

**Featured
Owner**
Ian Mitchell



Ilkley Jubilee - Taken on a rather wet road section

Photo: Tony Large Photographic.

Historic Rallying a Drivers Eye View

I was quite surprised and intrigued to pick up my copy of the September 06 AROC newsletter and find Andrews article on our exploits on the Northern Historic Rallying circuit. In the hope that you found Andrews thoughts entertaining (I did!) I thought you may find the view from the right hand side interesting too, we are a few months further down the line now and have a few more events under our belt.

Just to set the scene and recap a bit, this all started when I decided I wanted a bit more out of the ownership experience of my 1750 GTV than a few Sunday drives and meetings. I didn't want to go circuit racing as the financial commitment would be way too high, Sprints and Hillclimbs were a possibility, still are in fact, but I was drawn to the idea of Historic Rallying during a visit to the Historic motor show at Stoneleigh last February. The financial commitment was relatively small, it didn't seem like the chances of damaging the car or it's occupants were very high either (first mistake!) and although I have never competed in Motorsport I come from a family who got quite involved in Rallying back in the seventies and eighties and I felt reasonably comfortable with the idea. Next step was finding a Navigator and the obvious idea to me was a post on the AROC forum, I got a couple of responses and as Andrew was first it only seemed fair. We arranged a meeting and a quick test drive with each other and I think both realised we could work well together. Rallying is very much a team effort and Historic road rallying more so than most, as the road sections are often regularities, which do place a big demand on the skills of the Navigator.

So we were a team, we made the decision to do the Ilkley Jubilee Run in early April 06 and as there were only a few weeks to go I set about preparing the car as quickly as I could. We didn't need much (Trip Meter, Fire Extinguisher, Battery isolator, Second throttle spring, fire proofing, mud flaps.... Etc) but there wasn't much time either and it got a bit stressful as the big day loomed. The scrutineering went well they even passed my miniscule front number plate and we found ourselves on the start line for our first ever test. I had a few moments to think that I was in my mid forties and this would be the first time I had ever driven a car on a competitive event. 1 Minute 1 second later and I wondered why I had waited so long!

Andrews Article pretty much covered the Jubilee event we both enjoyed ourselves immensely, Andrew navigation was pretty much spot on, after a few teething troubles we settled in to the regularities quite well, I enjoyed the technical challenge of keeping to a set speed and particularly enjoyed the times when we had to go quite hard to make up time. The tests were something of a shock though, we were quite unprepared for how confusing the diagrams were, all the tests on the Ilkley are blind you can't see the layout of the cones until you arrive at them, travelling pretty damn quickly and usually on very loose surfaces, we eventually found out that there is no point going fast if you go wrong and we ended up failing no less than 6 of the 11 tests, not good. I reckon we lost about 10 minutes a massive amount of time, we could have walked them as quick!. Slightly more worrying were the surfaces, some were quite smooth but others were so rough we had no option but to crawl over them, I was beginning to regret that HBE kit and the 40mm drop in ride height, not to mention my naive lack of foresight in not buying a sump guard. All things considered finishing 12th out of 20 on the 'run', and comparing reasonably well against the more vastly more experienced teams in the 'rally' section we went home exhausted but happy.

Next outing was the Berwick Classic, just three weeks later, a brilliant event split over two days, we elected just to run on the second day which consisted of 15 tests linked by non competitive road sections, no regularity this time. I thought the Ilkley was rough but this was something else!, Mainly set in farmyards the test weren't as complex (It's easier to see a barn or a silo than a cone!) and we set a time on almost every one, just one fail (Not sure why even now!). We were still running with minimal ground clearance and no sumpguard, so the times suffered accordingly. Where it was smooth enough we did manage to give it some stick. It's a bizarre sport is this though, on one test we ran at full tilt through a Cow Byre..... Full of Cows!, they were fenced in but like all rally spectators leaned right out to get the best view, pulling there heads back in just in time! We ended up 14th out the 20 doing the Sunday section, but considering the level of competition, who remembers Louise Aitken Walker?,

(She was fifth) we were quite pleased. Only after I had driven the 100 miles back home did I realise at some point I had torn the front Anti Roll bar off it's captive nuts, destroying a drop link attachment in the process...told you it was rough!.



Berwick Classic - Typical farmyard test on the Berwick classic, some of the cars had 'air' under all four wheels over that, we had to be careful as without a sump guard it would have been nasty.

It was clear I was going to have to sort some issues on the Car and we passed over the Viking Classic, offering to Marshal. It was quite fun to watch other people going the wrong way round the cones, even though we got drenched in the worst rain of the Summer.

