

Manx National Rally 2014
Dan Boardman/Steve Coombes
Honda Civic Type R
37th O/All, 1st Class A7



Any plans for an early night on Wednesday to keep us fresh for a full day's recce on the Thursday evaporated as a judder from the front brakes of the rally car meant we spent well into the early hours making the front N/S disc sit properly on the front hub. Judder fixed though

Thursday was recce day and this started early. Dan wanted to make the notes from scratch so I knew it was going to be a long day. We started at half 8 and finished at 5pm, didn't stop once yet we'd only completed 4 out of the 7 stages. There was also a lot of work to do writing up the notes so whilst Dan and the lads worked on the car I tried to make sense of a book full of scribbles. Sometime around quarter to 2 in the morning I called it a night as there was still a morning of recce to do on the Friday as well as the actual event on Friday evening.

Friday started just as early as Thursday had done. We quickly recce'd the final 3 stages and I spent the afternoon finishing off the re-write of the notes. Luckily everything made sense so it wasn't too bad, just time consuming. There was just enough time to get something to eat and get changed before we headed off to Port Erin and the first stage.

We had never been in the car together and were completely unsure of each other's ability. Dan was also unsure of the car as it was only his second event in it, surely the short Port Erin stage would give us a chance to settle and learn. Yeah Right!!! SS1 started well and it was great to be going fast through the streets of the town. Cold tyres and soft suspension didn't help us. Around half way through the stage the lamp pod came loose and we got a puncture. It was a baptism of fire for sure. We changed the puncture, re-secured the lamp pod and stiffened the front suspension all within the 12 minutes road time we were given as we made it to SA2 bang on our minute. I had a tool roll stuffed in my rally bag and a car jack stuck under my legs as we entered the second stage. Not the best of ways to read the notes but we made it through SS2 with no issues.

SS3 (St Marks) had a 45 minute delay. This allowed us to remove the lamp pod so it didn't get damaged and put all the tools from our puncture change away. Unfortunately though this meant we attacked the stage in the dark, just on headlights. We were also starting at 30 Second intervals in order to get the rally back on track. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Go. Over the first half of the stage we got into a good rhythm. The notes flowed and Dan went for it. We even caught, passed and pulled out a gap on our class rival in a Honda Civic which had started 30 seconds in front of us. Shortly after half way we dropped a rear wheel into the grass verge on a 4R. This collected a load of mud in the wheel meaning we had massive vibration at high speed. It was enough to slow us as our class rival re-passed us. We kept pace with them only for them to go off about half a mile from the end. Luckily they were ok but the car will need a bit of attention.



Service was frantic as we checked the rear suspension, adjusted the shocks and fitted the lamp pod so it wouldn't come loose. We made it though and off to Marine Drive and SS4. This was slippier than we expected as there was a lot of gravel on the road that we hadn't noticed. Half way through it started to rain, not much, but enough to make us cautious on our slicks. Dan also hit the wing mirror on the passenger side. No damage but something he would now do on every chicane.

During the drivers briefing the C of C had warned us about SS5 (Parville) and in the wrong conditions it can be very slippery. Well when we arrived it was the wrong conditions and the wrong tyres. Slippery didn't do it justice. It was treacherous. Taking it very easy we slotted 5R past the

merge, sideways, then back the other way, then anyway the car wanted to go for about 200m before we eventually found some grip. Then we lost grip, found it, lost it. Well you get the picture. It has to be the slowest I have been whilst being competitive on a stage. Everyone was the same, but credit to Dan. He got us out safely. A lot of others didn't make it.

When we got to the end SS6 had been cancelled. I must admit we were slightly relieved. 14 miles in the rain, on slicks after that wasn't something to look forward to. By the time we got back it was 03:00 in the morning. Up at 07:00 so not much sleep again, but at least we had made it to the end of the first leg.

