

One Form of Madness . . .



. . . or, the Lighter Side of an M.C.C. Rally

NEXT Wednesday, November 12, sees the start of the Motor Cycling Club's National Rally for motorcars, the 1,200-mile road section of which ends at Brighton 48 hours later. This account is of last year's event which finished at Hastings.

* * *

IT is sometimes rather difficult to explain why one goes in for Rallies. People are all too apt to say: "Seems pretty silly to me, tearing round the countryside for 1,200 miles without a break. You might just as well motor to Glasgow for lunch and then straight back again for all the sport there is in it." Perhaps they're right. Perhaps it is stupid to go in for a motor trial when one might be hitting a golf ball into eighteen neat little holes, or sleeping peacefully after a good meal. Maybe those who go in for motor trials are just plain stupid. I wouldn't be knowing.

I got mixed up in the Hastings Rally quite by accident. I wasn't even expecting to be in England at the time, but "Jackie" Masters (God bless him) put me in touch with the organizers at Cardiff in case a spare driver was required. After a hefty line in business lunches the day before the Rally began I was contemplating regretfully the stub of a large cigar when the phone rang. It was Caleb Griffiths from Cardiff. "If you can get down here immediately," he said, "I can give you a seat in the M.G. team."

An hour later I was in the train, remembering only too late that we hadn't made it clear whether we would meet at Cardiff or Newport, where he lives. Needless to say, I picked the wrong station, with the result that the subsequent activities went on for just that much longer into the night, at which time one should, of course,

have been pressing blankets in anticipation of the event.

It was no small thing getting out of bed into the grey morn with no prospect of returning for the next three days. But the three M.G. 1½ saloons, finished in silver green, and complete with all mod. cons., looked very workmanlike at the starting post, and the future seemed brighter. Being organized by the M.C.C., the Rally was expected to produce some fireworks; nor were they lacking. For the Cardiff starters, the first was definitely not on schedule. Causing an obstruction in the middle of the car-park stood an antiquated lorry, and one of the competitors, who obligingly went over to move it into the background, opened the door to let off the brake; at which, without warning, a week-old corpse slid out.

By the time the somewhat shaken competitor had been liberally dosed with brandy and ginger there was a milling throng of policemen and photographers, and the occupants of M.G. cars Numbers 266, 267 and 268 were only too glad to slip away from the starter, hoping that too many finger-prints had not been left in incriminating places.

The amount of odds and ends which had been piled into the already restricted back seat of the 1½ made lebensraum a cherished ideal, and back-seat driving, at the outset, was at less of a premium than later in the Rally, when a quiet snooze with one's head wedged against a couple of thermos flasks, and legs tightly doubled, was the reward of the faithful. For the present, out came the sun, and the countryside around Chepstow and in the Cotswolds was never lovelier.

At Gloucester, Caleb Griffiths's organizing genius was apparent. The three cars stopped as pre-arranged in front of an hotel; food for eight was already on the table, inside 20 minutes we were outside an excellent luncheon, and back on the road. If this is the form, I thought, nothing can hold us back.



" . . . among a field of mangel-wurzels. . . "



". . . put out the fire."

Nothing did, until Winchester. Bournemouth had come and gone, night had fallen, and Peter Price, Mike Llewellyn and I had settled down to a comfortable gossip in 266, with the other two cars in front, when suddenly 267, immediately ahead, ran out of the road at a corner, took a ditch and hedge in its stride, and a moment later was to be seen growing among a field of mangel-wurzels.

Easier In than Out

Although beyond a dented mudguard and a scratched radiator no damage had been done to the car, it was easier got into the field than out. The hedge was thick and the ditch deep. Furthermore, there was no available gate.

A recce party stumbled noisily around in the dark, but returned with surprising rapidity with a "Men at work" sign and most of the trunk of a tree. These were placed over the ditch as an impromptu bridge, and with a moderate amount of effort and considerably more bad language, 267 was returned to the highway.

As we sped off the B.B.C. forecast thick fog in most areas.

The next few hours are obscure. I have memories of Sussex lanes with life-saving cats-eyes, and Olde Worlde cottages which appeared disconcertingly a few yards ahead; of keeping up a steady twenty-five down main arterial roads, and listening to "The Guinea Pig" on the Home Service.

Nothing, however, could shake Caleb's staff work, and when we put in a belated appearance at Maidstone there was smoked salmon on the table, turkey, and much needed pints.

At Folkestone, the next control point, Wadham Brothers had staged an admirable buffet, together with half the exhibits from Earls Court, and it was with difficulty that the boys were persuaded to remove themselves from XKs and DB2s and concentrate on the business of getting conveyed north through London to Doncaster.

Of exactly what went on through the rest of the night I retain no very clear picture, having strategically kipped down among coats, spare parts, maps, suitcases, hard

One Form of Madness - - - - Contd.

rations and other essential paraphernalia in the back seat. As an alternative to straightforward amputation, it was necessary from time to time to stick the legs through a window, but this apart, sleep could hardly have been less resisted in the Dorchester.

At Doncaster, Punch's Hotel provided bath and breakfast, with Basil Cardew of the "Daily Express" to tell us all about what we were doing.

And so to Penrith and the Lake district, where the four hundred and fifty Rally cars met up, and the real fun began.

The first tests were at Honister. Two stretches, of half a mile each, unknown to us, and which had to be covered without stopping at an absolutely identical speed. To succeed in the test you could take anything up to three minutes to do each stretch, and five seconds tolerance was allowed.

