

AMSC Snetterton Stages  
15th February 2020

Adam & Ray Ripper  
Nissan Micra 1.4  
Class A

# Blowin' in the Wind



There was some doubt whether the Snetterton Stages, hosted by the Anglia Motor Sport Club, would go ahead. But any fears of the event being blown away by Storm Dennis were dispelled, and although Dennis didn't prove as much of a menace in Norfolk as he did throughout the rest of the country, the spectators, marshals and photographers bore the brunt of his bluster, especially in the exposed places on the circuit. But motorsport fans are hardy souls, and maybe some were even warmed by this rally's hotly contested Class A.

Having a garage (thanks to the benevolence of our club, Middlesex County AC) meant we were largely unaffected by the gusts, only popping out now and then to assess the storm's potential to affect the next stage. Visitors to our lair looked like they'd been in a room with an angry Alex Ferguson – still, our fruit cake must have helped, as they all trudged back out with a smile to again face the elements.

To the rallying. A reasonable entry of 83 cars and a perplexing 'TBA' in the class listings for a 1400cc Nova raised a few eyebrows – were they really still deciding which engine to put in? – an anomaly that was going to add to the richness of the rally. We had arrived with our well-used rubber from the previous event still on the car and in truth this made us a little too cautious with our approach. There were a couple of late stage amendments to contend with and

the J20 chicane that had altered from a right-entry to a left-entry by the time we got there contributed to a time of 9:36 for SS1, suggesting we were well off the pace.

Things were drying and there were the beginnings of some good lines on the circuit so there was no need to panic as we were third in class. Clipping 26 seconds off the time for SS2 felt good enough, but the stage results showed otherwise – we were still in third place, behind the Micra of James Hardy and Nick Wilkins, with Ron Walker and Amy McCubbin in their Puma leading.

The addition of the loose surface around one corner of the circuit perimeter made for an exhilarating end to these two stages and I felt that Adam was enjoying this part a lot, maybe bringing back memories of his early tuition and seat time at the Silverstone Rally School. The sump and tank guards were taking a

battering underneath, but no complaints there as that's their job!

SS3 and SS4 brought drier conditions still and after much confusion at the arrival parking lot, we leapfrogged a couple of cars in the running order and Adam decided it was time to put in a proper shift. These were our best two stages of the day – and I really enjoyed blatting through some more 'rough stuff' across the circuit, once somewhat embarrassingly losing my place on the diagram!

A great time for SS3 of 9:49 pushed us up to first position – the Nova of Andrew Egger and Adam Brown still being listed as 'TBA' at this point – resulting in a text from Mrs Ripper asking "Wow! That was a flyer! Did Heidi (our car) have wings?" Had we indeed been blown along by Dennis? Is our Micra really Chitty Chitty Bang Bang in disguise? If it were so, the uplift continued on SS4, trimming nine seconds off our previous time.





Our tyres were shot though as Neal's beady eye confirmed when back in service. Lunch was a tasty burger.

Interestingly, the Nova, which was now listing as Class A, had broken a driveshaft on their way from the stage finish to the regroup time control and literally rolled over the line claim a stage completion! I spoke to Andrew Eggar at the end and he said he'd never been so lucky; if the shaft had broken just ten yards earlier, they would have had a stage maximum. Rallying. You just can't beat it.

Weather. Wet? Damp? Dry? Who could tell what was coming next from Dennis? Replacement rubber was now required and a quick trip to the tyre van revealed that they didn't have the compound that we wanted, so... it was either the four wets or the worn hards that we brought. It wasn't wet enough for the wets, so we put on the harder compound - we knew the conditions weren't quite right for these, but "we run what we brung, guv", as Nigel likes to say.

SS5 wasn't so good. After being held up in a traffic - at the back of a four-car queue for half of the second lap of the stage - we knew we had put in a slow run. "We're leaking time!" Adam was muttering on the way round, with me trying to encourage those before us to get a lick on. "I say chaps, don't you know we're

faster than you through this bit?" with musical accompaniment provided by our horn, as we snaked through the rough stuff immediately behind the Ford Anglia of John and Laura Cooledge; I was concerned about being on the receiving end of a stone through the windscreen!

The time was as disappointing as SS1, slipping back a place in the order, behind the Puma, but the next stage was better and we had a clear run all the way, overtaking an Escort somewhere, and putting ourselves ahead of Ron and Amy again. The other Micra had a good stage too and now there were three crews in with a chance of a Championship class win.



The weather deteriorated after we left service for the start of SS7 and we were wishing we had better rubber to ride on, and not having to make do. Things were tight and the competition was hotting up. We really couldn't afford to make a mistake. After we tackled the complex at the start of the stage and emerged onto the circuit, we had sight of a car fast

approaching. We decided that there wasn't enough clearance between cars and so waited for the car to pass to then tuck in behind.

This it didn't do, it tucked in behind us instead and we had to change our tack and push on. With the car behind still taking our attention - a cardinal sin in rallying - I was on autopilot and called a square left, which is where we had been going on the previous two stages! Adam lifted off and questioned my navigational skillset and I quickly corrected and with a "Go. Go. Sorry. Sorry. Go. Go."

We were playing again, but halfway round, our tyres started to weaken and by the end of the stage I felt that we had blown our chances with such scrappy navigation and precious seconds lost. The Puma was once again in the lead and the other Micra had closed the gap on us too.

There was nothing else for it. We'd have to go large on the final stage. "You can do it" texted Mrs Ripper. Light pod on and Adam tore from the start line, fast hands through the complex and me trying not to err again. Out on the circuit, our concerns were whether the tyres would hold out. We picked up the Anglia again, this time off the merge

before the mashed chicane at 24. After much hooting and flashing of lights through the obstacle, John kindly moved his Anglia aside just before the short distance to the next chicane and we got going. At the end of the stage we were in limbo as to how we had fared but another text declared "YOU DID IT!"

And we had. 12 seconds quicker than the Puma, now down to third due to the other Micra's impressive time, eight seconds quicker than our own.

Our reaction was one of pleasant surprise. A ding-dong end to a day with an equal share of delight and despair.



**Ray Ripper**, Apprentice Co-Driver