



July 2007  
Number 496



*Richard Burns' Safari Rally Kenya Impreza at Prodrive*

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## Your Editor Speaking...

Well, after that surge of activity the Westfield has lain dormant this month - things have been getting a bit manic at work...

Well, that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it!

Actually I don't really want to think about cars just now - the Omega has just had new cylinder head gaskets at the local Vauxhall ~~dealership~~ dealership. Which was almost as expensive as you'd think, doubled. Which was nice.

Things are hotting up in terms of WMx events as well as the weather - coming up in July are the annual walk, the outing to Mercedes World and the Summer Run / Ride-out / BBQ. Please try to support the organisers of these events - and let them

know in good time if you're planning to attend them - some of them require serious planning and preparation and therefore need to know numbers well in advance.

The golf day and clubnight were both very good events - many thanks to AG for organising them! The Boakes family sort of cleaned up on the event - my Dad, Peter, won the 18 hole trophy and therefore couldn't win the 9 hole as well - this went to Ray Pontet. Dad also won the longest drive while I won the 'nearest the pin'. Dad was also on the winning team for the evening clubnight activity along with Bob Head. Hopfully there will be an article about it next month.

Meanwhile, here is another edition overflowing with articles! Enjoy!

**Jez Boakes (Editor)**

## A Note from your Chairman

I hope everyone is enjoying the wonderful weather that we are getting at the moment. I think it was King George III who declared that an English summer consists of two fine days and a thunderstorm! Well we certainly had a thunderstorm the other night - I love watching lightning, so powerful and awe inspiring but my mind was suddenly brought back into focus when the TV picture disappeared! It soon came back on, but when I visited my Dad the next day he'd been without his DVD player and lights all night.

There's also a bit of a storm blowing through F1 at the moment - you can't fail to have noticed the name of one Lewis Hamilton in the newspapers recently. He's certainly destroying a few misconceptions about the sport and injecting an excitement that has been missing for years.....and he's British! I think we should sign him up as a **csma** WMx member now before he gets too well known.

Lots to read in this issue, including the golf day - hopefully that's a cue for lots of 'ball' jokes (am I being sad?).

As ever keep your foot in it.....

**Derrick Holden (Chairman)**

www.csmawmx.com

## Prince Borghese Rides Again

On the morning of January 31<sup>st</sup> 1907 the front page of the French newspaper *Le Matin* carried the following challenge “*Is there anyone who will undertake to travel this summer from Paris to Peking by automobile ?*”

Motor manufacturers and adventurers were intrigued by the prospect and as the plans developed the route was first reversed and then a champagne prize was offered for the first car to reach Paris. What had started as a Grand Tour was now developing into a 10,000 mile race with the pride of nations, reputations of vehicle and tyre manufacturers and circulations of newspapers at stake. Reporters were to travel in the vehicles to telegraph back regular progress reports. There were no rules, just one man from the

organisation would flag the cars off from Peking then jump on a ship back to France in time to flag the winner across the finish line in Paris. First one home wins and only one official – what more rules were required?

It soon dawned on prospective entrants that the basics of any automobile journey were missing – no roads, no maps, no fuel – the idea seemed impossible.

Six months later with just five vehicles having been shipped to China the race was cancelled

over a diplomatic row. The Chinese who had never even seen a motor car were deeply suspicious and confiscated the passports of the motorists who they suspected were spies. Undeterred the five entrants all vowed to start on June 10<sup>th</sup> come what may.

Prince Borghese an experienced traveller was by far the best prepared and funded. He commissioned a 7 litre, 40 hp, Itala to be built to his specification and took with him his faithful mechanic Giuzzardi with as well as the journalist Barzini. Loaded with 84 gallons of petrol, 35 gallons of oil, 12 spare tyres, food and camping equipment there were only two seats but the Prince was totally unconcerned that the other two were going to take turns sitting on the running board for the next two bumpy months! He used his extensive range of aristocratic contacts to arrange hospitality en route, to drop off spare parts and to organise camel trains to deliver fuel supplies at 500 mile intervals. Arriving weeks in advance he set off on horse back on a 300 mile recce of the bridges and tortuous mountain passes taking with him bamboo poles the width of the Itala to ensure that it could squeeze between the rock faces and that the outside wheel would not runoff the edge of narrow ledges.

