

Flying SCOTSMAN

LONDON TO EDINBURGH

The vintage rally crowd proves that the UK's roads can be some of the most challenging in the world

Words: Glyn Tucker Photography: Gerard Brown



A chill wind whips through the trees above the Members' Banking of Brooklands; drivers tug the toggles of their duffle-coats and flying-jackets, and fire up their engines... ahead is the longest rally-drive for pre-war cars in Britain, a hard, tough, dramatic route from London to Edinburgh.

Now in its second year, The Flying Scotsman is exclusively reserved for the vintage-minded. Crews under starter's orders have come from 12 different countries; the cars range from a 1910 seven-litre Chalmers and an only slightly younger Franklin, both with no sign of front brakes. Big-banger Bentleys, the bassoon-like baritones in the orchestra, join in the cacophony, followed on by the higher-revving black Riley MPH; with a chassis that is just the next one on from the Brooklands-racer 'White Riley', it's rather fitting that this rarity has some ERA mods under the bonnet. This little black Riley with its distinctive flowing wings looks purposeful, and driver Bob Meijer wears an equally serious frown.

The pea-green Talbot, ex-Fox and Nichols Alpine Rally car, that helped lift the team-prize in '32, fires up; and Peter Livanos presses the button on the dash of the Alfa 8C Zagato, and the

supercharged straight-eight joins in. Any Alfa Romeo 8C is a rare sight on a rally, but this is not just any old Alfa, oh no: this is the very car that won Le Mans in 1935.

The Flying Scotsman has attracted 50 starters for the run to Edinburgh, and with former Spitfire pilot Willy Cave, veteran co-driver of BMC and Rover rally teams and the oldest regular rally competitor in Britain, on the first clock of the event, cars make their way a few yards to the bottom of Test Hill in front of the Brooklands club house.

This is a sprint up a deceptive hill, the steepest hillclimb in Britain, with a section that is no less than one-in-three. Fastest-ever climb by a pre-war car is a record set by a chain-gang Frazer Nash in a remarkably spritely 7.5 seconds, but with such a long drive ahead nobody was out to bust records today. For one thing, that chain gang member didn't have to stop at the top on wet leaves. Fastest time is 11 seconds, shared by four cars, with the Alfa merely warming up the oil with a time just three seconds slower, but sounding absolutely glorious as the supercharger cuts in.

Crews now have the job of getting to Henley, and on to Peppard

Common, for a time control at the Red Lion, tucked behind the trees on the green. This hostelry is famous for its sausage-sarnies on crisp brown bread, but nobody has time for a late breakfast. It's a death-or-glory dash to get here on time and snatch a stamp in the time card from one of the marshals hunched over the table, who hand out free slabs of chocolate to those who don't look like whingers. The sheriff of these parts, marshal Goddard, has a hair-trigger finger on the clock that is so quick on the draw that a shoal of cars leave bemoaning that the day has hardly started but already they have been shot up with penalties.

The steam-powered *Flying Scotsman* was the first locomotive to hit 100mph in Britain (officially – it's long been claimed that the GWR loco *City of Truro* bested 100mph in 1904, 30 years before the *Flying Scotsman*, but this is open to question) and it set records for the dash from London to Edinburgh. The petrolhead's version is slower, but still a challenge. To cover this 700-mile route you need a reliable car, a quick-thinking navigator and a determined driver.

The route is something that would challenge anyone in a modern car. Try to keep up with this mob in a Hertzmobile and you'll get tired eyes, tired arms; you'll be hungry, thirsty and irritable; and you'll be doing it on radial tyres, with disc front brakes, a heater that works and with power steering. Most of those around you are in things that Mr Ackerman was trying to revolutionise, and nobody appears with a steering wheel of less than 20 inches.

Man's work, for sure... except that a couple of head-turning blondes in a Bentley on their first-ever rally are showing quite a few blokes how to do it. They keep coming up smiling, and while the lippy and the eyeliner get smudged at times they push on impressively, with Trina Walsh and Sue Shoesmith in another Bentley also eager to run over any man who so much as thinks of hesitating at the first river crossing as cars head into Lincolnshire.



The end of Day One contains a few hours of glorious English lanes – Northamptonshire, Rutland and Lincolnshire's finest; great road-rally country around here – and a time trial section that requires a disciplined right foot and a partner who can look at a stopwatch, keep an eye on a trip-meter, study a map and follow a route-book while watching the road. Nick Jarvis and Chris Winter in their smart SS100 Jaguar show how it's done and drop just four seconds out of seven secret timing points, while Charles and Kit Graves in a Bentley are only three further seconds adrift. After that, weary crews park up on the outskirts of Grantham.

Day Two: The Breton Woods hotel proves a comfortable watering hole. After the chef's breakfast speciality of ultra-crispy bacon (baked in an oven), fluffy scrambled egg, giant mushrooms that taste like real mushrooms, and a mug of cocoa, we are now braced to start Day Two.

Glancing at the results during breakfast suggest it's all to play for. Last year's winner Paul Carter, who was third on the last Peking Paris in this open Derby Bentley two-seater, heads the leaderboard, with John Bayliss on the clocks. Clearly a clever sort of chap, Bayliss was the winning navigator on the '97 Peking-Paris. There are plenty giving chase, eager to prick the confidence of these two and bring 'em down just a peg or two.