"There's a catch in it," said the experienced ones sagaciously. "They'll put us over mud, or something. Better take the full three minutes doing it."

So off went 266, to a cracking pace of about 10 m.p.h., round a corner and up into one-in-four. Ten yards from the finishing line, the poor little 1½, no revs on the clock and three 15 stoners up, stalled.

Nasty silence all round, until we were advised by the organizers that, together with sundry other cars, we had been baulked by a passing non-competitor and could have another run.

Needless to say, the finishing line was passed the second time with about 6,000 revs up. At least, that's what it felt like. The second part of the test was up a gradient which would have put the Forclaz to shame. At the top of it,



"Olde Worlde cottages appeared disconcertingly. . . ."

267, again baulked by a non-competing car, broke the selector in the gearbox.

The invaluable Benson, co-driver in 267 and chief participant in the hedge episode (it was inevitable, I suppose, that he should have been known throughout the Rally as Benson and Hedges) got to work with the spanners. Half-an-hour later he had more parts left over than when he began, but the gearbox worked. It was only necessary for 267 to cover thirty miles in thirty minutes to reach the control at Kendal in time.

One Form of Madness - - - - Contd.

Which small thing completed, we headed in convoy for Chester, fog and rain mercifully obscuring the scenic delights of Warrington and Wigan.

At Chester the bathing began. How amphibious, we wondered, was the M.G.?

Fortunately, although a continuous drip of water refrigerated one's right ankle on the accelerator pedal, the floorboards—and the plugs—held good. We arrived without mishap at Bala.

Here occurred an incident which caused less than no amusement at the time. I must mention that owing to a divergence of temperature inside and outside the car, the windows had misted up; furthermore 267 had turned his lights out.

It was inevitable, I suppose, that I should back 266 into him. A very gentle bump, let me make it clear, which barely disturbed the setting of the foglamp. Sufficient, however, for the drivers to expect rather noisily to be bought a pint.

Two minutes later, to our consternation, smoke and flames poured out of 267. The fog-light wires had shorted.

Whether extinguishers, local fire-brigade or downpouring rain put out the fire, I cannot say, but somehow order was restored, and five minutes later we made off for the Welsh hills, 267 leading.

"Everything seems to happen to me," grumbled Davis, who owned her.

But in point of fact, he had no cause for despondency, since notwithstanding hedge, gearbox and conflagration, he was in the news the following morning as one of the only three cars to reach Hastings with a clean sheet. It was just too bad that his sacrifices of gearbox went by the board when the Honister test was scratched, some 320 stopwatches having disagreed with the timekeepers. Useful to us in 266, however, who had bungled the test, for it meant that all the team got in with clean sheets.

Throughout the night we motored on; in queues up hills, and in alarming solitude along tortuous lanes. At Ross, Peter Price woke me up. "I don't know whether



"... into a hedge."

you noticed," he said. "But we've just been into a hedge. You take over." And promptly went off to sleep. I had the satisfaction of waking him an hour or two later at Gloucester: "I don't know whether you noticed, but we've just collected a kerbstone—your turn, if you don't mind." and thuswise, in true Monte-Carlo form, 266, 267 and 268 reached Hastings and the final check, not before 267's mudguard had been straightened and the radiator damage camouflaged with a large red poppy.

It was raining when we did the tests on Hastings front, and hastened off to find Hotel and bed. Either our sense of timing had gone for six, or the subsequent party was monumental, because one of the team was discovered telephoning his wife at half past three in the morning, to say he'd arrived.

Which is what a girl must put up with if her husband goes in for Rallies.

RAYMOND FLOWER.

PLACES WITH A STORY . . .

The Pelham Milestones, Sussex

MOST motorists in southern England must, at some time or the other, have travelled the A.22 London to Eastbourne road. But I wonder how many have noticed the Pelham milestones with their quaint method of recording the number of miles to London's Bow Bells, on that part of the route between East Hoathly and Maresfield?

Although it is well worthy of note, this type of inscription is not restricted to this particular part of the country. The stones are quite unique in another respect, however, and the reason is to be found in the buckle seen at the top of each milestone.

It is known as the Pelham Buckle and is the badge of the well-known Sussex family which erected these stones approximately 200 years ago.

For the story of how the buckle first came to be adopted as a family crest, we must go back into history

as far as the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. The battle was won, with the French King John a prisoner, and instrumental in this occurrence were two knights; Sir Roger de la Warr and Sir John Pelham. As a souvenir of their part in his capture, the king presented de la Warr with the crampet of his scabbard and to John Pelham he gave the buckle from his sword belt. Both knights eventually adopted these symbols into the crests of their respective families.

In common with the fate of many other signposts and milestones in Britain during the past war, the Pelham stones were removed for reasons of security and were stored in Lewes for the duration. During this operation the stones were discovered to be made of cast iron and their weight necessitated the efforts of two burly workmen to carry them away.

For motorists who enjoy touring the attractive Sussex countryside, there are several places where the Pelham Buckle can still be seen. Mostly affixed to church towers and doorways, it is to be found in the villages of Burwash, Chiddingfold and Laughton, and in all probability an unhurried drive down one of the many intriguing lanes will reveal an unexpected buckle that is not recorded in a current gazetteer or guide book.

FRANK BUNCE



BOW BELLS.—One of the pictorial milestones showing the distance to London, and having the