Charles Godard was a penniless roustabout circus performer who had never even driven a car but he was also a charmer and a conman who persuaded the Dutch company, Spyker, to give him a car on the basis that the organisers were paying people to enter – not true. He then sold the spares and tyres that came with the deal to pay for the car to be shipped whilst he worked his passage by becoming the ship’s entertainer. Needless to say whilst beating a hasty retreat from the hotel in Peking where could not pay his bill he had made no plans for his journey and was going to have to rely on his wits to beg, borrow or steal his petrol and supplies from the other competitors.



**Prince Borghese and his 71 Itala**

Collignon and Cormier were the French crews in two 10 hp De Dion Boutons and the strangest entry was that of another Frenchman, Pons, in a 3 hp Contal Tricar. The driver sat on a bicycle seat above the single driven wheel whilst the passenger sat in a basket between the front wheels. The theory was that the light machine could be lifted over obstacles but with so little room they did a deal with Godard that he would carry their luggage in return for them supplying his petrol.

Embarking on such a hazardous journey into the unknown the five crews made a pact that they would all stick together and help each other along the way ..... this was not to last for long.

The Contal was the first to be delayed just outside Peking as it struggled through the muddy ruts, with too much weight in front the single wheel at the back was lifting off the ground and failing to get any traction. After waiting patiently for it to catch up the others pressed onto the next town only to find the Contal already there. It had doubled back and been loaded onto the afternoon express train to Nankow.

The tortuous and narrow tracks through the mountains separating Northern China from the Mongolian Plains presented the first formidable obstacle. Spares had to be jettisoned whilst the cars were dragged by mules over the rocky paths. In some places the vehicles even had to be dismantled and carried by teams of Chinese coolies through narrow gorges and across fast flowing rivers. Treacherous descents were as much a concern as climbing cliff faces as none of the cars had front wheel brakes.

Borghese lost patience waiting for the others to catch up and once the Gobi Desert was reached and he was off .... romping across the flat plains managing to average up to 60 mph. From this point all bets were off and it was everyman for himself. Several times the others returned to help the struggling Contal but they realised that it was a lost cause and they too pressed on leaving the Pons and his Tricar to be rescued 3 days later by a passing camel train.

Time and again Godard prevailed upon the good nature of the French crews to provide yet one more can of precious petrol. When he went to refill from his last can he discovered to his horror that the rough roads had split the seams of the can and all the petrol had drained away. He waited knowing the others were following close behind but this time they had had enough. As he waved to them to catch their attention they sped on by without stopping. By luck he was found the next day by some Kunghuz tribesmen. By shaving lumps from a silver ingot, the only common currency, he bartered with them to rescue him. Riding day and night they returned 48 hours later with sufficient petrol for him to reach the next town.

Whenever the cars met up overnight Borghese, who had inevitably arrived half a day in advance and had rested and refuelled, made a point of setting off as soon as his hot, hungry and exhausted rivals arrived. This gave him a great psychological advantage that it was he was controlling the pace of the event and the one destined to be the winner.

Through the desert without maps they navigated by compass and the line of telegraph poles on the distant horizon. At Pong-Kiong Barzani strode into the telegraph office to file his latest report of how far they were now ahead of their rivals. Noticing the telegram was marked No 1 he assumed it to be the first that day, in fact it was the first ever to be sent from here. The poor operator had diligently sat at his desk every day for six years and this was his first customer.

Road conditions in Russia were atrocious. What tracks there were had been abandoned after the Trans-Siberian Railway had been finished. Day after day the cars struggled through dense undergrowth, waded through swamps and across rivers, got stuck in huge

ruts and had to dig themselves free from axle deep mud. It was Borghese who realised first that the simple solution to all these difficulties was to actually drive along the railway track, slowly bumping over the sleepers for mile after mile.

All the competitors had amazing stories to tell of daring do, determination, mishaps and luck. Borghese had a bridge collapse just as he passed over it and the Itala ended up at the bottom of a ravine. It took the best efforts of the Russian Army to construct the necessary lifting gear to retrieve his vehicle. Godard had to make a 5 day journey by train and horseback to find a man who could repair his magneto.