Leg 2 had the famous Druidale and Baldwins stages which I had been looking forward to. Cut slicks were the tyre for our first attack at these stages. SS7 (Druidale) was quite damp. We had a steady run, but were hampered by the suspension that needs some major attention now the event has finished. More slow speed damping and less high speed damping is needed.

SS8 (Knocksharry) was a great stage for us. It flowed well and we caught two cars on the stage. Both pulled over straight away so we didn't get impeded at all. You could tell it had gone well as we were smiling when we got to the finish.

SS9 was The Baldwins. The chance of going down the stage that I have seen many times on TV was fantastic. 12 minutes of flat out rallying. Awesome! There were no major problems (apart from the wing mirror and the straw bale) as we made it to service with big smiles whilst slowly moving up the leaderboard.



Wets were fitted at service and it was the right choice for the next two stages. First was our second run at Marine Drive. Again it rained but at least this time we had the grip. Actually we had too much grip. As we made our way around one of the chicanes Dan clipped it with the front near side wing (and mirror, again) causing some minor damage. Dan blamed the fact he was used to his old car being 6 inches narrower. Then our second run at Parville. The notes had been altered to reflect the lack of grip. Despite this, us being on wets and there being a lot less water than on the Friday night, it was still like driving on ice. Again Dan did a great job of getting us round and out of the stage. He definitely worked on that stage. I will remember both runs on this stage due to the amount of carnage it created. Cars off everywhere! Never seen as many cars stopped on a stage as I did on this one.

On our way into Service a Mk II Escort tried to get in front of us but we resisted. This would play a part later on in the rally. We decided to stick to wets for our last 3 stages as there were some menacing clouds on the horizon and there was a lot of water on the stages during our first run. With hind sight cut slicks would have worked, but hind sight is a great thing.

SS12 was Druidale again. Dan was talking to Paul Bird (Rally Leader) at the start of the stage. He'd had a big off and warned us about the mud on the stage just up the road. He had obviously had a big one. Round a 4L there was a section of banking that had been quite heavily impacted. 50m further on the road was covered in mud and his Ford Focus WRC was another 50m down the road on the other side of the banking, totally destroyed. As for us, "Not again" I said to Dan as he hit the wing mirror on the straw bale. The car handling got worse as we went through the stage. The Wet tyres started to struggle as they got warm and the suspension also struggled as we pushed on.

After the stage was our moment of luck. Remember the Mk II Escort that tried to get in front at service. We had to stop on the way to SS13 and this allowed the Escort to get in front. In to the stage they went. Then it was our turn. Up to the start line. Time card signed. 10 seconds to go. 5,4,3 Stage stopped. A car had gone off blocking the stage so the stage was stopped. After a 15 minute delay we were off and with a clean run through the stage had a really good run.

SS14 was our best stage of the event. Luck was shining on us again as another 5 minute delay meant we had another clean run with no one on the stage in front of us. The notes were spot on. Dan was on a mission. It was rallying as it should be. There is a great picture of us with all 4 wheels off the ground as we go over the crossroads near the end of the stage. At the end of the stage it was big smiles and handshakes because it had gone so well. Then the comment of the event, Dan said "Did you see that bird?" "What Bird?" I replied. "The bird we hit" Dan said. "We hit a bird?" I questioned. Dan said "Look at the window screen." Sure enough on the window screen was the remains of a bird we had hit. As normal I missed it as I had my head down calling the notes.

We had made it to the end, finished 37th O/all and won our class. Not bad for my first time on the event, with a new driver and with no sleep. After the celebratory night out I had managed 18 hours sleep in 4 days but the buzz of the event had kept me going. I must thank Dan for chauffeuring me around the island and our service team of Ollie, Karl and Chris for doing a fantastic job making the car run perfectly. The Marshals braved some horrendous conditions on both Friday and Saturday, keeping the event running. Thanks.



Not sure what is next. Rally Isle of Man maybe?

Steve

Gemini5

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