



Syd Stelvio Rally Report Flying Scotsman 2022 Day One - Picture Postcard Rallying

'They're gonna end up in hospital' chuckled a bemused onlooker as he observed the open top vintage cars cutting a bead through the snow-covered landscape. 'I'll sell them my hat and coat, but I still reckon they'll end up with hypothermia' the man continued. I suppose to the uninitiated it must appear somewhat foolhardy to be out in such machines, when the countryside is decked in white and the air is cold enough to condense the breath of even the smallest animal, such as it was this morning, when the Flying Scotsman 2022 roared into action.

The start at Slaley Hall was particularly frigid, and as car no 1 was flagged away, the 1922 Bentley of Lieven van Hoylandt + Wim De Sutter, no doubt flag waver Eleonora Piccolo, HERO-ERA's hospitality chief, was dreading the prospect of continuing the job for the other 92 machines waiting to start. Any thoughts about the cold amongst the competitors though would soon be forgotten, as the event began with instant action, with a test around the golf course at Slaley demanding immediate concentration. Some took it steady, some took it very steady and some, like Bill Cleyndert in his Model A Special, "Betsy", came out of the blocks hot, with navigator Elise Whyte screaming the instructions over the silver machines boisterous exhaust tone.

The sky was threatening as the cars left Slaley, heavy and grey and as we picked a path through the countryside flurries of snow blew through the fields as the landscape undulated along the ancient contours. Soon though the clouds broke, and by the time the remnants of Hadrian's Wall were reached a glorious sun shone through the pale blue atmosphere. Against the white landscape it was magical, and perhaps for car 23, the Lea-Francis of Kurt Vanderspinnen + Bjorn Vanoverschelde it was all a bit too enchanting, as they appeared to miss the first regularity entirely, although they wouldn't be the only one's to suffer in the snow, as later in the morning car 38, the stunning Singer Le Mans prototype, one of just three ever built and currently crewed by Chris Wilks and David Creech, would suffer mechanical gremlins and retire for the day. We all hope to see them out again in the blue flying machine in the morning.

The compass needle pointed north for most of the day, as the cavalcade of rally cars headed for Scotland, and strangely as the latitude increased so did the temperature and the level of sunshine, seemingly against the common laws of nature. But as the border was crossed the mercury rose and although still only measuring in the single figures it was deceptively warm and the snow was replaced by the green of the rolling hills just north of Kielder Forest.





England was behind us, as was the first test and first regularity, but there would be a further two regularities to contest before lunch.

These would be conducted under yet more sun filled skies, as the maps directed a course through gorgeous hills with snow capped mountains in the distance. Clear meltwater streams sparkled in the light, and no doubt there were moments of clarity for people as it sunk in at just how fortunate we were to be rallying in vintage motor cars, on such tremendous roads in these conditions. It was like driving through a constantly evolving picture postcard, and one could be forgiven for forgetting that there was a competition going on.

But the competition was going on, and as the morning unravelled by lunchtime William Medcalf and Andy Pullan were top of the pops, in the instantly recognisable red Bently SuperSport machine, with a narrow lead over Martin Hunt's Frazer Nash BMW 328, with navigator Bob Mannix, and then Paul Dyas and Ian Tullie occupying third place in Pauls Bentley.

The afternoon was largely about covering some ground, although there would be the reward of a further regularity and two tests to punctuate the miles. There was also tremendous crowds of people out to see the cars through particularly on regularity no 4, whoever had conducted the PR in this area had clearly done a sterling job. The last test of the day married up old and new, with the vintage cars venturing onto a drift racing circuit, heavens above! Some would take this quite seriously indeed, with much rubber and smoke being expelled from tortured tyres. A typically ostentatious display of driving skill was laid on by Theo Hunt, with navigator Jimmy Galliver struggling to hold onto the road book as the Frazer Nash rep was thrown this way and that. The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree, and Theo's father Martin was also putting on some display in his Frazer Nash BMW, at one point threatening to rotate the machine entirely, although in true drifting style he held onto the raging beast.

By the time the scores for the day were totted up top spot was still occupied by William Medcalf, but now with Paul Crosby and Ali Proctor in second place, 13 seconds adrift. Martin Hunt and Bob Mannix are now third. It is early days though, albeit we are already one third done and sadly there is already one definite retirement, car 54, the Bentley 3-4 ½ of Andrew and Ann Boland. Tomorrow the Cairngorm's beckon, and the weather is forecast to take a downturn, with the predicted chance of precipitation being at 80%, as if competing in these cars wasn't difficult enough...

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