

MullMurmurs – Chapter 9

Provisional Leaderboard after SS19 (of 19)

1. James MacGillivray/Ian Fraser (Subaru Impreza) – 2 Hrs 25 Mins 53 Seconds
2. John Cope/Tony Cope (Subaru Impreza WRC) – 2h 28m 07s
3. Denis Biggerstaff/Graham Thomson (Subaru Impreza WRC) – 2h 29m 23s
4. Eddie O'Donnell Jnr/Eddie O'Donnell Snr. (Ford Escort MkII) – 2h 29m 42s
5. Tony Bardy/Reg Smith (Nissan Sunny Gti-R) – 2h 29m 45s
6. Doug Weir/Duncan Brown (Ford Escort MkII) – 2h 35m 23s
7. Lyndon Barton/Johnny Vance (Subaru Impreza WRC) – 2h 36m 11s
8. George MacDonald/Ian Nichol – (Subaru Impreza) – 2h 36m 45s
9. Dave Hopwood/Paul Grattidge (Ford Escort RS) – 2h 37m 07s
10. Iain Grubb/Louise Sutherland (Peugeot 106) – 2h

Every Tour of Mull Rally is unique and special, and we knew we were in for a very special Mull this year, not just because of the tasty new maroon and gold colour scheme, but we lost the top seeds on the very first stage.

The 36th Tunnock's Tour of Mull Rally started with a spark, a fire and a clatter and then built up to a climax. It also provided us with unexpected winners, but no less welcome and no less deserving for that. James MacGillivray and Ian Fraser scored their first ever victory on home soil. It had been a long time coming. Way back in 1993, a more gangly looking version of 'Jock the Bull' finished second overall in a Ford Escort MkII. Who would have thought it would take 12 years before he topped that?

"After Tobermory/Dervaig tonight I didn't think I was going to do this," said James, "I didn't know what was knocking at the front end, it was in the back of my mind all through those last stages, but we're here – I can retire now." I don't think so. "When Calum and Neil went out, and then Dougi (Hall), we all thought we could win this, and I knew John (Cope) would get quicker as the rally progressed." Early on he had picked a pace he was comfortable with and then sat back and watched as the opposition wilted, but he wasn't without his own frights. On the final stage at Dervaig he was nearly on the beach. Whether it was early morning dew or oil, the car suddenly snapped sideways and had James not been fully awake and concentrating completely it could all have ended there. This was a calculating, mature drive from a man in control backed up by an equally unflappable presence in the hot seat, big Ian 'Frazee' Fraser.

And you know what, prior to this event James said: "If I win this I'll do the Rally Forum next year." Having avoided appearing in public for years now, this put James on the spot: "I suppose I'll have to do the Forum now after all." Yup, too right mate, we'll see you on stage next October.

And what a run into second place. John and Tony Cope finished a fighting second. From last place on the first stage to second place on the last stage, that was some battle. They dropped to last place with a spin and an off on the opening test on Friday night (it seems such a long ago now, don't it?) and thereafter made inexorable progress up the leaderboard to finish second. After the Calgary stage on Friday night, John turned to Tony and said: "That's what I come rallying for." With two stages to go and three stage records under their belt, John said: "We're trying, but it's all under control." And so it proved.

In third place, and despite a hiccup with times on the last Bulletin (not my fault, honest) Denis Biggerstaff and Graham Thomson completed the 'there was a Scotsman, Englishman and an Irishman line up' but it looks as though Denis has unfinished business on Mull. 13th last year and 3rd this year, Denis said: "On the second stage, there was a bit where the rear diff was hitting the tar so hard it would have scared the life out of you, but we raised the car and it was better. Then we tried raising the front a little more but it upset the steering. We've learned a lot – for next time."

Rounding off the top four were the O'Donnell twins, Eddie Jnr and Eddie Snr, and for a few glorious hours on Friday evening, we thought justice might be done. After years of bitter disappointment mixed in with equal amounts of sheer cussedness in the face of adversity and sheer brilliance behind the wheel, the top seeds were wilting and

the O'Donnells were in the hunt. It was not to be. James was well in control and then the Escort's throttle cable burned its casing on the hot exhaust crippling their times. Of more concern was the flickering oil pressure light and when asked how this was fixed Eddie replied: "I think someone took the bulb out!" There was another cheeky remark when Simon Proud asked Eddie what it was like to finish a rally with his tail lights intact! Eddie's terse response is unrepeatable in a family publication.