By the time the Cumbrian Caper came around in June, we had a bit more ground clearance and a Sump Guard, the Handbrake was still a bit iffy though. But at least we could attack the tests on this almost mini special stage rally. This did seem like real rallying, forests and parkland, with dirt and gravel tracks and some pretty hairy speeds. I managed to do a full 360 spin through nettle patch on the lowther park test and got stuck totally sideways with about 6" clear at each end in Greystoke forest. A few ludicrously tight car park tests an error on test one and a few more 'moments' in the forests left us languishing well down the leader board. But we hadn't broken anything and were still up for it.



Cumbrian Classic - The glorious Lowther Park test, nothing less than a short special stage, very fast but very slippery in the wet. Still insufficient ground clearance and road tyres.

In August we turned our hand to something subtly different the Devils Own night rally. Most of you will have seen stage rallying and can relate to it, the test on our day events are really just short but tight stages, night rallying is different though... very different!. In days gone by a UK night rally was a very fast and dangerous event, imagine driving down a road slightly wider than a car at an *average* speed of 60mph, in the dark with no pace notes. Back in the eighties the top crews in ex 'works' rally cars would easily clean a section with no penalties hitting three figure speeds

with frightening consistency. It couldn't last and a big clamp down by the law meant that a re-think was necessary. These days it's not as daft, the today's rallies are stuck with a 30mph maximum average, so the organisers invent tighter and tighter routes to keep it difficult. On the Historic events, like the Devils, they have brought back the regularity system from the early days of the sport. Again timed to 30 mph you are tasked with driving the route as close to 30 as you can taking penalties for going too fast or too slow. Now 30 doesn't seem fast, but when the road is twisting and turning, climbing and falling with codeboards to read on the wrong sides of triangles, inside farm yards and down the dreaded 'Whites' (Un made roads) there is no way you can maintain 30 even travelling at twice that speed where you can. But the big challenge is the navigation, get that wrong and you are stuffed, you can go as fast as you like but if it's in the wrong direction you lose. period!. This is where Andrews's abilities really showed; apart from two wrong slots we were spot on all the time. One of the errors was on a neutral, so no harm done, the other was on a selective, which had been trashed for us by a by a ditched Mini anyway.



Devils Own Hotel - Our accommodation for the very short break between the night section and the Sunday daylight section. Andrew's Sprint GT acting as service barge.

The Guilia was a real joy to drive on this event and charging down a narrow tree lined road with the branches catching the roof and the Cibies illuminating the way, twin cam howling at 6000rpm in second or third, in the dead of night, for mile after mile and finding to our utter astonishment that on one section at least we had dropped just 1 second in 25 Miles, was beyond belief and the most fun you can have with your clothes on.

We hit a spot of bad luck on the last section, arriving minutes after Car 22, a very quick Mini, had put it into the ditch on an impossibly tight bend blocking the road. We managed to pull them out with a rope tied around the sump guard, but it took about 20 minutes costing us a maximum (2 minutes) on the section, the concentration suffered and to add insult to injury we wrong slotted shortly afterwards. But the important thing is we had realised, back tracked and picked up the route again without gaining the 15 minute penalty that car 29 (Sunbeam Rapier) did when they did the same thing.

It was a very tired but exhilarated pair of Alfa fans that crawled into the tent at 3.30 in the morning. But we weren't done yet!, After a strong black Coffee a bacon butty and a quick scan of the results we were back at it for another 90 miles and 14 daylight tests. In the true spirit of rallying the crew in Car 22 had limped home spent all the rest of night fixing the car and turned up ready for more in the morning. We were reasonably consistent on the tests, not particularly quick but with few errors. Close examination of the results now shows we dropped two places on the Sunday and finished the event 16th out of 31 starters. Considering the incredibly competitive nature of these events and the massive experience of most of the crews, many of who have been rallying for decades, we were pretty satisfied with that.



In the Lanes Devils own - Typical narrow lane used for the night section, here being used as a non competitive section on the Sunday. It was a typical lane like this where we came across the ditched Mini, it was so narrow we could only open one door, fortunately it was the Navigators!.

September saw us back on the daylight events with an entry in the Durham Dales historic rally, with 21 tests and a couple of short regularities it was a packed day starting at a rather nice hotel near Consett. We got off to a bizarre start, whilst queuing at the main time control I noticed the other cars were starting a bit sharpish, I remarked on this to Andrew asking if this was the first test?, 'nope just a neutral, the tests starts somewhere over there'. As we got down to the start line the car in front, a particularly hairy 911, set with it's characteristic howl going like 10 men!. We had a quick conversation with the marshal, something along the lines of 'what's he doing, this isn't a test is it?', 'yes of course, it is... three, two, one, GO'... so like everybody else we shot off down the back of the Hotel trying to match the road to the test 1 diagram only to arrive at breakneck speed into the front car park of the hotel. I anchored on realising that we had been led astray. Test 1 turned out to be quarter of a mile away. God knows what the normal residents of the hotel thought about this apparent lunacy.

