

MullMurmurs – Chapter 1

Wellhullawrrrrchinasanhowzyerblinghinging, warm greetings and kindest felicitations to one and all on behalf of Philips and 2300 Car Club. Welcome once again to the golden nugget of Scottish geology, to the island of many colours and many climates, where the tarmac glistens in the rain and gleams in the sun, where glory is always sought and ambitions sometimes achieved - but where all too often dreams are shattered and hopes are punctured. To be crowned 'Lord of the Blacktop Isle' requires bravery, stamina, skill, talent - and just a pinch of luck. So welcome to you all, for it's you the competitors, the support crews, the followers and the Marshals who make the Philips Tour of Mull what it is - 'the best rally in the world'. *You know, I couldn't have put it better myself.*

The 35th Philips Tour of Mull Rally 'officially' got underway last night in the Aros Hall when that cheeky chappie John Fife hosted the traditional Philips Forum. Things got off to a hectic start with the customary 'flying tee shirt' quiz with prizes courtesy of Philips, Eddie Stobart Motorsport, Dunlop, Kumho, Burmah, Esso and Ford. That was followed by an hour of cheerful chat with last year's winner Calum Duffy, John Cope and John Swinscoe. The patter was pure dead brilliant!

Now just a word before night falls. Get yourself a rally programme. It's got detailed maps of the stages, full entry list, timetable and something to read before the cars arrive. It's on sale at the Aros Hall in Tobermory where rally organisers, 2300 Car Club, will also be selling other goodies and memorabilia.

By the way, some time Clio rallyist Rod Brereton and wife Diane held a fund raiser in the Mishnish the other night for the Susan Cameron Memorial Fund. They raised 290 quid and then Robert McLeod topped it up to £350. Nice one Rod. And whilst on the subject, look out in the Programme for the competition to try and predict the top three in this year's event. Fill in your prediction, add your name and address and hand your entry to one of the officials. There are some nice prizes.

And now to Friday, with the whiff of mash and malt scenting the crisp, sunlit morning air, it must be Scrutineering. Once again hosted by Tobermory Distillery, the facility provides the ideal backdrop for the official 'wheel shooglers' and 'tyre kickers', aka, the Scrutineers, to do their business.

One of the first through was winner two years ago, Daniel Harper in the MINI. The car has only done one event since being built, his local Pendragon Stages and it suffered a few 'teething problems' but Daniel is upbeat: "It pulls all the way from 2 and a half to 7000 rpm with a flat torque curve. I reckon in a straight line, it's faster than my Lancer and it stops quicker!"

James MacGillivray was playing down his chances in the Subaru. "I did the Easter Stages in Ireland a couple of months back but the engine failed." However, 'Jock the Bull' was 10th on the Jim Clark and 3rd in Group N with the same car, so who knows what he'll do this weekend. "It's Group N, I don't think I've got much of a chance against the top boys here." Yeah, and Liam Gallagher prefers orange juice! Billy Bird's got a new car, it's an ex Chris Mellors recce car which he has built up and this will be it's first outing. It's basically a GrpN Lancer with bigger restrictor.

Lyndon Barton's Subaru is back to full health after its crash on Epynt - even if Lyndon isn't. He's tried three different seats to try and get one that's comfy for him. Mark Jasper is back with the black Metro and fingers are crossed. The boys have had quite a bit of trouble with electrics over past months but they found some loose connections behind the dash (which looked OK from the outside) so that has been sorted and they hope the temperamental machine is fixed. We hope so too, it sounds minted in full flight. Ian Colman is back with the Nissan Sunny and a new engine: "We had a misfire on the last 2 stages last year and thought it was just a broken plug then we took it to the Christmas Stages - and it blew up, so it was more than a plug! Tony Bardy built the new engine and took the car out for a test. It had brand new Dunlops on it at the start of the test and they were shredded when he brought it back to us!"

1600 front runner Doug Weir has built up a brand new Escort MkII to replace last year's class winning Nova, but looks a bit worried: "We only just finished it this week and we've got low oil pressure. We've got a 'new' second hand oil pump coming over on the 9 o'clock boat." So more fingers crossed then, eh? Martin Healer has replaced his GrpA Escort Cosworth with a world rally versions after last year's accident and has done one event since it was built. Apparently it's a shade quicker than the old car as the engine comes from Effen, as in effen quick.

And it's good to see some more islanders here, Denis Biggerstaff from North Ireland and George Collister from the Isle of Man. Denis has had a good look at the roads but is playing down his chances. He was talked into coming over here by co-driver Graham Thompson who got backing from new Subaru dealer, Eden Subaru in Fife. Surprisingly Denis has never done much driving in the dark: "I've done the odd stage in the dark but never anything like this. Trying to set up the lights the other night, estimating distances is going to be the biggest problem." But Denis is always up for a new challenge, he was in Holland two weeks ago for the Tulip Rally. George Collister has only done one tarmac event this year amongst his ANCRO series commitments but he was 3rd on the Manx Trophy in his MkII, but the John Easson Memorial winner is looking forward to this one.

John Cressey has finally forsaken two wheel drive for the first time. "Howard Chopping said to me if I build you a proper Subaru will you drive it on Mull. I said 'of course' then he said that he wanted it back in the same condition he gave it to me! It's awesome - I drove it 6 mls and sh*t meself!"

By the way, the Polis are having a crackdown on number plates and headlight main beam settings, so make sure yours are legal before venturing out tonight! Well, that's yer lot for now - look out for more MullMurmurs around the route during the rally or read them on the web. Keep up to date with: www.2300club.org and tune in to Oban FM on 103.3.

Yer auld pal, Jaggy Bunnet, Tobermory, 12.30 pm