

Crockers Ramblings!

18th August 2014 I'm driving home from a job in Scotland on the A74 and out of the blue I get a phone call off John Cope.

'How do Crocker, fancy coming out of retirement and sitting next to me on Mull'

Silence

A bit, or should I say a lot of rambling and finally I said 'give me 24 hours and I'll give you a definite yes or no'. So ten minutes later I rang John back and said YES.

Once having said Yes it was a real concern that as October drew close I would start having reservations about coming out of retirement and having another go at this mad sport, I'm glad to say exactly the opposite happened and as the event drew closer I got more and more giddy about it.

After JC winning the CERL 'Yes' campaign the following weeks were all a bit tense as the body shop who were re-prepping the shell managed to cut holes in the wrong place, weld bits in the wrong place and generally put Dean and John under huge amounts of unnecessary stress and pressure. However slowly things reappeared at GeoPrep and Dean worked wonders (and some very late nights) and got the whole thing bolted back together.

I've got to say when I saw the finished car for the first time in Ady's workshop on the Island it was sat there in plain white, gold wheels, spot lights on and looked absolutely stunning. A massive credit to Dean and his guys at GeoPrep in turning this round against all odds.

So what followed was a fairly intensive Recce, John and Richard (Winy) had already been out on Sunday and rewritten the notes for Ardtun and had a run up and down Gribun and Scridain so that was a good start. John and myself spent the next 3 days and nights checking notes. We managed to get a minimum of 3 passes on each stage and some as many as 5 or 6. It always works out that way due to the nature of the Island roads and the layout of the stages. Job done a full set of checked and updated notes.

I've got to say on all the events I've done I find the Recce the most difficult part, mainly due slow speeds the cautious approach you have to take plus the sheer amount of work involved in collating all the paperwork together. However on Mull this task was made so much easier thanks to two things, firstly Tony Cope and his computerised pace note system. TC pulled all the notes together, printed them off, bound them and presented me with a full set of Mull notes, this made things so much more simple for me, so cheers TC much appreciated. Secondly, John Cope, probably the most courteous recce driver I have sat next to, never went over the speed limit, cautious beyond belief and most of all a good smooth driver!!

Next on the list of things to do was the shakedown stage run on Friday morning. We had to Scrutineer and sign on Thursday teatime which all went smoothly. A 'minor' throttle problem was resolved by Dean and Andy and off we set.

The weather was horrid, the stage was slippy and a bit rough and all in all it didn't really prove much, it was good however for JC to get some time behind the wheel in what was a 'new car'. Fair play to the organisers for running this, its been asked for since I was Clerk of the Course, finding a suitable road is difficult and I reckon they did a good job in pulling this off. Shame the weather was so bad, on a dry day it would have been totally different.

Friday flew by and before I knew it we were sat on the start line being flagged away by the legendary Boyd Tunnock, weird feeling for me and one I never thought I'd experience, starting at car 6 on the Mull Rally

Friday night was incredibly difficult, wet beyond belief (as it was for everyone) and its fair to say we got off to rather a slow start. The first leg was pretty uneventful, 3 things stick in my mind, passing a stopped Danny Harper at Croig junction and genuinely thinking bo***s poor Dan. Being passed by James MacGillivray on Stage 2 and thinking bo***s, and thirdly the car picking up a massive vibration on stage 3 and thinking bo***s its bust!

Talking of bo***s, it was at the first service I dropped one, my best of the event. 'How long till we go Clive' '10 minutes lads' I replied, which was followed by hectic activity. Just as I was stepping into the car I checked the 'out' time in my Road Book. Couldn't believe it when we had a further 10 minutes available and I'd made the call 10 minutes early. Needless to say this didn't go unnoticed, quiet rightly I got ripped all weekend for it!! Made for some good craic actually so I'm glad I did it.....

We finished Friday night 12th Overall, lower than we both expected but happy to be there and ready for the daylight stages.

Saturday was fantastic, John had picked the pace up and although not fully up to speed was driving well and setting more and more competitive times the further into the event we got. For me it was pure pleasure doing those classic stages in a good car, with a good driver, great back up and fantastic Mull weather. We managed to pick up a further 4 places finishing the leg in 8th place.

Saturday night came the lads had been through the car and sorted any problems, it was dry, and time to push. We immediately picked up a place on the start line when Steve Clark didn't appear which was good, as were the first two stages where we set 5th and 6th fastest times.

The following two stages went without any drama and we went into final service 5th overall with a 10 second lead over car 24 (Sinclair) who was 6th. I remember pulling into service where Tony and Rhys grabbed John before he had even got out of the car, they had vital information – "It's pissing it down in Salen", put it on Inters said John, that information and that decision probably got us the result.

Whilst the service crew re-prepped the car for the final 22 mile stage Tony & Rhys gave me the 'wet note' information for the final stage. I've never done an event where I've had the luxury of this service, and I've got to say its invaluable information, those two did an incredible job not only in driving through the stages on road closure time but actually getting the information back to me so it could be used.

The final stage was unbelievable not only was I looking forward to the challenge of the 22 miler but what unfolded as we made our way through we will probably never experience again.

Start the Stage, and as I said we were 5th just passed Lagganulva and Dougie Weir is off the road on the right hand side, thankfully Linda was out of the car and showing the OK board. Nothing said between me and JC, just kept reading the notes and he kept driving. In the back of my mind I'm thinking YES we are 4th.

A certain points you get a glimpse of headlights in the distance and on the odd occasion I looked up I realised we were catching the car in front, must be car 24, so sub consciously I knew 4th was looking good. Just after Calgary Bay we passed a stranded John MacCrone parked up, clearly with a mechanical issue. 3rd!!!!!! Again nothing said between me and JC.

About a mile further we caught and passed car 24 which totally confirmed in my mind yes we are 3rd. Again nothing said between me and JC. Just kept reading the notes and John kept driving.

Over the finish line to the final control and I've got to say in was mayhem, it was fairly clear Callum and Del had won but what had happened to John and Stuart, it was down to us to confirm they had stopped and retired and the realisation dawned we had pulled it off and got a podium position.

It really was the best feeling in the world, totally made up for the whole team who put in so much effort into getting us there, made up for John who would have said 'no chance' if you have predicated 3rd after the Friday night, and made up to be part of such a well drilled, professional and probably the most important bit FUN team I have worked with. The whole Mull experience was made even more pleasurable by you guys, Thank you.

Thanks go to :

John – Team Leader !

Dean – Geoprep – Master Car Builder !

Andy – Service & Chase

Richy – Chase

Ben – Service

TC – Notes and Support - Catering

Rhys – Notes and Support - Catering

Winy – Reccee and Comedian

Peeky – Logistics

Ade and Mairi - Garage Facilities and Team Cricket Pitch