Borghese rolled into Moscow with a lead of 17 days over his rivals. Full of confidence he then set off on a 1000 mile detour to St Petersburg to join some 'fine ladies' at a Gala Dinner in his team's honour. After a night of hard partying he then retraced his route to



***A well in the Gobi Desert***

the point where he had detoured and pressed on at high speed on the better roads.

In the end it took Borghese 61 days to reach Paris, 20 days ahead of the others. The reception was rather subdued, after all an Italian Prince in an Italian car had convincingly beaten the best of the French automobile industry. With Godard now expected to arrive second in a Dutch car drastic measures were called for. Charged with false pretences and unpaid debts he was arrested in Germany and although his car made the finish line in Paris he never did.

*On May 27<sup>th</sup> 130 veteran, vintage and classic cars will set out from Peking to retrace the route pioneered by Prince Borghese 100 years ago. Three weeks later Alan Smith will meet the cars at the Russian border to marshal on the ten timed trials in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland that will help to determine the winner before the cars reach Paris on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Watch this space for his report next month and in the meantime log on to [www.pekingparis.com](http://www.pekingparis.com) to follow the progress of event.*

***Alan Smith***

## Footnote:

**T**hat friend of WMX group and all-round madman, Philip Young, has again organised one of his epic rallies with 134 vintage cars being driven from Beijing to Paris!

No stranger to such mammoth route planning, Philip will be taking the crews and some 16 support vehicles including trucks, spare parts, ambulances, fuel and 'chuck' wagons via Ulaan Bataar, Tsagaannuur, Omsk, Perm, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Warsaw and Berlin – some 12,000mls.

However daunting this may seem, spare a thought for the original 5 vehicles and crews that endured the original event, that this replicates, in 1907 with little back-up but plenty of bottle (quite literally). The winner was an Italian Prince, Scipione Borghese who had as company his valet, Ettore, who acted as mechanic and champagne carrier(!) and a Daily Telegraph journalist. In the Princes honour, the red colour of his Itala car was adopted as Italy's national racing colour.

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**csma** West Middlesex Group

I have to confess though, to being rather taken by the story of his closest challenger – one **Mr Goddard!!!!!!** Variouslly described as a fairground worker and a con artist (ring any bells yet?) he had never sat in a car before the event (that could explain a lot) and was arrested for fraud as he approached the finishing line. During his pursuit of Borghese, Goddard set an endurance record for driving 24 hours non-stop which just shows that he could go on just as much then as he does now – I reckon it's something in the water.

Some of the original cars that took part in the first Beijing to Paris rally in 1907 are actually taking part in this re-run which is amazing, although none of the crews are. And Philip Young should count his blessings that a certain Mr Goddard is also not taking part!

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## **West Middlesex Group motorcyclists**

Our next mid-week Ride Out will be on

*Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> July*

Once again we'll meet at Jack's Café on the A30 at Bagshot *but a little earlier than usual* - at 09.00am, and we'll leave at 09.30am.

We'll then ride Westwards for a day with an Nautical flavour - to the historic Bristol Docks. This will complete our 'Trains & Boats & Planes' trilogy for our May, June & July Rideouts. This Ride will include all the usual stuff: coffee stops at interesting places, rural and country riding rather than motorways or 'A' roads, somewhere nice for lunch and, rumour has it, Alan Mayger is treating us all to afternoon tea as well! Now, that can't be a bad day out, can it? Of course, as usual, we'll end up at the Jolly Woodman at Littleworth Common in Burnham Beeches to complete our day out.

We may not arrive at our Noggin' an' Natter venue until after 7pm but there'll still be enough time for a shandy.

We go, come rain or shine and if YOU are planning to join us on this Ride Out a quick call before the day would be much appreciated please...

**AG**

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*PLEASE NOTE:*

This Ride-Out is just two days after our Summer Run to the Group's BBQ – please make plans to do both events 'cos they're both gonna be great!

