**Flying Scotsman 2019**

**Day 01. Ambleside - Slaley Hall 190 Miles.**

There were two past winners of the Flying Scotsman on the start line this morning, Andrew Davies (2011) and Paul Crosby (2017). Under the circumstances they both looked cool calm and collected, and ready for the challenge of the next three days. They remaining tight lipped and poker faced however about their chances of taking a second win away from the Scotsman. There were also plenty of “nearly men”, for want of a better expression, who have never tasted this victory and this year they must fancy their chances once again.

Bill Cleyndert for example is one case in point, he and his trusty Ford - Betsy have graced the event six times now and has had some epic battles along the way with the likes of William Medcalf. He’s never stood on the top step however and doubtless this will have crossed his mind as he took the flag this morning.

Similarly, David Thomson and Alan Smith, who have only ever missed one edition, and have come agonisingly close to a win, waited patiently for their due time trying not to think about what it would take to move up to the top step of the podium.

Jim Gately, is another *nearly* man, albeit with one big win to his credit at last years Alpine Trial. But this year his campaign took a serious knock even before the flag had dropped,. Tony Brooks, his navigator extraordinaire tripped in the carpark during scrutineering and broke his ankle.

Whilst Jim was waiting for his due time, Tony was therefore awaiting his turn in the operating theatre. His ballroom dancing might have to take a back seat for a few weeks but luckily for Jim, a substitute navigator in the shape of Andrew Duerden was only a phone call away and was seamlessly able to step into the breach. We all wish Tony a speedy recovery and expect to see him lined up with the rest of us in Beijing.

In an event like this, there’s a fine line between pressing on and charging hard whilst keeping a clean sheet on the Regularities and this is the balance which will have to be worked out between the crew and their car and how well they have achieved this will become evident on Sunday night.

Whatever their exceptions and aspirations though, the crews and their cars were flagged away at 7.46am sharp by Patrick Burke, the Hero MD with Brian Whyte stamping the time card. There was a busy day in the book, with five Tests and five Regularities to negotiate over a route which totalled 190 miles.

The first Tests were at Holker Hall and comprised a sprint, twice round the grounds, with a tricky yet clearly worded split in the middle of the section. In the event it seemed that either some of the navigators had mis read the small print or some of the drivers hadn’t heard the instructions clearly enough. Whatever the reason however, this parkland witnessed some entertaining tyre squeals and some very rapid changes of direction so as to make the chicanes and the stop astride boxes.

The neatly manicured grounds of Holker then gave way to the wilder open roads of the Western Lake District and the first of two pre lunch Regularities at Subberthwaite and Cold Fell, and another two Tests at the Rowrah circuit.

A coffee halt at Irton Hall had given the crews a short break mid morning, but the lunch at Armathwaite was where the serious business of refuelling the inner man took place and by the time the dessert had been cleared away, everyone was raring to get going once again.

There was blue sky above us, snow capped mountains ahead and a ribbon of empty black tarmac upon which, Anthony Preston had set another great route from the Eastern fringes of Cumbria, through County Durham and into Northumberland.

As the morning had been, it was to be a busy afternoon. The Regularities came in quick succession at Raughton Head and Eden Valley, after which we climbed up the Hartside Pass, took a quick break in Alston before tackling the Allendale Regularity - the last of the day - and heading into the Quarry test in Eastgate.

The final twenty miles of the day were a delightful blast over Stanhope Common and Edmundbyers Moor and led straight into the large carpark of Slaley Hall and at the day’s end, the leaderboard shows that Paul Crosby and Ali Procter are still getting the aforementioned balance right as they are leading the rally once again with Bill Cleyndert and Leigh Powley snapping at their heels in second. Clint and Brad Smith meanwhile are third.

Tomorrow promises to be longer and harder so no-one is taking anything for granted tonight.

Syd Stelvio