an easy section that made it easier for a class two motor, far from it, it was a hard section that Jim drove better than the rest of you.

Now you'd got a taste for desert driving in that sand the next section was completely in the sand as it ran along a ridge, down then over the ridge before winding it's way back up through some turns.

This sand moves around beneath your wheels like driving on ice, it saps the horsepower and sees wheels sink without trace. Then suddenly some grip is found and 'bang' - there goes some bit of the drivetrain, another halfshaft or diff' bites the dust.

Which is exactly what happened to Tim Brookes again. What he's got to do to keep that motor from breaking axles I don't know, and Tim's running out of options fast.

Chris came to the rescue and offered Tim a drive in The Muddler for the rest of the day, so Tim did get a day's sport despite the breakage.

No clears on this section, but the six 1's were hard won.

Tactics varied a great deal as well, some drivers tried the softly softly approach while others tried the "drive like it's stolen" method.

Who was right? Who knows?

The rocks also move under your wheels at Trisant, so that was the next challenge, rocks.

A couple of small humps and drops, some tight turns before the small pond and the finish was up a small bank.

Sounds easy doesn't it?

So how come there was only one clear?

Tim Mackley just managed to get the right line to poke a hub through, which redeemed his 5 points from section one a bit!

There were a few spirited drives up the last climb onto the stony ridge as well, but the canes were placed just at an awkward position to get a clear run at it, but that's the whole point of trials isn't it?

Make it look easy when it isn't!

I was starting the next section by where we'd parked, so I didn't get to see the last part of the section on the big climbs behind the ruined house.



The start was tricky though, with its mixture of loose sand and stones, tight turns and nasty bumps that easily cross axled you. But the only person to get caught was Les Davies in the Minx who just touched a cane on the way through as he slid in the sand, which was bad luck. Six clears here, and again that didn't make it an easy section.

Angus Hornby drove his Range Rover through for one of the clears, and that's a very standard motor except for the lack of rear bodywork. The shunt longer motors are allowed could have been an advantage, but he only gets one. The rest of the section he drives just the same as Half Pint and the Scrapsu. So that was a good drive from Angus.

After lunch we went over the road to the ground that has some great climbs and lots of loose stone to play on.

Also, just inside the gate, are some small mounds - lots of them - perfectly designed and placed for cross axleing even the best articulating 4x4, so that's where you went next, finishing the section with a climb onto the old abandoned track to the right of the entrance gate. The gate Les got the Minx well and truly hooked up on as the gatepost went inside the roll cage!

No clears here, but five 1's from a variety of drivers and motors showed that the section was just about hard enough.

Section six was just a bit further down and started with a drop into the rocks, up the steep bank towards the road fence, down and up a good loose climb to the 1 gate.

There's a few 6's and 7's on the score sheet where drivers failed the climb or misjudged the tight turn back down. But it was difficult, you needed to get a run at the climb and then trickle around the turn as slowly as possible.

Those that did make it didn't all go on to a clear, just Tim Mackley and J.P.R., there was a lot of loose stone flying around where I was marshalling by the 1 gate as well!

The next section was a good one, it was one of those sections that looks horrible when you walk it, that side slope dropping off the old track and then turning back up again to cross the track looked bad. Well it did to me anyway, but that might be flashbacks to the old days when I drove The Heap!

I always found that when I drive sections like this they look completely different from the drivers seat though, and driven carefully most side slopes are safe. Go slow enough and you should be able to turn down and boot it before the roll happens. The Heaps problem was it didn't do 'slow' and had it's roll centre somewhere around the top of the roll cage!

The start of the section was also difficult and a few drivers ended up beached on the pile of loose dirt, but most carried on just to try and drive that side slope.

It must have been a bit of an anxious moment for Prys being first away, this was his first trial for a long time and he was driving an unknown motor as well, so his 3 points on the side slope were nice ones.

That was a good score on this section, and Les Price, Sam Wilkinson, Jo Willet, J.P.R. and Tim Brookes should feel pleased with their efforts. But Ceri and Frank should be very pleased with their 1 point, well driven guys.

You know when a part of a section has been just that extra bit of a challenge when drivers have another try at it after the sections finished, and there was a queue to have another go at that bit. What an excellent section.

It was going to be hard to top that, but the Tomley's had a another great one for their finale. Starting on the flat top of the rock pile, and then dropping down, through some tight turns, through the gate into the fields, and then the hard part started.

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The final gates were all on a steep climb that followed the muddy stream, then turned right before the pool, and finished with a left turn and a very steep climb through the gorse that led to an impossible looking ridge and even more unlikely 1 gate.

There's a big list of 2's on the score sheet, and some lower scores that proved that this section wasn't just an easy hill climb / mud run with an impossible finish, oh no, it was tricky all the way through.

The bad luck story of the day must go to Hal Ridge who drove Jo's V6 further than anyone else, coming to rest straddled on the ridge with the front bumper just touching the red 2 cane, so he scored the same as many others who didn't make all of the climb, very bad luck Hal, but take consolation that Jo scored a lot less, so it must have been down to the driver and not the dumper tyres having more grip on the climb!

And again that bit of the section was such a good challenge that it got driven after the section had finished, and Dave Tomley didn't get any further than Hal either.

That was a trial laid out with the drivers enjoyment the main priority, there were no lengthy recoveries, no serious damage, no waiting around - we went home about 2-30 - and on many sections there was a good mixture of drivers and vehicles scoring low points, and every section had a clear or a low score from someone.

And best of all it was a trial where drivers had to concentrate hard, I think every section had at least one sneaky bit where the exact line was critical, where if you made a mistake there was no chance of making it right again.

That's a black art, something the Tomley boys seem to know an awful lot about.

Great trial gent's, and many thanks to everyone who helped out along the way, that was a good day out.

Dave