

The President's Trophy 12-Car Rally – Friday 20th January 2012

Rally report

A lay-by next to a service station off the A40 hosted the start of this year's Witney Motor Club's 'President's Trophy' 12-car navigational rally. Appropriate sweetie treats for the marshals and time keeping officials along the route were packed into the 3-seater TOYO Golf Gti, and last minute tactics discussed. In the driver's seat was 'Dastardly' Ding Boston, a man who admits he would 'squeal like a little girl if he was his own passenger'. Navigating was 'Rusty' Rob Jacobs, Chairman of Oxford University Motor Drivers Club and a man who had not held a map for 5 years. Mounted in the back was 'Novice' Nick Rounthwaite, with no previous experience, and a rear poorly designed to fit in a racing bucket seat, who was armed with spare maps, timers, torches - and Jaffa Cake 'nuclear fuel rods' for the driver.

15 minutes before the start, envelopes containing the clues were handed out to the crews by Simon Bradley the organiser, and Rob became more ruthless than rusty, powering through three quarters of the clues that determined the rally route, whilst Ding doing an illuminating impression of an 'angle poise' lamp and made inappropriate comments to put Rob off the scent. Then we were off. Accelerating at break neck speed from the start, we set about traversing 60 miles of Oxfordshire's back roads as quickly and accurately as we could.

Rob's navigational skills were near impeccable (apart from some bridge blindness which led to a few corners being more interesting than anticipated, but no problem for the TOYO 888 tyres) and Ding, determined to overtake as many competitors as possible, made up large amounts of time over each stage. This determination allowed the Golf's suspension, as well as Rob's ability to hold onto his dinner, to be tested to the max. The 'press-on' driving meant that stages were completed in close to half the allotted time and allowed Rob to finish his route planning whilst waiting to start Stage 2. From this point on it was plain sailing, with the largest problem being the high level of enthusiasm from Nick, appropriately jammed in the back passenger seat, suggesting that everything on the horizon that was reflective must be a code board.

The only disappointment of the whole evening was the finishing line being at a pub that had run out of beer. Once all competitors were in, the score cars were collected and the award ceremony began. First Ding was awarded the 2011 President's Trophy, which he and Joe Sturdy had failed to collect after winning the rally last year. This elaborately tiered silver cup was promptly dropped, breaking into several pieces. This cack-handed disaster was a stroke of fortune for the organisers however, as in first place of this year's President's Trophy were two teams – OUMF, and Brian Cammack and Zenya Heap (expert leading lights of the Thame MC and Oxford MC respectively). The two crews could not be separated through any means known to the organisers (as they had somehow omitted the usual rule about engine size from the event regulations). So in spite of the TOYO Golf having the smaller engine, the constituent pieces of the recently dismantled trophy were distributed across both teams.

Thank you to Simon Bradley and all in the Witney Motor Club for putting on an excellent and very exciting rally which I'd recommend to everyone as terrific night out - and we look forward to the hat trick attempt next year.

(Nick Rounthwaite)