**West Middlesex Group presents:**

*The 2007*

**SUMMER BBQ, RIDE-OUT AND SUMMER RUN**

*for all Motoring, Motorcycling & BBQ enthusiasts*

**Sunday 29th July 2007**

**Where?** Starting from Jenners' Café alongside the River Thames In Maidenhead, just 300 metres from Boulters Lock.

**Time?** 'Signing-On' opens at 9.15am. Both Cars & Motorcycles will set off from 10.30am.

**What is it?** Basically this will be the Summer Run that will incorporate a Motorcycle Ride Out and we'll finish around 3.30pm at Nikki & Jez's house in Hook for another sumptuous West Middlesex Group barbecue.

**Motorcycle Ride-out** participants: please book with AG as soon as possible.

**Summer Run** participants: please send an entry to Jez as soon as possible. Unfortunately, it isn't possible for you to enter on the day as your rally plate and road book are prepared for you in advance. Entry forms are available now.

**Barbecue only** participants: please talk directly to Nikki so that we know numbers for catering a week or so before hand.

Last summer we had a bumper turn-out for this event and, as we're incorporating the Summer Run as well as the famous "Boules Championship of the World & Hook", this year it should be a real cracker! Bookings will be on a "first come first served" basis and it would be great if YOU could support this excellent Group event if you can.

*We look forward to seeing everybody there with  
car, motorcycle or even on foot!*

*Contact:*

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Motor Sport Coordinators' Bulletin

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Dates	Event (Status)	Club	Type of Event	Champ
Jul	Sun 1 * Summer Solo (C)	Farnborough &DMC	AutoSolo on tarmac	
	Sun 22 * Grasshopper A/T (C)	csma NEL	Grass autotest	Centre
Aug	Sat 4 Autosolo (C)	Loughborough CC	AutoSolo on tarmac	
	Sun 5 * Photo Phrolic (C)	Harrow CC	Photo Treasure Hunt	
Sept	18/19 * Welsh Enduro (Nat B)	Amman &DMC	Enduro road event	
	Sun 2 Haymaker A/T (C)	csma WMx	Grass autotest	Centre
	Fri 14 Greenhorn 12 Car Rally (C)	csma NWL	Navigational rally	
	15/16 Yorkshire Enduro (Nat B)	Ilkley & DMC	Enduro road event	
Oct	Sat 22 Castle Coombe Rally Day	csma WMx	Track Day	
Nov	Sun 7 Autumn Autotest	csma NWL	Grass autotest	Centre
	Fri 12 12-car rally	csma WMx	Navigational rally	Centre
Dec	Fri 8 12-car rally	csma NWL	Navigational rally	Centre
	Fri 7 12-car rally	csma NEL	Navigational rally	Centre

**Licence required:** (I/Nat A/Nat B/Cm) = MSA Licence, (C) = Club Card, ( ) = Nothing, \* = Regs available

Previous Events

**Quadruplex Inter Group Competition**

There was a very good turn out from the Centre groups, well all except West Middlesex that is. On a wet night, 13 teams competed in a multi round quiz, with a joker playable to double the score on a chosen round. Although it was quite close at times, North West London still managed to come first and second, and so won the Quadruplex trophy yet again. The hosts at Surrey group put on a very good quiz evening and a very good buffet that was enjoyed by all, especially as there wasn't much left afterwards. A full set of results should appear elsewhere in the newsletter.



**Juniper Autotest**

It was a nice hot sunny day for competitors and marshals for our annual trip to Hatfield. Some very close competition was observed throughout the day, but in the end, Paul Swift swept to another comfortable win, after his problems last year. Only one car retired with a mechanical problem, when the Westfield of Ian and Chris Chapman started jumping out of gear; a bit of a problem when going round a corner with kerbs close by on both sides. Duncan and Stephen Wild had a driveshaft joint break on their ABS Freestyle and after fixing that, Duncan then whacked a wheel against one of the kerbs and broke a large piece of alloy off. Thankfully we had a very good turn out of marshals again, and the "down tools" at a set time worked very well to give them all a break ay lunchtime. Where we will be next year is still not decided, but I will definitely have to have another venue as a back up if this one does finally get sold, which will be a great shame from a competition venue point of view.



