

Lindisfarne Rally

Otterburn Military Ranges,
Northumberland

110 stage miles of smooth
Tarmac – 10 September 2006

*Images courtesy of Ian Hardy
Motorsport Photography
(www.ianhardy.net)*

Mental preparation for this event started long before I started preparing the car! Much had been said about Otterburn, mainly how frightening it is, how there are ditches waiting to pounce on every car that passes them etc!

So with this in mind, I was quite nervous about just doing the recce, stupid as it may sound. Thankfully though, my worst fears were put to one side as we followed the recce convoy over the ranges. We had bought a set of route notes (not pace notes for legal reasons!) from Patterson's, so as we went were able to tweak things that we thought needed it, but there wasn't much so we took in as much as possible. The recce convoy was supposed to be driven at 40mph max, but we were fortunate to have a convoy leader who didn't know what 40mph was!!

Recce over and with the car successfully scrutineered, we headed off to the digs to get something to eat and have a steadying drink!!

Morning of the rally everyone in the digs seemed to be up ahead of schedule and ready to go. My stomach however was not. For some reason unbeknown to me it was doing cartwheels and making me nervous again, so I passed on breakfast (I eat a full English before Swansea bay!) before heading to the rally venue.

There was a drivers briefing before the start of the rally; this was really just a warning to the sometimes over exuberant 205 challenge crews about the dangers of taking dips and crests flat in a 205!! If you read MN there was mention about the five written off 205's and the one BMW that was turned into a pickup!

As we were seeded quite low (96 of 100) it gave us the opportunity to watch the first 20 cars through the chicane next to service. There was the usual Subaru and Hyundai WRCs, a couple of 6R4's, a gorgeous sounding F2 Astra, but the most impressive driver through the chicane was David Bogie in a Group A Corsa 1600. He dabbed the brakes and changed down a gear just before, then floored it through the bales not touching them, just inch perfect and ultra committed.

So, off to stage one and the nerves were still giving me some grief. This wasn't going to put me off though and as the 5 second count down began, my focus was on the tarmac in front of me. The morning was quite dank and the surface was a little damp in places, so with cold tyres the first couple of corners were taken steadily to build the heat and grip. Once the tyres were up to temperature, the grip on the smooth-flowing tarmac was fantastic and



we were able to hold some decent speed through the fast corners. We were third fastest 205 1400 through SS1, quite good for someone who was going back and forth to the loo!

SS2. With heat into the tyres and nerves a thing of the past, we settled into a nice flowing rhythm. I was very conscious of needing to get through the day un-scathed as I had the Plains two weeks later, so went at a pace that I was comfortable with, but without taking risks. Even so, was only 6 seconds down on the leading 205 1400.

SS3. More of the same really, kept in a nice flowing rhythm that I was happy with, but not taking any big risks. Again, 6 seconds down on the leading 205 1400, but the rest of the class was much closer, with 3 seconds separating four of us!

SS4. The last stage before first service; the stage we were warned about at the briefing due to the three large dips and crests in a row. They were real car-swallowers and just before the flying finish as well! I think the cautious approach showed on this stage as we dropped 12 seconds to the eventual winner, but the biggest casualty of this stage was Darky (205 1400 Championship leader) who rolled out in spectacular fashion apparently. This is also where there were several cars parked at the flying finish in differing states of disrepair!!



Service was a quiet affair; nothing major to report about the car, which pleased Chris!

SS5. A repeat of SS1, but with a bit more confidence, so a bit more speed and a time that was nearly 30 seconds quicker which was good for the confidence!

SS6. We were really enjoying the rally; the stages were fast yet still quite technical in places. It wasn't as daunting as I had been worrying about and we were having quite a good laugh, usually at my inability to get round the acute hairpin right! Our times were consistently good and we were improving on our times from the morning stages.

SS7 & 8. Consistency was paying off and we were holding our position of second 205 1400. Unknown to us at this point was the retirement rate in our class: two crews had pulled out of the rally, one with a sick co-driver and the other with a sick driver!

SS9. This was the first long stage of the day at approximately 20 miles. This didn't begin smoothly; there was a long queue at the stage start so we sat patiently in the queue waiting for our turn to time in. However, as the delay went on and us not moving anywhere, most people were happy to be told that they would get the time they wanted, so we sat and waited. But some crews behind us decided that they wanted actual times which caused the start marshal to go into meltdown!! The result was two cars were put in front of us, which we then overtook within the first five miles of the stage. This was not the end of the problem though; at the following service we were told that we had a six minute penalty for being late!!! Tony thankfully took charge of the situation and got the penalty scrubbed.

SS10 & 11. These were the longest stages of the day at 22 miles each, quite a challenge for the stamina. Stage10 was going well until approximately half way through, when there was a serious vibration coming through the steering wheel and shaking the whole car! All sorts were going through my mind now: should I stop and check it over, is a wheel loose, or just take it slower so it wasn't as bad? I went for option 3, took it steady and didn't go up to 90mph again. In the 10 minute service Chris checked the front wheels and all the nuts and bolts but couldn't find anything serious, so we just changed the wheel. Thankfully this worked and there were virtually no vibrations for stage 11.

So, with us getting through the last stage unscathed, we had completed our first trip to the famous Otterburn Ranges. The final result was that we had successfully kept second placed 205 1400, picking up valuable Championship points and a trophy! We are now getting ready for the Plains, the last in the Championship and with us tied in third place it's going to be exciting!

Very big thanks to Tony Derrick my co-driver and to Chris Hambly for servicing. It was a great experience and one I hope to repeat again soon.

Phill Martin