

Testing Times

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In the beginning there was Bournemouth!

It was in 1951 that the RAC National Rally was upgraded from National to International status to become the "RAC International Rally of Great Britain" and because of its format became popularly known as "The Rally of the Tests". That year from an initial entry of 266 no less than 229 started the event from one of four locations - Brighton, Cheltenham, Skegness and Harrogate - and around 150 or so contested the final challenge on the promenade at Bournemouth. Whilst the 1956 event called at Matchams Park on the outskirts of nearby Ringwood, the event never revisited the seaside town in that decade. Therefore although the 1962 and 1963 The RAC International Rally finished in the resort it was by then a forest stage rally and no longer "The Rally of the Tests"! The Classic Rally Association rectified this in 2006 when we took the recreation of Rally of the Tests back to Bournemouth.

Looking at possible options for the location of the start of the

rally the thought process goes something along these lines:-

"Where can we accommodate around 200 competitors, organisers and officials?"

"Can we come up with a really good Prologue?" and

"What did they do in the fifties?"

"Last year we were in the north and we ran roughly east to west so this year its time to look to the south once more and generally head north."

"There is a town with genuine provenance but that has somehow slipped below the radar and was never used as a starting point."

Hence Bournemouth here we come again!

The Thursday evening "Prologue" will follow what has become an established format with a combination of tests and a regularity section. The initial activity starts from the Bournemouth Flying Club at Bournemouth Airport and retrace the wheel tracks of our forerunners to Matchams and the surrounding area. We then return to Bournemouth for a final test and the welcome

dinner at Rally HQ the Menzies Carlton Hotel.

Once more we anticipate a number of entrants from overseas who will be determined to rest the "Nations Cup" from the current holders, the English. Competition gets underway with three tests and a regularity and as the style of the early test could suit the Irish contingent, Irish eyes may be smiling as we travel west through the chocolate box villages of Dorset and on into Somerset. A return visit to the national championship hillclimb course at Wiscombe Park awaits, before a test and the lunch halt at the ancestral home of the Kennaway family - Escot Park. The restaurant, adjacent to the main house, is set in over 200 acres of parkland and gardens originally set out by Capability Brown.

In the afternoon we call at a splendid military facility on the edge of Dartmoor before heading through North Devon, designated as an "Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty" and on into the wonderful wilderness that is the classic rally country of the Exmoor National Park. Our route then turns east along the fabulous "Doone" country and on to



what we hope will be an exciting regularity and our rest halt where the ladies of Porlock await! Those of you who took part in the 2004 Rally of the Tests I know still fantasise about the refreshments at Porlock. Be prepared, we are promised more of the same before the evening section. Details of that will not of course be made available until the event but as some of you will know the south west is wonderful rally territory. I am sure you will enjoy it.

Our overnight halt is the Holiday Inn Taunton but once again the morning restart is not from the hotel. Our MTC on Saturday will be at the Haynes Motor Museum where the restaurant is opening up especially for the event. Again be prepared for an early start as the museum is 40 minutes away.

From Haynes, we head north taking in three or four tests and a regularity in Somerset before our coffee halt and a morning in the Cotswolds, well-known for gentle hillsides ('wolds'), sleepy villages and for being so 'typically English'. Above all, the local honey-coloured limestone, used for everything from the stone floors in the houses to the tiles on the roof, has ensured that the area has a magical uniformity of architecture. Whilst our route takes us through all this, our tests and

regularities will possibly keep minds focused elsewhere.

Lunch near Gloucester precedes an afternoon in the foothills of the Malvern Hills, an area with a rich cultural heritage of forts, castles and priories standing proudly from this landscape of ancient woodland, rolling pastures and wild, open commons. Commencing with a visit to a great test site – the "Three Counties Showground", where the complex of roads should provide a real driving challenge. We turn to the west and then north through Worcestershire, west of the river Severn, and into Herefordshire for our afternoon TC.

A final push north with a regularity and a test on the Shropshire border and along the very pretty Wenlock Edge takes us to our evening meal halt overlooking the World Heritage site of the Ironbridge Gorge. You will be able to relax in front of a roaring open fire before setting out on the second evening section!

Stoke on Trent where we overnight is not the most obvious town on the motor sport enthusiasts must stay lists! Perhaps most famous as the birth place of pop star Robbie Williams and the home of the legendary "Wizard of the Dribble" - Sir Stanley Mathews. It is however close to an army training area with

which some of you may be familiar!

The final leg of the 2008 event starts (for a change!) from the rally HQ (the Holiday Inn). We begin with a regularity and a test a short distance away before turning to the west through Shropshire and heading for the spiritual home of rallying - Wales. Much favoured by the original "Testers", the Principality, as most of you will know, is a special place and our route will pass along the lovely Tanat Valley en-route to the dramatic Snowdonia National Park. Tarmac venues are unfortunately few and far between in this part of the world but we have a combination of all tarmac, tarmac and gravel and gravel tests and regularities as we make our way to the Great Orme and our finale before the finish in the wonderful little Victorian seaside town of Llandudno. Those of you who were with us two years ago could not have failed to be impressed by the charm of the place and I am sure if you make it all the way from Bournemouth to here you will be suitably delighted!

Hwyfawr!

(I think that means goodbye, have fun!)

Fred