**Midsummer Enduro**

The event had been promised as a lot smoother whites than last year, which was a bit of a misnomer considering it was still in Norfolk, where there is really no such thing! It didn't start well for us as the car was a bit of a handful going round the Sculthorpe airfield sections. Thought this was due to the new tyres, but it didn't

improve as the tyres wore down. The section round the kart circuit was fun, mainly as I resorted to the handbrake most of the way round to kill the understeer. At the break for the supper halt and inspection found the front hub was loose and allowing the suspension geometry to move! Don't know how I missed that when putting it all back together as it must have been like that on the CB as well. Overall, Jamie Turner/Matt Fowle were leading Owen Turner/Andrew Dadswell by 12 seconds, with Phil Kendall/Dave Coles in 7th and we were down in 11th place, over a minute behind. Come the night section of the event and the fog came down just as we started; great! Owen was on a mission to get the time back



from Jamie and he pulled out 19s to go into a 7 second lead on only the first section of the night. We however went backwards as about a quarter of the way through this section we got a front puncture and I decided to drive to the end. We managed it and only dropped about two minutes but the tyre was absolutely wrecked. Jamie pulled back a couple on the next one but then it all went wrong. They hit a big hole that wasn't cautioned and flew through the air before

breaking a front strut and bending the rear beam. They retired. Next along was Ian Meopham who also hit this hole but they were unlucky in that it put them into the trees and they had a big accident when one of them got in the way. Thankfully they both got away with only cuts, but it could have been a lot worse. Phil and Dave also went out on this section with electrical problems. We moved into second place on the fifth section and despite two sections where I seemed to take the brain out, we weren't going to trouble Owen at the front. There were another four tests at Sculthorpe in the morning before the finish and these saw the temperature shoot up on the first one. We checked the fan fuse and that was ok nad with nothing else to go on drove the tests and then went for a drive up and down the runways to cool it down. Turned out that with the A/C that was originally fitted, there were several other relays and fuses in the circuit and one of the others had blown. At the finish Owen was declared the winner again, three times in three years, and we ended up second.

**Greenacres Autotest** This will have been held by the time you read this but hopefully all had a good time. Results next month.

### Future Events

**Summer AutoSolo** This is being run by Farnborough &DMC and will be held along similar lines to the West Middlesex event in April. It takes place at the Martinique parade ground near Bordon, in Hampshire, on Sunday 1st July and entries are again restricted to 45 at a cost of £30 each. Scrutineering starts at 8am, with the tests beginning at 10am. Regs are available from either myself or downloadable from the club website at [www.fdmc.org.uk/SummerSolo2007regs.pdf](http://www.fdmc.org.uk/SummerSolo2007regs.pdf).



**Grasshopper Autotest** The second of the grass autotests will be held at the usual Studd Farm site over near Leighton Buzzard, with Bernard Ward organising again. The event is two events in one with a championship event taking place and a club event. The latter is for those without a competition licence and want a bit of fun. Passengers are

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required, so either a chance for a bit of guidance or a bit of hindrance. The events cost £17 for the main event and £15 for the club event. Things start at 9:30 and the first test is at 11am. Give Bernard a ring on 01992 582323 if you want to enter or marshal.

**Photo Phrolic** This is an invite to a Harrow Car Club event which is similar in format to the Farnborough Topographia, in that you have to work out locations from photos and then visit the location and answer a question. Cath, Ian and I did the event last year and it was a fantastic fun. The whole event takes place on map 165 this year and starts at 10:30am from the Northbound services at Toddington, on the M1 (about 3 miles from my home). The event finishes at 5pm at the Black Horse in Great Missenden, Bucks, where a buffet will be available. Entries cost £12.50 per car. I have copies of the regs if you are interested.

**Welsh Enduro** Just like last year there will be a series of tests on private land during Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning - although the shortest test is 3½ miles long, the longest test is a whopping 18 miles! - plus a traditional road rally of a few hours duration starting late on Saturday evening. The rally will be based around the top of the Neath valley in South Wales. The event will be quite straightforward and is a test of car and crew, with no tricks and no difficult navigation. Most of the tests will use unsurfaced forest roads, but there will be no car-breaker sections. The Entry fee is £250 for the two-day rally, including a buffet dinner on the Saturday evening. For £5 a night, you can even pitch a tent right outside the Rally HQ clubhouse. See [www.ammandmc.co.uk](http://www.ammandmc.co.uk) for regs and more details.

csma West Middlesex Group



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## ***July Clubnight ~ the Annual Walk!***

D'yer know AG's planning a walk?  
 He says it's gonna be great  
 Just be ready to go  
 At half-seven y'know  
 And NOT the usual eight!

