

Richard's Riponian Ramblings

Those of you who read my report of the Roger Albert Clark Rally will know that it didn't turn out as planned due to my original driver Tony Williams coming down with Covid just before the event.

Fortunately, he is now much better so we decided to contest the RAC Rally2 Gravel Championship this year, the first round being the Riponian – my local rally.

After his long drive up from Dorset to North Yorkshire, my 15 minute journey seemed a bit embarrassing but as I told him, that's the penalty you pay for not living in God's own County! Fortunately he arrived early, as the scrutineering queue grew and grew through the rainy afternoon, something I find hard to fathom as all the safety equipment and car details are now included on the original entry form.

Sunday morning was dry and all seemed perfect for our new partnership to get off to a good start, with no pressure on me as I didn't even need the roadbook, as many of the forests we were to visit are either on my local dog walking or mountain biking list!

Stage 1 at Wass Moor is a little used forest and I was trying to think when I had last competed there; the answer was probably the mid 80s on either an RAC or a National Breakdown/Cartel Rally.

Our strategy was to get to the end of the day without too many incidents and gaining some championship points, so we were somewhat surprised to catch the car in front. Unfortunately despite copious use of the horn and flashing headlights, he refused to pull over and cost us around 45 seconds, smashed headlights and lots of stone damage to the front – not a good start!

North to Cropton and Gale Rigg next two stages with completely different characteristics to Wass. Cropton is very fast, slippy, bumpy and would no doubt dig out on the corners for the second run in the afternoon. Gale Rigg is more exposed but fortunately ice wouldn't be a problem despite the occasional snow flurries, but the surface is rockier and the organisers were imaginatively using a stretch of closed road tarmac to extend the mileage as they had also done in Wass.

Cropton was negotiated without incident but in Gale Rigg we approached a '1 Left' with too much speed and the resulting moment probably cost us around 20 seconds – good photos though thanks to Colin Green!



colin green



colin green

After service it was another loop of the same stages and as we headed out through Helmsley town (site of one of the most atmospheric service areas I have ever witnessed on the 85 RAC) it was snowing heavily and settling.

The stages had already been very slippery but the white stuff now made things even worse as was discovered by the car in front of us who decided to play pinball with the trees on both sides of the road. Fortunately the crew were ok but discovering the incident cost us yet more time.

Back to Cropton and the apex bumps were getting bigger as expected but the surface did appear to have more grip than in Wass. That was other than the last two straights before the flying finish – flat out in top gear there seemed to be no grip at all.

The final stage in Gale Rigg was again a lottery of playing for the grip but was all going well until we lost all drive and spun. The gearbox appeared to be locked in gear but we bumped it and eventually found 3rd, enabling us to limp out to the stop board but another couple of precious minutes had been lost.

The 40 mile road section was the next issue with a choice of just 3rd gear or 4th if you didn't mind the sound of broken teeth and an impending BANG about to happen. Fortunately the section was long enough to stay with the quieter 3rd gear option as we limped to the finish.

So whilst it had been an enjoyable event, the result of 24th overall and 5th in class was not quite what we wanted but we did get some valuable championship points. Hopefully circumstances and seeding for Rally North Wales next month will favour us more and we can have a good, clean run.

Richard Wise.