

Somerset Stages – 16/04/2011
Ian Arden/ Steve Coombes –Car 226
Nissan Micra RF1000

I am familiar with Minehead due to many holidays at Butlins, but never did I realise that there were rally stages in the area. Usually the rally is based at Butlins, but due to Easter being later, Butlins was booked up, so the sea front and steam railway car parks were acquired to great effect. Ian was running his own car and also supplying a car for another competitor so the service crew of Shaun and Dave had their work cut out. Noise, scrutineering and signing on were hectic, mainly due to all the numbers that needed putting on the cars (BTRDA events also run luminous numbers in the windows). All passed and it made that first pint in the pub taste that bit better.

The first stage was a nice easy 1.35 miler. That is easy apart from the chicane which was navigated with help from the handbrake and bale on the exit. The second stage was a test at just under 9 miles. No problems encountered as I got use to Ian's driving style and he got use to me on the notes. I didn't take much notice of the scenery but did look up at one point to see a cliff face on both sides of the car. The problem being that the cliff face on the nav's side was about a mile away at the other side of the valley. I didn't look down. A 1 sec class lead after 2 stages.

The next two stages went well as we started to work as a team and we stretched our class lead to 13 secs into first service. The next two stages were on tarmac along the excellent Porlock toll road. We extended our class lead to 26 secs, despite losing my place on the notes. A lack of experience catching me out. On our return to service we had picked up a 4 minute penalty. 2 Minutes on the stage and 2 minutes for early arrival at the time control. A quick chat with the organisers and query lodged.

The next 2 stages were double use. We managed to extend our class lead to 32 secs. That is assuming the 4 minute penalty was scrubbed. Everything was going to plan until stage 9. Two left hand 6 lefts, over crest, round bales. The problem being that unlike every other corner on the event where the bales had been on the inside of the corner these two bales artificially tightened the corner so we collected the stage tape on both. No matter, a small bit of reversing and we continued. Luckily the stage was 9 miles so we had chance to pull time back and limit our losses. Stage 10 was a repeat of stage 1 and so was our attempt at the chicane. Must be something with me and drivers I sit in with struggling at chicanes!!!

The last stage went without any problems and with the 4 minute penalty removed we won our class by 26 secs. Ian making it 3 out of 3 class wins in the forest. A fantastic event and well worth the long trip. Big thanks to Shaun and Dave for looking after the cars all day and good luck to Ian as he challenges for the RF1000 Forest championship. There is some excellent footage of the stages from various competitors on youtube if interested.