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2008

MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT

2008

Well the Macmillan Cancer Support 2008 was quite an event, after a very tame 2007 event the organisers told us to be prepared, not even a veiled threat.

12 months planning, fund raising, anticipation you can only find in a Five year old approaching Xmas night and here we are, the night before the event.

The car is fully packed; fully serviced, fully sign written courtesy of John at Insigns, we have enough food for a small country, spare fuel, 3 spare wheels, spare spares, every thing is ready.

Then my proposed navigator Mac calls, he has put his back out, and is unlikely to last a day bouncing around in the car let alone three days, so with all the spares I have packed I actually need a spare navigator.



So its 8 o'clock Thursday night, I need somebody who can read a map in a car (not as easy as it sounds), be ready in a couple of hours, able to have Friday and Monday off work and more importantly put up with being in a car with me for the weekend.

That will be Alun then, a phone call later and its all sorted. Don't know who is more relieved me or Lynn, me as I now had a navigator, or Lynn as this means she did not have to come with me.

Friday morning I collect Alun and on the way to Craven Arms try and bring him up to speed with what he has let himself in for, I did not tell him too much on Thursday night just in case he came to his senses and decided to tidy his sock drawer instead. Following booking in and scrutineering we then played a game of musical car parks as the organisers tried to get 60 4x4's all to park in number order.

Then we are ready, the first section is a off road course round the Britpart grounds, we are looking for sections of number plate, well two digits of a number plate to be precise, we have to find record these and not hit anything on the way round. It's a bit of a baptism by fire for Alun as we have to have to perform a 'stop' on a hill decent due to another competitor overshooting a junction. Then we attempt a very loose surface a hill climb, well hill being a bit of an overstatement more of a big pile of house bricks. With Dif lock not working we get cross axcel'd and then with wheels spinning start ejecting house bricks in all directions. Discretion being the better part, we take a fail on this section and reverse down the hill.



Exciting and we are not even out of the car park.

We hand in our check sheets in and collect the next set of clues, quick walk round the car to make sure it's all there (One of the other competitors was actually removing house bricks that had got wedged under his car.) and we are off.



The next section is a massive orienteering / treasure hunt. this starts from Church Stretton, over Long Mynd (clear bright weather and unbelievable scenery) and then round into the Clun Forest (more bits of number plate amongst the trees) passed by Montgomery, finally reaching the check point at service area nr Oswestry, Oh and we had an off road section somewhere on route as well.

It was here we given specific instructions, 'any problems, cut and run for the ferry'!, FERRY!!, the excitement reached fever pitch, we are going to Ireland.

Now things got tough, we had to plot a route, Llangollen, Ceiriog Forest, Llanarmon, Tanat Valley, Llandrillo take in a number of clues and challenges and make sure we got to the Bala off road centre around Midnight.

Route plotted we confidently set off and almost immediately came across a road closed section of the A5 between Oswestry and Llangollen, the council wanted to resurface the road.

Sixty 4x4 wanted to use that bit of road and non of us cared if it had tarmac on it or not. We did have a brief debate as to ignore the road closed and carry on the A5 anyway, but in the end I followed the road diversion signs while Alun feverishly re plotted the route.



We arrived at Bala off road centre around midnight; pleased we had collected a suitable number of control boards and had managed to answer most of the questions, while keeping to most of the Route.



The organisers were spacing the cars out as we entered the off road section, because, due to the nature of an off road course your lights are not always pointing in the direction of travel and it's not good to meet another cars.

Our time slot arrived and we are off into the Bala off road course, not far from the start we cross an expanse of water, not deep by Land Rover standards but upon exiting we have a little more steam than normal and this steam smells of anti freeze.

It would appear our cooling fan had not 'kicked in' while we waited and a very hot engine meeting very cold water caused it to spit its dummy out, or in our case all the water.

By the time we had refilled and checked everything over we are dead last, and we still have to cover the rest of the off road centre. The off road lights built into the roof rack then blow the relay, actually more melted than blown, the fuse had also melted but not blown. Not having a spare relay we don't attempt to repair them.

So we where in an off road centre at dead of night, no Diff lock , no off road lights and an engine we could have cooked eggs on, safe to say we did not spend much time looking for the control boards, the only way forward was with, let's just say a little more momentum than normal, We had a ferry to catch and a temperature gauge to watch.

2.30 am we arrive at Holyhead ferry port, head gasket still intact, water temperature normal and to our amazement are not the last to arrive, we decide not to bother with tents and just recline the seats and go to sleep.

We had had enough excitement for day one.



Day 2



We are awoken by the sound of diesel engines; we just have time to get out of our sleeping bags when the queue moves to join the ferry, and what crossing it was. We headed straight for breakfast but also making the crossing was most of Wales, going to the rugby Wales v Ireland fortunately they went straight for the bar.

The forecast for the crossing was rough, so once we had breakfast out the way we plotted our next set of map reference and clues ready for our exit. Having done this we then amused ourselves watching people trying to walk around some carrying multiples of drinks.

Rough was a bit of an understatement, that's the sea not the Girls.

Couple of hours later and we are in stunningly beautiful Ireland,

We are now looking for clues as you would on a treasure hunt and discover the Irish have a way of making sure you see a lot of stunningly beautiful Ireland, poor or non existing sign posts, cunning these Irish.

You cannot go to Ireland without having a Guinness so Lunchtime finds us in a small pub you could say was 'in the back and beyond' but that's most of Ireland.



