

Flying Scotsman 2019

Day 03. Turnberry - Gleneagles 169 Miles.

The day of reckoning

It might be part of the same hotel chain but one thing's for sure, Turnberry is not exactly the same as Mar a Largo and this was witnessed by the new day which dawned misty, grey and chilly. We think that the two properties might also differ in the breakfast they serve with the offerings of the Floridian guest house likely running in second place to the haggis, bacon, eggs and black pudding which filled the counters in the same *mirrored and chandeliered* dining room as we ate in last night.

As this was the final day of a hard-fought event there was tension in the air as the crews set about their full Scottish breakfasts, and outside under the equine-themed water fountain, a small knot of nicotine addicts stood and discussed what was to come. They all agreed that it was likely to be a hard day, the top of the leaderboard was too close for it not to be, the weather had turned slightly - it was cold and windy - and there were four Tests and four Regularities crammed into 169 miles.

The first two Tests were run through the Turnberry Airfield and were typically short and sharp, favouring agility over brute force. Some rapid-fire *cone calls* from the navigators were required to successfully negotiate the narrow course, as described in the route book.

Getting out onto the open road was therefore something of a relief and indeed, the first Regularity was enjoyed by all of the crews but particularly those who drove the Crosbie Hills in a Nash. A coffee break in Kelburn Castle allowed some warmth to creep back into the crews before they tackled the Barcraigs Reservoir Regularity, which climbed through a farmyard and rolled along a lengthy section of slippery green lanes. Another Regularity at Caldervan kept the pressure on with three speed changes along some very broken tarmac.

The lunch halt in Callander was a welcome sight and for most of the rally, this marked the point at which they could begin to dare to believe that they were set to roll over the finish line and take the credit for a job well done.

For those at the top of the results sheet though, this wasn't an option, with five crews still in with a shout of a top three placing, none of them could relax one little bit as there was a long Regularity and a pair of Tests to get through before Gleneagles.

In the event, there was drama and the first place was decided by a nail-biting display of mechanical sympathy and coolness under pressure and it was Bill Cleyndert who just held on to snatch the overall in the Vintageant class.

"This win has been a long time coming and I've been on every step of the podium now, but for my first Flying Scotsman, it was more a case of just getting through it. We didn't have a clue what we were doing and when Philip Young saw the car his comment was "you're a bloody idiot".

Although I've learned a lot over every edition, today's win wasn't an easy one by any means. Every Scotsman is tough and this time - on the last day, and on the penultimate test - we heard sounds of impending drive shaft failure".

Bill knows his cars inside out, he's well known for his love of tinkering with them and his ability to get them back on the road by whatever means necessary to finish a rally. So, when he thought that he heard some crunching from his transmission, he knew that something wasn't right.

"We knew that the Achilles heel of Betsy is her driveshaft so we had to nurse the car through the last two sections and along the road into Gleneagles".

"We could see our lead slipping away with every mile but unbelievably, it held itself together until we took the flag but the car was in a really bad way and in fact, as we parked up for the photographs it all let go and we had to push her into position.

This means that I can't drive home now but I can enjoy a few drinks this evening".

Bill's navigator Leigh Powley was having trouble taking it all in as he has also been on every step of the podium and was clearly emotional after taking such an important win in what was a new car to him.

"It's been a long time coming, this win; and when we entered the event I expected a ride in a Bentley, but Bill called to say that the car wasn't quite ready and that Betsy had been saddled up ready for another ride.

Given her size and shape though I was slightly concerned to hear this and I thought that maybe I was a bit mad to take it on but, I set to getting myself organised; I bought a pair of goggles (as there's no windscreen) and sorted out where I'd be able to stow my things and accepted that it was going to be hard.

Once I'd settled in though we had an amazing time and it quickly felt that we were destined to do well in that car. We've had an absolute blast".

Michel Laarman was similarly delighted with his win in the Pioneer category with his Knox R.

"This has been another wonderful experience and a great adventure we had a few problems, we narrowly avoided a bus, we had trouble with our brakes and a bit of a fuel issue. I think that the key to this win was good navigation with just the right amount of speed. The car is just brilliant". Maryan Greif, his navigator agreed.

From just about the oldest car on the podium to the youngest crew. This year saw Theo Hunt and James Galliver move up to third place overall and Theo spoke for both of them and said that *'we are extremely happy to be where we are. It's our third year and we were thinking that maybe we'd get a top ten place.*

We did get lucky and we were consistently there or thereabouts for most of the time which allowed us to catch up at the very end.

My navigator James did an amazing job and we made up quite a lot a lot of time on the tests as well. We're over the moon and we can't wait to have a proper crack at it next year'.

Once the cars had been parked up and secured for the night it was then time for some fun and, in the Gleneagles ballroom, Tony Jardine stepped up to the mic' to expertly compare the prize giving whilst the rest of us enjoyed a dinner of fillet steak and truffle mash washed down by some very agreeable red's and whites.

As well as the overall awards there were some specials given to those crews who had, in the opinion of the organisers, gone just that little bit further than was strictly necessary.

The Spirit of the Rally Trophy went to Max & Julie Stephenson, The Concours d'Elegance to Andrew Laing & Sandy Mitchell Whilst the Best Dressed Crew was given over to the very dapper Bjorn Schage & Bjorn Lie.

Whatever they won though, all of the crews who came to collect their winnings were fulsome in their praise of the route, the organisation, and their fellow competitors.

At the end of a memorable evening, Patrick Burke, Hero MD, closed the proceedings by announcing that entries for 2020 had just opened which was the cue for Anthony Preston to set his alarm. Tomorrow might prove to be another busy day in the route planning department.

Syd Stelvio.