And those were the lucky ones. As I said at the start, this year's Tour started with a spark, a fire and a clatter. Calum Duffy's coil failed on the approach to the start of the first stage and he retired almost before he had got the seat warm. Then Neil MacKinnon suffered a stuck throttle body on the Subaru and the ECU thought it was wanting more fuel. The resultant fire was quickly brought under control, but that was Neil's run over. Dougi Hall also lost time early on, but then scorched over the island roads like a potential winner till he got to Calgary where the Mitsubishi romantically and intimately embraced a stretch of armco! Willie Bonniwell went off, Billy Bird rolled, Daniel Harper and John Cressey broke gearboxes, Dave Miller crashed, Stuart McQueen broke his gear linkage, Roger Binyon retired and then on the final stage, John Swinscoe crashed.

For the second year running, the rally was held in dry conditions, and speeds were higher, but so were breakages and bashes. The top 1600 winners Iain Grubb and Louise Sutherland survived broken rear suspension to not only win the class, but finish 10th overall, a remarkable achievement in their wee Peugeot 106. They had been having one heckuva fight with Ian Chadwick in a similar car, but Chaddy took the tourist route in Mishnish and got lost in the scenery! Mike Storrar finished 2nd in class in the Anglia and was delighted with 14th overall while Chris Paton and Dave Cabena were third. What an achievement. No, not the 3rd in class. This was Chris' 35th Tour while Dave has now done all 36 – I wonder if they'll get a discount next year when they show their Bus Passes.

In the wee class, Duggie Ingram and Olum MacCrone were top finishers in the 'real' Mini 1380 while Mark and Andrew Constantine were second. In the closing stages last night Mark was puzzled by a power loss till he discovered a blocked fuel filter while Matthew Tarbutt was third in the Nova and it looks as though Carol MacCrone was top lady driver in 50th place overall in her Mini.

It was small consolation, and good fun anyway, but Calum and Del Duffy won Saturday afternoon's Trophy Rally from Willie Bonniwell and Ian Chadwick in the wee Peugeot. Willie Bonniwell won the night time Trophy Rally from Ian Chadwick and Derek Carless bringing up the rear of an event in which more than half the entry failed to make the finish. What a rally. And what of the future? Well, it looks pretty safe. Way back down the field in car 156 were brother and sister Heather and John MacCrone on their first rally. Apparently there was no sibling argument about who was going to drive. Heather turned 17 three months ago and John is still only 16. They had their problems on the main event, but came back out last night for the Trophy and finished. Well done the pair of you. But I'll leave the last words to 16 year old Alex Brown sitting beside his Dad, Donald on his first Tour: "I've been waiting 16 years for this," he said simply and earnestly. And when they crossed the finish line in 32nd place you'd have thought his finisher's award was pure gold. Nope the future of this event is safe with enthusiasm like that around. The John Easson Scholarship winner also gained a huge chunk of experience this weekend. The 18 year old Stevie Brown was out in his Dad's Nova and was going well till the clutch acted up, but showing remarkable restraint, Stevie refused to say who was to blame till step-dad Doug Weir volunteered that he was responsible for car preparation – then blamed overwork because he also had to prepare his own car and Linda Brown's car, Stevie's Mum. That's what Mull does to you, it's a family thing.

And now the big question. What will 'Motorsport News' make of it all? Jonathan Mudd and Matt Burt came up here on an adventure to see for themselves. They camped out, they spectated, they quizzed and questioned, but most of all I think they genuinely enjoyed themselves. I'll bet the paper will have a big sale on Wednesday.

And finally, on behalf of all at 2300 Car Club our grateful thanks to those purveyors of the finest foods - Saint Tunnock's of Biscuitry, to all competitors, service crews, followers, Marshals, Safety Personnel and Radio Crews, Officials, Gerry at the Salen Hotel, Big Ade and the Oban FMers, the Isle of Mull and its population, some of the CalMac staff, and of course the Polis – it needs each and everyone of you to make this 'the Best Rally in the World' and it wasn't me who said it first. And a very special thanks to one other. If you thought that was mist wisping across Tobermory Bay in the early hours of Sunday morning, I don't reckon it was, it smelled like pipe smoke to me. Thanks Brian.

That's yer lot for this year. Yer auld pal, Jaggy Bunnet, Aros Hall, Tobermory, 11.00 am, Sunday morning.