As we go through the door we find most of the town watching the rugby, we squeeze through to the back of the room and order a couple of drinks. We then notice 'behind the bar', no it's not a collection of Toby jugs, or any other items you find in the UK; it's actually a small armoury. The question has to be asked 'do they all work', 'of course not' the barman says (stupid question written all over his face) 'we could not keep live grenades or guns in a pub, we have taken the bits out them and the guns to make them safe'. Key word for those not paying attention is 'we have taken'. Lovely drink, lovely people.

Surprisingly we are late for the lunchtime check in, and are met with 'you have ten mins to your leaving time'.

In our short time in Ireland we have found out nothing rushes, so decide we will use 'Irish time' I cook lunch and make tea while Alun plots the afternoon route from a selection of map references.



We then have a choice, race around to find the clues and get back onto schedule or take our time and absorb even more Ireland.

We make the decision to miss out some of the larger loops to put us back on schedule; this also allows time for afternoon tea.

The afternoon was spent much as the morning half the time looking for clues, half the time looking at the fantastic houses and scenery.

Our rendezvous point is Todds Leap, an off road centre in Northern Ireland, we kept waiting for the South/North border crossing, customs and the 'smart alec' questions 'do you have anything sharp in the car' (it's a 4x4 on an outing, its loaded to the roof with things customs don't like, 'do we have a knife', 'yes we do' any particular size or will a machete do).

What do we get, a road sign telling us we are now in MPH and not KPH not so much of a welcome; you get a welcome to Wales, a welcome to Scotland, welcome to England, but Northern Ireland, Nothing, Perhaps a hint there.

Todds leap is a massive off road centre and for a change the clues you need to find are surf boards, ironing boards bits of dummies, once clear we are then directed to take a direct route to Belfast for the ferry.



A couple of Army lads (also competitors), ask if we would like to follow them to the Docks, they are keen that we do not to find ourselves in the 'wrong part' of Northern Ireland and having a very large (Police specification reflective material) Union Jack on my spare wheel cover decide it would be a good plan.

We have a remarkably smooth sailing to Stranraer not that most people saw any of it, people asleep everywhere. The crossing was described by one over Jolly 'Jack Tar' (or bar steward) as the lull before the storm.



Day 3 Just



We arrived at midnight, you know how exiting the ferry works, you follow the car in front to the exit gate. Unfortunately the trial of cars (around 40) followed a lorry into the lorry park, then proceeded the sort of chaos Laurel and Hardy would have been proud of, 40 cars crisscrossing the docks in the dark trying to find the exit. Eventually we exited the Docks and headed for Lockerbie,

We were then hassled by the Irish Lorries, how can you be hassled, well when you are doing 70mph on a single lane carriageway and yet another Irish Lorry complete with 40ft trailer is making another death defying overtaking manoeuvre, apparently they had a bet on.

We arrived at a nice Hotel in Lockerbie around 2 am and did what everybody does at a nice Hotel, camped on the lawn.





7 am We are awoken, by the sound of diesel engines ticking over, nobody going any place, just ticking over, it's a Land rover thing, I know I do it. I think it's an inbuilt fear of the car never starting again.

Breakfast outdoors is a wonderful meal; nothing can better it, cooked on a large tree stump, washed down with steaming hot tea. All in the middle of the Hotel Lawn, I do wonder what the paying Hotel guests thought when they opened the curtains and saw us all.

The 9.30 drivers briefing described the day's events, another 'plot and bash route' looking for sections of number plates and cryptic clues.

This time saw us start in number order with 1 min gaps, the map references and clues for route timely handed out 30 mins before our start time, this really put us under pressure (ok Alun under pressure) to plot our next route.

I did what I do best and made more tea.



Having seen what Ireland has to offer in the way of scenery now Scotland trumps it, our tour takes in Castle Oer Forest, Langholm Forest and a stunning 'yellow' road between Langholm and the finish at a pub in Newcastleton, all this while trying to find yet more clues.

After handing in our answer sheets and having a quick pint (rude not to) we headed for Daresbury and the Hotel.



It's a long run from Newcastleton and a long time before our evening meal so we stopped at a motorway service station, and cooked in the car park (as you do). Well at least we did not camp on the lawn.



As is now a tradition, The Prize giving went well as we did not have to prepare any winning speeches and avoided being kissed by some celebrity who should really get a better agent. We bid on a number of auction items and won none.

Unfortunately I won't be able to use this line for 2009 as the celebrity is **Julia Bradbury** and a queue is forming (behind me) already.



Alun and I would like to thank everybody for supporting us in this 2008 event; and just to show we have not lost our sense of humour we have entered 2009 event.

It would be hard to think of anything that would top this 2008 event but we are sure the organisers will think of something.

As of today's date the total raised for 2008 will be just under ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY THOUSAND POUNDS, this will bring the total raised since the inception of the Mac 4x4 (2002) to around a QUARTER OF A MILLION POUNDS.

Not bad for a group of 4x4 nuts

Please sponsor my Macmillan Cancer Support challenge 2009 at www.justgiving.com/alun-and-sean-09

Yours sincerely,

Sean

Sean Flynn

Clayton Car Contracts

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Please help up support Macmillan Cancer Support (Registered Charity No 261017) its one of those things in life when it's better to care for Macmillan cancer support than have Macmillan cancer support care for you.

Any good or services or cheques can be sent to Clayton Car Contracts, Staffordshire House, Beverley Close, Penkridge, Staffordshire ST19 5SS

Also supply any 'stickers' or other promotional items you wish to be displayed to the same address.

All costs for this event are paid by Clayton Car Contracts and Alun Beardmore all donations go 100% directly to Macmillan Cancer Support.