Dogs, kids, & thee friends are all welcome,  
 And a promise - no cows booked this year!  
 Just the River and grass  
 Non-strenuous paths  
 Then it's reet back t'pub for a beer.

The Flower Pot Hotel 'tis in Aston  
 And that's where we'll all need to meet  
 In t'garden round t'back  
 Just off t'beaten-track  
 So you'll need proper boots for your feet!

So put t'date now in thee diary  
 Come o'er to Henley on't twelfth  
 If you want they directions  
 You've got me connections  
 Call 'us an' I'll tell 'e me-self!

### **Translation:**

## **Clubnight – Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007**

An evening walk starting at 7.30pm – meet from 7pm at the Flower Pot Hotel at Aston, MR 175 / 784 842 – best approached from Remenham Hill on the A4130 Henley to Maidenhead road.

Details from AG on 07785 903 000 - see you there!

## ***The 2007 Haymaker Autotest!***

### **Where is it?**

We have a new venue for 2007, it is a large, smooth grass field near Ritchings Park, Buckinghamshire.

### **When is it?**

September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007

### **What else do I need to know?**

The venue will have onsite catering, toilets and a 20 acre maze! The maze will be open all day so bring along the whole family, and lose them. We can help you find them again when the haymaker finishes.

Regulations will be available on our website in July, but put the date in your diary now.

Malcolm Grubb - Clerk of the Course  
 Jez Boakes - Secretary of the Meeting  
<http://www.csmawmx.com>

**The deadline for articles for the *August* Sump is July 25<sup>th</sup>!**

**Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors, and not necessarily those of the csma, csma West Middlesex Group Committee or the editor.**

## A Wet Weekend in Wales...

Ahh! That'll be the Welsh National Rally then!

It's become a bit of a habit over the last decade or so and 2007 was no exception. So, on the second Friday of May, a (fool?) hardy bunch of seven motorcyclists representing West Middlesex's finest made their way up the A44 towards the Welsh border, bound for Castle Caereinion. The objective was another crack at the challenging Welsh National Motorcycle Rally.

Three of us started from my house and our journey to the team meeting place began in the dry but with ominous clouds gathering all around the Thames Valley and a severe weather warning in place from the Met Office covering most of the UK below Hadrian's Wall, mild apprehension was the distinct flavour of the day!

Two of our 'regulars' were not able to make it this year so Tom had invited along a couple of his RAF friends (Steve & Dave) to join us and we'd planned to all meet up at our 2006 rendezvous place, 'Bikers World' in Drakes Broughton near Evesham.

Nick (Honda VFR), Angie & myself (on my Pan European) arrived in good time, having gone via an excellent Lunch stop at the Café at Broadway Tower, and were happily browsing the racks of assorted bikes & motorcycling gear when the rain started – it was just 'ordinary' rain at first... Shortly after Dave arrived on his Aprilia soon followed by Chris (Honda VFR), Tom (Triumph Speed Triple) & Steve (Yamaha Fazer), all a bit damp but fairly happy. Introductions, another coffee and another half an hour getting acquainted with our new riding pals, meant we'd hardly noticed that, outside, the rain had developed into something resembling a heavenly jet-wash!

Inevitably we had to make a move. Riding plans were made, a Leader & a rear-gunner (no Tail-End-Charlie's today, well, we were with RAF types after all...!) were decided upon, and we once again moved off into the murk, mist & moisture heading for Wales.

