

Robert Kennedy/ Steve Coombes Nissan Micra RF1.0 - Car 241



Robert had never done a multi venue rally or been in the forests. Having competed in the juniors last year it was going to be a major learning curve for him. No waiting about for an hour in between stages, this was nonstop action all day. Event HQ was at M-Sport. I've never seen so many Volvo's with a cage in. There were at least 20! Scrutineering passed and signing on complete without any problems and stress free. This was the first major difference that Robert noticed from single venue events. As is the norm we had to be sociable so we headed to the hotel bar. We should have known not to stay as they had no draught beer, only bottles, but stay we did and eat. Food was average, service poor and beer expensive. Luckily this was our only mistake of the weekend. Whilst we waited to go over the start ramp in Cockermouth we had some fun interacting with the spectators. One young child was crying but soon started smiling when we waved. **SS1 (Combe)** - We set the goal of getting to the end of the stage as a minimum. The green light came on and we set off. The first half of the stage was up hill and we struggled. It felt like Robert was trying too hard instead of trusting his ability. A few words of help given and as we came down the second half of the stage he got into a rhythm. The left foot braking was working and he started getting to grips with things. First stage completed and a competitive time set all things considered.

SS2 (Hobcarton) went without any problems. Robert continued to grow in confidence and again a competitive time. **SS3 (Greystokes)** was very slippery. A small lock up on a SqR R were a car had already gone off was our only drama as we navigated our way through. Again our goal was to get to the end of the stage and service. The car was running well and with a splash of fuel we set off to Grizedale 4th in class.

Grizedale North was first and things flowed well. This was the longest stage Robert had ever done and the longer it went on the more he got into the flow. Grizedale south was longer still and again we had an excellent run through it as the confidence continued to grow. We were getting our time when I heard the marshal get the time for the car behind us. In 10 miles we'd taken over 20 seconds out of them in their 1400. Considering this was only his 5th stage in the forests we headed back to service 2nd in class.

With 2 stages left we turned our attention to getting to the end of the event. **SS6 (Greystokes)** was a reverse run of SS3. We had a chat before we entered stage making sure Robert was aware of how slippery it was on the first run and about the ruts that had been generated. We set off into stage and apart from a slight drift wide on the exit of a SqR L towards a ditch we set another competitive time. **SS7 (Wythop)** was our worst stage. After about a mile and with head down in the notes I felt Robert lift. I looked up to see a spectator waving at us to slow down. The car in front of us had stopped near the top of the hill and with both crew still in the car we had to slow to make sure they were ok. This disrupted the flow for the rest of the stage and we dropped around 25 seconds and this cost us 2nd in class.

With only the finish ramp and the interview with Bob to contest with we had achieved our goal of finishing and for Robert to get some much needed mileage and experience. The car had run well and Robert had done a fantastic job behind the wheel. It was great to see the support Robert had as a number of people came over to congratulate him on finishing his first forest event, recognising what an achievement it was and how well he had done. By the end of the event he was driving with confidence and I don't see why he can't win his class before the end of the season.

Thanks to all the marshals who braved the conditions in the morning and to the organisers for a great event. Thanks must go to the McClure team for their help with servicing and well done to Aaron and Martin for a great result in the 1400's. Until next time.

Steve Coombes (G&PMC) & Gemini 5

Photo Courtesy of Andrew Shepherd



Photo Courtesy of Ian Bell