Carter and Bayliss have penalties of just three minutes 29 seconds. John Abel and Steve Bradley in a Lagonda LG45, with a lot →



Clockwise from facing page

Paul Carter and John Bayliss pour on the coal in their open Derby Bentley; starter's flag is lowered on Car 1, the Brescia Bugatti of Nigel Williams and Bill l'Anson; Robert Abrey and Julian Riley in their 1910 Chalmers put in a stunning effort; Jayne Wignall and Kevin Savage finished second overall in Sunbeam 20hp.



‘Empty roads so remote, there are only four sets of traffic lights in three days’

Clockwise from top
Caroline and Scott Greenhalgh attack Yorkshire stream in Alvis 4.3; Talbot of David Thomson/Gareth Holding snatches third place; Frazer Nash of Bill Ainscough finished up a tree; Aston Martin of Alan and Margaret Beardshaw gropes for traction in Lincolnshire.

less grunt, are 36 seconds adrift. In third, the Talbot 105 of David Thomson is one second behind, and six seconds ahead of Jayne Wignall and Kevin Savage in their Sunbeam 20hp Sports, which is eight seconds clear of Philip Haslam’s Aston Martin heading the small-car class, and Filip Bourgo’s Bentley Special. It’s a tight scrap – just seven seconds split the best three.

The image of vintage rallying might be genteel, but to listen to those hunched over their morning marmalade it’s clear that the challenge of beating Carter is anything but. Everyone is in mourning for the loss of Paul Wignall, who with Nigel Raeburn was fancied to do brilliantly as potential chief Carter crusher, but who failed to get to Brooklands due to a cracked cylinder head.

Interestingly, in the Pioneer Category for Ultra-Oldies, which has its own separate leader-board, the 1910 Chalmers of Robert Abrey and Julian Riley is battling away at the Vauxhall 30-98 of Nigel Gray. These two would be in the top ten of the Vintageants. Abrey is having the drive of his life and is on a real charge.

The route-plan devised by Alan Smith and Kim Bannister was schemed to offer the very best of rural roads, with great swathes of countryside but blended with a degree of cunning. Crews now faced 30 miles of demanding roads, with no fewer than nine checkpoints where time was recorded. No margin, then, for taking a wrong turning. Franco Lupi, from Switzerland, dropped out of a chance of a promising result by missing two of the timing points in his six-litre Bentley. John Abel lost second place here, as a wrong slot totally ruined his and Bradley’s chance of hauling in Carter.

Lunch at Eden Camp proved a fascinating break – just outside Malton, an ex-prisoner-of-war camp has been restored and is now home to a jumble of wartime artefacts. The Italian and German crews on the rally were in admiration of ‘the way we build things to last’ and puzzled over the English fascination with the grim reminders of 60 years ago: Spitfire, Hurricane, old tanks, and huts now given over to reminders of conflicts past, including a clever recreation of the inside of a submarine; a tin mug of tea with Vera

Lynn belting out *Run Rabbit Run* proved a fascinating interlude.

Then it was into Yorkshire moors and the countryside of James Herriot, and *Emmerdale*, filmed in these parts, and several streams to cross – which caught out those who failed to take seriously the pre-rally preparation notes to waterproof engines with bathroom silicone sealer around the electrics.

The rally said goodbye to Bill Ainscough and his Frazer Nash, as drum brakes full of water from storming a ford failed to drain out in time for the first corner, and the little Nash went straight on, refusing all command to stop, crashed through a dry-stone wall, and then bounced over the boulders down a slope. The crew decided in unison that it was time to bale out and rolled out of the Nash just as it began to clear the stones. They watched it bounce down into a field and come to rest halfway up a tree, wrecked. A wheel fell off in the excitement, rolled down after the car and bounced up to rest in the tree above the bonnet.

The Livanos Alfa, up to seventh, now took a wrong slot and dropped out of the top ten. Large crowds gathered at the market square in Helmesley and at the Queen Catherine Hotel in Osmotherley. The day ended near Darlington, but Carter still held command, 38 seconds ahead of Jayne Wignall’s Sunbeam, and Jonathan Davies in the Riley 12/4 in third.

Day Three: With two Special Tests and four Regularities on the third day, there was still a chance that Carter could be beaten. He was well and truly trounced by Jayne, and the Riley crew, on the first, but, then Bayliss gave him a prod with a sharp pencil and he flew round the second, beating all by a clear ten seconds.

On through Bewcastle the route headed for a time control in The Grapes Hotel in Newcastleton, the start of a truly fantastic road section over the mountains to Langholm, which all crews managed without loss of time. The road past St Mary’s Loch, and the Megget and Talla Reservoirs, proved a spectacular final drive.

The battle for second and third overall was all down to the performances on the four demanding regularity sections. David Thomson and Garteth Holding in the Talbot proved to be the best of the day, losing only 14 seconds, beating the Riley pair by one second to claim third behind Jayne Wignall. That second was important: it was also the difference in clinching the team prize.

Bagpipes swirled as weary crews rose up the drive of the Delmahoy Hotel. ‘Get Carter!’ That had been everyone’s ambition. If Jayne Wignall could have found another 28 seconds, in three days of driving a route-book with empty roads so remote there were only four sets of traffic-lights from start to finish, she might just have managed it. 