Dave Rillie is our usual 'leader' on this event – he qualifies by being the only one amongst us who seems to have GPS system built in to his brain. This makes things easier for the rest of us as generally speaking we don't have to spend too much time looking at maps. But this time we were Rillie-less, he couldn't come this year and we elected Steve (one of our RAF guests) as our ride Leader on two counts. Apparently he once read maps in aeroplanes as his day job whilst defending Queen & Country(!), and, perhaps more to the point, he was the only one who actually had a real GPS gadget on his bike. Personally I'd have felt happier with a DR mounted to my handlebars, except when you shout at him he usually shouts back, unlike Steve's 'Garmin' device! However, inanimate technology does have it's up and it's down sides – if we loose Steve then none of us will know where we are – that's a down side. DR will at least wait if he leaves us behind (usually!), but with his passion for real ales, his expertise invariably costs us all very dearly in the 'bar at the end of each day – so the saving on the bar bill, well, that must be an up side!!

Nevertheless, we all followed leader Steve diligently through the constant deluge with yours truly pushing everyone along from the back of the column as the 'Rear Gunner' and, using the tried & tested 'drop off / marker' system, we finally arrived at our Hotel around 7pm. Riding gear stowed on every chair & radiator to be found, a quick bath & we were all sitting in the bar by 19.45hrs.

Our base for the weekend was the same small (and the only) hotel in Llanfair Caereinion called The Goat that we discovered in 2006. Friday evening, we each waded through two or three courses plus a cheese board, had a couple of lemonades(!) & were quite

merry, until some bright spark suggested that perhaps we ought to do some planning for the long day ahead tomorrow – don't you hate it when that happens?. At this point several people became instantly 'tired' and made a quick exit upstairs with the rest of us drifting off to our own beds at regular intervals thereafter leaving the last man standing to both finish the planning and turn out the lights. Well done Steve!

Nowadays an alarm call at 6,15am on any day is something of a rarity for me, but on a Saturday it only happens once a year - on the Welsh National Rally. However, as I said in my 2006 report, the smell of Welsh fried breakfast cooking as I descended the stairs did a sterling job in awakening my senses and still gets my vote as the ultimate early morning call devise ever.

By 8.30am we were at the Start in Castle Caereinion. We each 'Signed On', collected a couple of 'freebie pens' and the paperwork for the Dragon Award (an additional award to the usual Medals) then mounted up and filed out dutifully behind Steve's bright blue Fazer heading for Lloyney, just north of Knighton.

The rain had stepped up it's ferocity overnight and the normally excellent roads that abound throughout Wales, were awash with many riverlets crossing our path, huge puddles everywhere, & there was even a number of 'proper' floods to be negotiated. The conditions were a challenge in themselves and caused one of our number a heart-stopping moment before we'd even reached our first Checkpoint.

As the group's Tail-end'er I was following two of our gang along a twisty, slippery and undulating lane leading up to open moorland, the others having opened up a bit of a gap. The first 'bike of our trio turned into a tight uphill left-hander but the one immediately in front of me completely failed to make the turn and went straight on up a heavily rutted dirt track at about 35mph! I made the turn and pulled in to the verge where we dismounted and hurried back to the corner fearing the worst. Well, he hadn't dropped it, amazingly, but he was in a bit of a spot. The ruts were about a foot deep either side of a central hump and our hero had come to rest some 20 yards from the tarmac having stayed in the left hand rut until he did so. Now all that was needed was a three-point-turn – not an easy option on a 'bike, even on a flat road – and we could call it a close shave! Well, eventually three of us man-handled the offending machine back to the smooth stuff and it's rider metaphorically picked himself up, brushed himself off, and started all over again! Apparently a momentary lapse of concentration was judged to be the cause but it served to sharpen up all of us for the rest of the event. All this before the first Control – and that 'whoopsie' did cost him a round at the 'bar that evening despite the faultless days riding that followed.

Ordinarily this event is a mixture of good riding, beautiful scenery, coffee breaks a-plenty, & much banter between the boys but the conditions were such that we just had to keep moving to maintain the tough schedule we'd set ourselves.

Eventually, half way through the afternoon, we had a Team meeting just outside Aberystwyth. We decided to divide into two groups, the quicker (and younger?) riders taking a longer more northern route in an attempt to earn a Platinum Award, whilst three of us elected to 'down-size' to the easier certainty of a Silver Award and the distinct possibility of a Welsh Cream Tea at the Ponderosa Café atop the Horseshoe Pass. Well, that was a very attractive option and hard to ignore when you've been wet for 24 hours!

