



Our little "off" on the Jim Clark left us with the problem of straightening the car out as well as preparing it for the Manx in around 4 weeks. We always insure the body shell so much of the cost of a repair is absorbed by that. The big teams do not bother and take the risk themselves and there are some competitors at our level who don't bother either. They must have long pockets, do all the work themselves or are crazy. The damage to the MG was quite bad and our cover was not enough and we would have to top it up to complete the job. Our man who looks after the car was quietly confident the job could be finished in time. Does this sound familiar? There were the inevitable problems with parts and logistics and we helped all we could in this regard. Repeated enquiries over the month seemed to reveal progress and with a couple of days to go all seemed well for the car to be ready. At 5 o'clock, the afternoon before the day we were scheduled to leave, the call came that the car was not going to be ready. We were stunned. Frantic phone calls were made, endless rather pointless ideas to ready the car during the night were pursued, and in the end by 10:30 at night we had convinced someone to lend us another identical MG ZR to ours. In fact it was one of the other scholarship cars. So it was a big thank you to Peter Young of CMC who came to our rescue, even getting up early the next day with his sons to get the car ready. Luckily his people run another ZR in our championship so we were able to piggy back with them on the rally itself. The next day, my girlfriend, myself and our new co-

driver Phil Hall went on the early ferry to the Isle of Man and Dad followed on the later sailing driving the rally car.

Since the Jim Clark, we had been looking for a new co-driver and we had heard about Phil Hall through the BRC. He is just 18 and starting out as a co-driver and had had a couple of nasty experiences and a couple of dramatic crashes. The last incident which was a barrel roll out of a rally was the last straw for his confidence in his driver. The grapevine gave us positive feedback and so we met up with Phil and his Dad Steve. It turned out that Steve prepares and drives historic rally cars, principally TR4s and TR7 V8s. The TR8s are a favourite of mine, so that was one of many factors that decided us to team up with Phil. A measure of Phil's commitment was that he and his Dad (who is a veteran of the notoriously dangerous Manx) went over to the island to do a recce which we were allowed to do. They even asked me to go but I could not due to work commitments.

On arrival on the island Phil and I did a brief recce together of the two stages we would do on the first night. The car sailed through the scrutineering and all was ready for the first two dusk stages. The weather was horrendous and reports filtered through that the international cars were crashing all over the place. In fact, Mark Higgins, the current BRC champion and a Manxman, was reported as saying the conditions were the worst he had seen. I was in a borrowed car and with a new co-driver and the pressure was on!!! We

started the 1st stage flat out and were doing really well when we caught up Mark Gamble in a Peugeot 106 who was seeded in front of us. He usually drives like a nutter so we new something was wrong and it looked like a broken driveshaft. With LSDs the cars can keep going when this happens but they are slow and the Manx lanes are narrow so we could not pass. This meant we were 5th on the stage when we should have been 2nd or 3rd. We were even more determined for the next stage but we had not settled into a rhythm. This was made worse by a cock-up at the beginning of the next stage. On arrival Phil was told to wait and not hand in his time card, an anathema to a co-driver. He was assured all was well. Two minutes are like two hours under such conditions and he went again to hand his card in to be told the time would be added to our time. We were not happy. The confusion caused by more crashes was added to by the fact the marshals were Dutch and hard to understand. After what seemed ages we were off again. Our rival with the popped driveshaft had managed to put it back again during the delay with the help of £10 borrowed from Phil for oil and we all waited for the off. In Mark's case it literally was off as we passed him in a field, having joined another of the top international cars in a sorry heap. We heard later that Mark tried to drive it to the next stage but even he had to give up. We finished the stage without a problem, 4th fastest. We were relieved to survive those stages as another of our championship contenders had crashed. Phil found out we had received a 1 minute 20 second penalty as a result of the stage mix up. He proceeded to pester the timekeepers and clerk of the course all evening until the penalty was dropped. We were very grateful for his efforts and application in contrast to our previous experience.



The next day dawned and the worst of the weather seemed to be over, but it still looked like it might be four seasons in one day. Tyre choice would be crucial. We decided to compromise and have wets on the front and slicks on the back. This would prove a good option as the conditions varied all day. The 1st stage of the day was very tough and we managed 4th fastest as more competitors fell by the wayside. I found, true to my usual form, I was getting faster and faster all day. The stages were unlike any others I have done and I remember what Steve told me that they almost seduce you to go faster and faster. We certainly did that. Due to the fact our 1st stage time had been slow we had to start for the rest of the rally behind a slower car and in spite of the starting intervals we were catching them up. To add to everyone's frustration three consecutive stages were cancelled. Luckily the last one was still on and it is the classic Manx stage sharing a large portion of the famous TT course. It winds its way downhill from near the highest point on the island to right in front of the grandstand in Douglas. It was a tremendous stage with really fast sweeping bends, flat out straights and hairpins. We had the little MG flat out at 115mph on several occasions. Unfortunately, we caught our man ahead again and although we overtook him on the previous stage we couldn't on this one. This was a pity as we would have beaten David Meredith on this last stage but, as it was, he beat us by just under 3 seconds on a 15 minute stage.

Anyhow, we were pretty relieved to get back in one piece and I know Dad was very relieved!!! We did our usual and took 4th overall and 2nd in class which pleased us, as the car was new to us and it had been another new driver and co-driver combination. The other good result was that I am still 2nd overall in the Stars championship. Now all we have to do is improve our result in the Trackrod Rally in Yorkshire in October.

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◀ A warm welcome back to Oxford Motor Club to Supradip Dey Roy, another participant in the Manx

Photos by John Blackwell