

Pre-Start and scrutineering. Low Wood, Ambleside.

Sat, almost at the head of Windermere, the largest lake in England, the Low Wood Resort today played host to the pre-start formalities of the 11th Flying Scotsman. This is the first ERA event of 2019 and the sense of pent up energy was palpable both in the bar last night and over breakfast in the morning.

92 crews had descended on this most idyllic corner of the English Lake District to sign on, meet and greet old friends and new, and to take possession of their time cards, route books and maps, which will come to be their most valuable possessions until they reach the chequered flag in Gleneagles on Sunday afternoon.

According to these books, some 600 miles of the best motoring in the land lies between the start and the finish and, as usual it looks like Anthony Preston, the route master, has put together a sensational selection of highways and byways with more than a smattering of Tests and Regularities thrown in to keep the leader board looking lively and, in true Darwinian fashion to ensure that it's only the fittest who survive.

The first action of the event, however, was down by the lake shore where, as dozens of sleek cruising yachts were being taken from their winter storage and refloated for the new season, dozens of vintage cars were soon queuing alongside them to be *scrutineered*.

With the crews of both types admiring the others equipment, the Low Wood bay area soon became the scene of much mutual admiration.

Thankfully, the weather today was kind and whilst there was snow on the fells which ring the lake, it didn't rain. This made the job of the sweep crews checking the cars for compliance and safety so much more pleasant.

Obviously, with such an eclectic mix of old cars, there were one or two minor issues to sort. There was some excessive front wheel play from the Frazer Nash BMW 328 of Bertie and Charlotte van Houtte and the leaky carburettors on the Aston Martin of Thomas Maechler and Andrea Scherz but, the combined might of Peter Banham, Andy Inskip, Tony Jones, Bob Harrod, Rob Kitchen, Russ Smith and Rob Dominy made light work of such trifles.

Once their car had been declared ready to rally, then the crews were able to proceed to the next stage of the registration process in the pop-up Rally Office where, Eleonora Piccolo, Annette Daley and Lizzie Lewis were taking signatures and handing out lanyards with their usual efficiency.

Then, clutching their newly issued rally bags, the crews were free to relax and take in all that the hotel had to offer before the sumptuous welcome dinner where Patrick Burke, the Hero MD formally welcomed everyone to the event before handing over to Martyn Taylor the Deputy Clerk of the course for a brief pep talk.

There's an early start tomorrow and a long day ahead so tonight the bar was perhaps a little quieter than it might have been

Finally, we're delighted to announce that, in true Flying Scotsman fashion, the experienced rally crew of Andrew Bailey and Philippa Spiller officially hitched their rolling stock together last week so, this rally is a sort of a mini honeymoon for them along with their new Bentley Super Sports and, we wish them all many happy miles together.

Words by Syd Stelvio