

Plains Rally 2012
Robert Kennedy/ Steve Coombes
Car 135 – Nissan Micra RF1.0
108th O/All - 4th Class

Although I haven't done all the events on the BTRDA calendar, this for me is my favourite. After our last event in Somerset, Andy and Robert had changed some things on the car. A different gearbox fitted, air filter changed and Dunlop Tyres instead of the Fuldors we had been on. This, along with the modified notes, should help us to bridge the gap between us and a top 3 (class) result. This was not going to be easy due to the entry and we didn't get off to the best start during the weekend.

On the way to Scrutineering we had a bad vibration shaking the car. I couldn't work out what it was, but the vibration was bad enough to make me think we might not make the start. The car sailed through Scrutineering as usual and with signing on completed we turned our attention to the car. The vibration seemed more than just a wheel out of balance, but to check we changed the wheels for the run to our digs. No change and no surprise. A check of the car found an engine mount at the back of the engine was worn. Temporary fix in place and a test drive later. No change. A phone call to Ian Arden and a few more things checked, including a full bolt check and no change. After spending 2 hrs outside in the rain (it stopped as we tidied up) and starting to get very hungry, we called it a night and headed for the pub and a well-earned pint.

Saturday morning came and we headed for the start. Despite not finding any problems the car seemed better and determined to at least tackle the first stage, the mayor waved us away from MTC1 and we were off.

SS1 (Gartheiniog) was 10.51 miles of flowing Welsh Forests. The car went better of the start line, but had a flat spot at about 55. Nothing we could do and we got into a rhythm. As we went through the stages we worked on our speed through the corners. By the end we were a gear higher through 60% of the corners. It's easy to forget that this was only Robert's 3rd event.

SS2 (Dyfi) and SS3 (Hafren North) Went well and Robert started to get confidence in the notes and driving with the commitment needed to challenge for class honours, although I think the fog knocked his confidence. Despite this we pulled some time back on the car ahead of us in our class. Service saw us 5th in class but only 13 secs off 4th.

SS4 (Sweet Lamb) was a good little stage with some big jumps on it that could easily damage the car. It was also my first trip around the complex and I enjoyed it. SS5 (Hafren South) also went well as we set the same time on both as Harry, who was 4th in class.

SS6 (Gartheiniog) was a re-run of SS1. Again we went well and were 10 secs quicker, putting everything we had learnt to good effect. Unfortunately Harry had extended his lead over us by another 18 secs. There was a long run to SS7 (Micks Woodyard) and as we had time before the arrival control we decided to get a burger, much to the amusement of our competitors. Burger down and Robert confident of a good run on the final stage (he had tested there) we went for it, getting big air over the jump (I've seen the proof, all 4 wheels off the ground).

At the final control we found that Harry had picked up a minute time penalty meaning we had taken 4th in class. On our last event we were 5 secs a mile off the pace, but this time we had reduced that to 3 secs a mile. A good step forward for Roberts development. For this event we developed both the car and Roberts driving. There are a few more car mods planned for the next event and there is definitely more to come from us as a team. Another good result was Aaron McClure and Martyn Taylor who finished 2nd in Class (RF1.4). Excellent reward for their hard work.

As always, a huge thanks to all the Marshals, organisers and radio/ recovery crews who made the day possible. I'm having a month off to let the bank balance recover before attempting the Nicky Grist Stages for the first time. Until then enjoy your Motorsport.

Steve (Gemini 5)