



southern comfort

Words
by
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Now

called the Major's Memorial Rose Bowl, following the death of Eastnor Castle Estate owner, Major Hervey-Bathhurst, the 1998 twenty section trial was again organised by the Midland Rover Owners Club. Despite the entry fee going up nearly double, a record entry was received.

Teams from all over the country made up the 105 drivers who this year were competing for three separate trophies. Drivers in the specials class were driving for the Rose Bowl while in the standard class Yorkshire were there to defend that trophy. 1998 saw a new trophy, The Ladies Shield.

The ground at Eastnor always changes as each group drives over it making for an even more exciting trial than at venues that hold firm. Also at the Majors we have the problem of the two days, one in one area and one in the other. The ground will be so different in each area, each day. No-one knows until the end if either area will have been an advantage or not.

The organisers had split the groups so that the favourites were driving the same ground on the same day. That meant that the holders, Cornwall and Devon 'A' were at the Bronsill ground with the Southern 'A' for the specials and Yorkshire and Lincs were together for the standards.

The ladies were an unknown quantity but, on paper,

the 101 Forward Control Club and Register team looked favourites from the start. Debbie Aldridge, with Caroline and Sue Flanders in their coil sprung eighties can hold their own against the men at any trial so something would have to go drastically wrong for them to be beaten in this ladies-only class. This result went to form and the 101 FC girls won by 100 points with the Midlands ladies second.

By the end of Saturday, ten sections had been driven by all. Rumours that Ron Baker (SROC) had only dropped three points all day would have taken some believing if it hadn't been Ron Baker. Other teams had kept their scores quiet but the Cornwall teams looked to be going well, and they would not give up their grip on this trophy until the very end.

The standards had a tougher time than the coil 80s with their power and suspension travel - the Series One leafers find it harder each year to get close to their scores. Yorkshire's John Firth had a good day but like Ron Baker he just seems to get the best out of his machine. Whatever section I saw either of these two drive they received a round of applause going further than any other driver in their respective classes.

But this event is about teams of three and Paul Tucker, Derek Rodgers and Anthony Retalick (C&D) are a team with no weak links, that's why they have kept winning this highest honour in the ARC calendar for trialers.

Top: John Denniss of Lincs. Above left: Anthony Retalick of Cornwall and Devon. Above right: The 'Lifeboatmen' from C&D



for the first time in six years, the major's rose bowl will not be spending the next twelve months in the west country...

I asked many of the top drivers what event they would drop if they could only get to the Majors or the Nationals, the overwhelming answer was they would miss the Nationals every time to drive this event. This is the trialing event of the year for the serious trialer.

Ron Baker had a father and son to make up the SROC team, Martin and Keith Leonard were double driving their special and driving well.

On one particular section in the deer park the C&D team had their worst nightmare come true dropping more than twenty points - in years gone past that's been their total. On the next section a similar thing happened on tricky 8, 7, 6 pegs where they collected another twenty points. SROC picked up fifteen points on C&D on these two sections alone.

The standard class was a similar situation with John Firth going further than most. The others were all getting roughly the same, so both classes were close with one individual driving better than the rest.

An hour waiting for all the results to be posted was agonising for the top teams - SROC with Ron Baker and Martin and Keith Leonard had done it at last, C&D are beatable, but don't bet against them in 1999 and keep an eye on the Somerset and Wiltshire teams, they have been third for the past two years and were only a few points short of C&D for second place this year.

To drop only eighteen points in twenty sections

required unique skill and a good motor, Ron Baker achieved this, the nearest driver to him scored 41 points.

YROC pipped Lincs for the standard cup by twenty-four points thanks to an excellent drive from John Firth. Norman Whitely and Dave Walker gave him good support to regain the cup. The Lincs teams of standard 80s will, like SROC, keep trying until they win it - John Denniss, Tony Summerfield and Ben Knight get closer each year.

As usual when I report a big event I tend to have one moan, this year it was the same as last. No static marshal on a section and no tow motor. There were requests from some drivers to follow a line other than the driven one. "Has anyone else driven it this way?" but travelling marshals can't tell them the answer.

If a competitor breaks a diff while towing someone else out there would be anger in the camp. Both are easily rectified and for the highlight of the trialing calendar for the ARC's best it would make a brilliant event perfect.

To sum up this year's event is easy - a great weekend. Record entry, good sections and brilliant driving but most of all a real close team spirit and friendly rivalry topped off with another good Sunday evening in the bowling club where arch rivals become friends again for nearly twelve months.

Paul Tucker of Cornwall and Devon struggling with Eastnor's ever-changing terrain

LRM