

Mull Rally
Brian Macphail/ Steve Coombes
Car 107 – Toyota Corolla AE86
Retired SS7

I have to start by thanking all those people that put in a massive effort to get us to the start line never mind around the event. The Preston Crew - Dave, Andy, Phil and Kevin, who did a fantastic job in getting the car running and keeping it running. The Mull Crew – Brian, Joanne, Kyle, Jimmy and Chris, who looked after me, fed me, worked throughout Friday night to get the car ready for Saturday and chauffeured me round on the recce. The crew from car 105 who we shared service with and had some good banter. The rally fan in the estate car who towed us back from Scrutineering. Thanks for all your help.

The Mull rally started on Tuesday with a 350 mile trip to the island. I arrived to see that the car was not ready and not running well. After some tinkering, without success the decision was made for Brian to catch the 7 o'clock ferry on Wednesday to take the car to Preston to get it running. He would have been the only person to take a rally car off the island. Even though we didn't know if the car would run I prepared as planned and Chris took me to recce. Up one stage, Down another. Calling and amending notes. After 130 miles of none stop calling and altering (apart from the pub lunch) we called it a day and I spent the night re-writing them. There was some good news though as the car was running and on its way back.

With Brian due back mid-afternoon we continued to recce. We stopped at Callum Duffy's to collect some rims and look at his car. What a motor. Callum was using a new paddle shift on his car so I suggested that might give us an advantage over the first few stages to build a lead whilst he got used to it. He chuckled. Stages checked and more alterations to do that night, along with looking at the car to see exactly what needed doing. Friday was going to be a long day.

And it was. Firstly we set the fire extinguisher off, replacement found and fitted. Bolt check done, lying in the extinguisher foam. Lamp pod fitted, fuel purchased, chase car sorted, tools in the rally car, fit the spare, refit seat belts and with noise at 13:30 I finished fitting my seat about 13:00. I could finally sit in the car. Noise passed. Then our next problem. The car wouldn't start. After 5 or so minutes of trying eventually it fired and we were off. We made it to scrutineering, had to buy a spill kit as we didn't have one and were then pushed out to the car park as the car wouldn't start again. The Preston crew were there so we left them to it whilst we signed on.

Talking to Hugh Hunter in the signing on queue, he told me about his new right hand drive Focus WRC and how he was still getting used to it. "Well that's 2 people we'll pass on the first few stages" I told him. "You whilst you get used to right hand drive and Callum whilst he gets used to his paddle shift." I think he then realised he was under pressure..... Not. The Preston crew were unable to get the car started so it was kindly towed back to Brian's for some urgent attention. Some frantic effort saw the car starting better, but it was still not right. After a quick chat we decided to attempt the Friday night stages.

7 O'clock came and we went to watch the top 10 start the first stage and check on the weather. Top 10 seen and back to Brian's to watch telly. How many rallies are there when 10 minutes before the start you're watching telly at home? Start ramp done and off to the first stage. I found it amazing to go past the road closed sign knowing why it was closed. Arrival control done and the car stalled. I was then put into action by helping to hold the handbrake on whilst switching the fuel pump on and off until the car started. Up to the line and off we went.

We made it through the first stage, no dramas, but due to our lack of preparation time the spot lights were lighting up a 3ft patch directly in front of the car. The notes went well and I'd done my first stage on Mull. SS2 was 14 miles over the hill road and down towards Salen. I do enjoy long stages. The car continued to run badly, but we made it to service where Jimmy and Kyle checked the car over and did what they could. One thing I had noticed was that there were cars off all over on the first 2 stages and that continued over the next 4. We almost went off on the tight hairpin right on SS3 as it came up a lot quicker than when we had recce'd it. Typically it was right in front of the species and the Preston Crew who were watching. SS4, 5 & 6 were ok as we continued to limp along.

On the way to SS7 the car spluttered to a halt. We checked it all over with help from Jimmy and the Preston crew. We noticed that the bolts had come out of the starter motor. The top bolt was tightened as best as could be done but the bottom bolt was missing. With OTL time approaching we set off to and into SS7 as 3rd last car on the road. Approx ¾ of the way through the car spluttered to a halt again and despite our best efforts it would not run and our chance at finishing was gone.

We awoke Saturday to find that Jimmy and Kyle had spent the rest of Friday night fixing it so that we could run in the trophy rally. Some phone calls on Saturday morning also helped the Preston crew to get it running better. Amazing what cleaning the fuel filter does! As the weather closed in we had the usual discussion on tyres and with time starting to run out before scrutineering we decided to cut the slicks.

A mad rush and then a long wait until our new start time. SS10 went ok. We went off on SS11. The car was well stuck. As I tried to get out, to push, a group of spectators pushed me back in the car and in some atrocious conditions they pushed us on our way. Not something that seems to happen too often anymore. Thanks. SS12 went perfectly but SS13 was stopped due to a bad accident. The crew, after some hospital treatment appear to be ok, but we were too far behind the main rally to continue so we prepared for the night stages.

On our way to start the night stages we used some rags to lift the spots up. It was better but they were still low. SS16 went well as Brian could see a bit better. SS17 was a nightmare for me as I completely messed the notes up, got lost straight from the off and was glad to get to the end. Well done to Brian for driving it. SS18 was good and we headed back to service. Determined to get the spots right for the last 2 stages I put some pipe lagging under the front and hey presto. We could see.

SS19 was 22 miles and something I had been looking forward to all week. There was a delay at the start and we risked turning the car off. No worries though as it purred back into life and we set off. What a stage. The notes went well. We went off and nearly got stuck just before we came down the steps. The spots were perfect. The car ran the best it had all week and I can't believe that 30 minutes could go so fast. If we had started the event with the car we finished the event then we would have made it all the way through.

My one disappointment is that I didn't do this event 10 years ago, but I'll be there again next year either competing or spectating. I hope my ramblings show how much of an effort went into the event for us and that you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed the event. Many thanks to all those that have helped me to make this years rallying so enjoyable.

Have a great Christmas and a Happy New Year.....

Steve.