Apart from some fairly fast farm road tests where we could let the car have it's head I never really got into this one, most test were a bit too twisty which doesn't suit the Guilia (or me for that matter) and we also picked up an engine problem part way round. It was a hot day and I think thrashing along at high revs yet relatively low speeds got the better of her, it was made worse by some dodgy fuel we picked up part way round. We limped home but well down the results table. The best part for us were the two regularities, which went very well with combined penalties of just 24 seconds over the twenty or thirty mile section, we would have got second if there was a separate award for it. Incidentally Russ Swift won the event in a Mini, you will have seen Russ's driving even if you didn't realise, he's the stunt driver who does the parallel parking trick. Test maximums were double the fastest time on this event, it crossed my mind that we might have done better taking a maximum on some of the tests with Russ Swift driving!. Mind you we did beat them on the long fast test 9, he must have got lost I think. Amusingly the guys from the Mini in the ditch incident turned up again but as usual broke it and had the long trek home on a borrowed trailer!

There seemed to be a bit of a lull in the calendar in the Autumn so I used the time to enhance the car a bit, a full roll cage, some Corbeau seats and a set of harnesses all added to the sense of security in the cabin and a change of rubber from Khumo's to Nokians helped the grip especially in the wet. A set of gravel tyres are planned for next year wrapped around some 15" alloys from a Peugeot 205 Gti, we will use these for the daylight events with loose surface tests, keeping the Nokians for night tarmac road events.



Croft Historic 2007 - Photo Ian Hardy

At the end of November we tried our hand at a local club 12 car rally. 12 cars are effectively short road rallies, timed to the minute at 30mph maximum. They are normally run in the late evening over quite country lanes, 12 cars being the maximum entry as these events do not require the route to be fully PR'd for the public. On a normal rally all residents on the route are 'PR'd' to advise them and give them a chance to object. On this one we lined up against a motley collection of modern cars ranging from a BMW 3 series touring to a ginourmous Nissan four-cab pick up. Mostly small hatchbacks though, a 205Gti probably being the optimum car for this sort of thing. We had an exciting evening, wrong slotting a couple of times and nearly being mowed down by the big Nissan as they cut across the front of us when they arrived at high speed from our left, we had the right route though and they had missed a code board. I thought he was a particularly mad farmer until they stopped at a control. We also found out that harnesses, Andrews oversize map board and the Guilia's sticky passenger door handle are a bit of a hindrance when we had to negotiate a gated road. The timing system caught us out, by our clock we seemed to be on time even early, but ended up with 9 minutes or more of lates. We have been conditioned by regularities where arriving at controls early gets you a penalty, we were waiting outside them on this but still got penalised for being late. A secret check we mistook for the final control cost us a couple of minutes this was on a 'timed to the second' section and was particularly costly for us. We finished 9th, but beat that damned Nissan!. Not all is what it seems in rallying the organisers use every trick in the book and some that aren't to make it difficult. It's still fiercely competitive sport.

January came and we entered the Johnstone Trophy, an excellent event organised by Berwick and District motor club taking in 14 tests mainly on Farm Steadings with two evening regularities. We were still running on the Nokians, I hadn't got the gravel tyres sorted and we found how slippy it was very early on by hitting a cone square on the very first test!, 10 seconds lost straight away!. I nearly repeated the act on the second and we came within inches of being in a ditch. Test 3 it got worse we were doing the old dash through the cow barn bit, as we came off a ramp coming out of the door, the car veered off right so quickly I couldn't react in time and we bounced off the side of another barn denting the wing. After that though I seem to find some consistency and a reasonable pace and it started become clear part way through that we had a real chance of a class win on this event. The last two tests were in the dark, which was new experience and quite fun but we held everything together and finished the tests leading class H4, (post historic over 1600cc) and about 22nd overall. The two regularities were run in the dark and covered about 50 miles over narrow yellows and whites at the regular 30MPH average. The navigation was tricky but Andrew was spot on once again, and this time we had really cracked the time keeping, dropping just 23 seconds on the first regularity and 11 seconds on the next. The combined penalty of 34 seconds was the third best across the field and gave us seventh over all. We were delighted with the result and proud to take home our first silver ware, this was only slightly tempered by the battle scar in the wing and the discovery that I had damaged the engine mounts, fan and radiator. Still we faired better than the crew of the almost concourse quality TR3, who tore their front wing off on hard part of the scenery on test 6!.

To sum up I think we have both really enjoyed our first year of road rallying and are looking forward to a packed season this year. I can seriously recommend the sport to anybody who is looking for a more active and competitive way of enjoying their Alfa. On the whole the GTV makes a pretty good rally car, it could do with a better turning circle and isn't as manoeuvrable as say a Mini or an Imp, but we tend to get a lot of nice remarks from people as the car makes an interesting and rare sight amongst the mainly British and Swedish built opposition.