

first time lucky

until getting together with the Cornwall & Devon LRC, Ian Robinson was an off-road virgin

Words and
photos by
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I skipped Sunday school in order to join the Cornwall and Devon Land Rover Club at an RTV on a wet and muddy wooded hillside near Tavistock.

Dartmoor crags broke the skyline as cattle stood, fetlock-deep, in claggy brown porridge, heavy rain having rendered much of the course off-limits.

Despite this, clerks of the course, Gavin Earnshaw and Dave

Lethbridge had done a fine job on the higher ground, isolating eight challenging and waterhole-filled sections around the trees. They're a friendly bunch at the Cornwall and Devon LRC, representing practically

every job strata from farmer to naval officer and "just plain retired," smiled Ted Ivory, the very active club chairman.

I was quickly enrolled as member 130 and stuffed into the diesel 90 of Ken Brain, the '98 RTV ARC National champ, for a couple of vertical sections. Niki Lauda may be my hero, but Petty Officer Ken's deft handling through the canes was sheer poetry as his brown Defender sailed over deceptive switchbacks into wallowy hippoholes. All credit to the rest of the field for Ken's was a standard emulated by most in the rapidly coagulating mud.

Lunchtime banter ranged from the merits of the new low sulphur diesel, to the drawbacks of ex-MoD Land Rovers after airdrops and seaborne landings. The event, sponsored by Plymouth main dealer Roger Young, had the competitors' field swelled to a healthy 29 with wives and sons double-driving. And apart from a tree modifying a Range Rover wing, which received surgery from a marshal's boot, the day's dents were otherwise mostly to pride and not panels.

at it again

A week later they were at it again, different beasts this





Far left: The conditions for the RTV were appalling. Top: Chalkie White (now there's an unusual name) airborne. Above: At speed in the wet. Below: Not quite sure what the original colour is here

time, but many of the same muddy faces in a no-holds-barred comp safari. Fifteen screaming laps around a quarry in the South Hams, in an event sponsored by Qt. Services near Looe, specialist builders of off-road vehicles.

Nice guys they are, they even offered me a couple of laps with garage owner Jan Pote but, having seen the 100 foot drop beyond the oil drums, I decided that someone had to take the pictures. In retrospect, I should have sat in, as Jan's excellent driving was cruelly squeezed into third place by just a single second behind Brian Retallack's brand new 88 3.9 auto.

The oldest competitor was a sixty-something George Hingston, whose son, Robert, set the course up. "Because of that, I drove," said George, finishing a respectable 14th in his son's motor. He'd probably have done better but for getting wrong-footed in a big rut on the first lap; then, a later mishap pushed a bumper on to the tyre. "On the last lap we had the fifth fastest time," he said with the grin of a man who plays right to the final whistle.

Personally, I've not witnessed such wild action since photographing mudboggers at the Alaska State Fair, the difference there being that almost everybody gets

stuck fast and needs a tow.

In the quarry, dust, mud and water soon robbed the vehicles of their smart liveries, hindering both driving and identification. Blind humps, sweeping corners, abrupt drop-offs, waste deep water, impossible descents, deceptive cambers and a final sting in the tail kink before the finish line, all combined to make a trial out of each demanding lap, and excellent spectating... and there was a chip van.

Thus ended two well-spent, albeit muddy, weekends. Cornish Sundays have come a long way since John Wesley brought Methodism to these parts, bless him.

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