One of the Controls we needed to visit was at the Bala White Water Rafting Centre. Having had some difficulty locating the place we eventually sorted ourselves out, got the info we needed and were about to prepare to leave for the next point when a bright orange helicopter made a very low pass over our heads. Moments later a member of the

Rafting Centre came running out of his office to ask us to move the 'bikes as the chopper needed to land on the road right where we were parked! We moved – the Rescue helicopter descended to within 10 feet above the spot where we'd been parked, lowered a spinal stretcher to waiting hands and, with a roar and a huge downdraft, lifted off almost as soon as it had arrived. The air pressure was almost enough to blow

over our 'bikes, even from a 'safe' distance away. All most impressive and, thankfully, just a delivery job rather than an emergency call apparently.

Finally we reached the Control at the top of the Horseshoe Pass, booked in, ordered the coffee & cakes etc. and settled to wait for the other Team members.

With five minutes to go before their closing time the Control marshals began pack up and our boys had yet to appear... surely we weren't going to have a repeat of last year when half of our Team arrived just one minute after the marshals disappeared over the horizon? I went to talk to the Marshals, yes they had to close on time (how long could I keep them chatting for...?), six or seven minutes after they had 'officially' closed they finally made their way out to their car in the car park, just as Steve & Co arrived on top on the hill. Frantic gesticulations from your's truly (doesn't sound like me does it?) and the boys got their Control cards signed in the car park, along with one or two other grateful competitors who'd arrived well beyond the last minute. It seems that our lot had traversed the last twenty miles in twenty minutes, and all in pouring rain! It's times like that I'm pleased I'm not so young nowadays...! But well done to them & top marks for the marshals concerned for being so reasonable in such awful conditions.

A short respite for our late arrivals, now we'd re-grouped we needed to get a move on (just for a change!!!) and once again we all enjoyed the almost annual blat down the marvellous Horseshoe Pass en-route to Bangor on Dee for the last Dragon Award control, and then Llanarmon Yn Ial our last Rally Control, before the Finish back at the Community Centre at Castle Caereinion.

The final run-in involved some very minor, single track, grass-up-the-middle type roads (good old GPS!) and a very wet five or six miles along the A458 but we all reached the Final Control together and in tact.

Chris, Steve, Dave & Tom had just missed out on the Platinum Award, mostly due to the appalling weather, but had worked really hard to earn Gold Awards. Nick, Angie & myself each gained Silver Awards on the Rally and, of course, all Team members had done more than enough to qualify for the much coveted Dragon Award. Now, here at the Finish, we just had to collect what we'd each worked so hard for over the weekend and then make our way back to the hotel for another shower, this time in HOT water rather than rain water!

The Goat Hotel very kindly agreed to serve us very late and way outside their normal 'restaurant opening' hours but we rewarded them by eating a full three courses each of their most excellent fayre and drinking much of their finest ales & spirits in celebration of a job well done.

The next morning we were blessed with more of the same, weather-wise, and the 200+ mile ride back home was accompanied throughout by rain, wind, & hill fog in great abundance, and a lot more traffic to boot. Once home I set to drying out my 'kit' – the leathers weren't properly dry for four days!!!

But, despite everything, West Middlesex Group should be very proud of the tenacity, perseverance and indeed skill of their Motorcycling members – this one really was quite an achievement!

My sincere thanks, and congratulations, to all the Team – Steve, Chris, Tom, Dave, but particularly Nick & Angie who were never more than a few 'bike lengths away from me for the entire weekend. A tremendous Team effort, each member entered into the spirit of it and they were all great company throughout the event. And there were no moans and groans either, well, apart from mine, but then you'd expect that, even at the best of times, wouldn't you?

Now, the plan is we'll be going back in 2008 over the first weekend of May. So if you know anyone who has any influence over the weather perhaps you could put in a good word 'cos it would appear that, after many years of successfully praying hard, my influence over such things has dried-up – no pun intended!!!!.

*Allan Goddard*

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During the visit you will be able to see all the Mercedes Benz classics in the museum as well as all the current Mercedes Benz, AMG and Maybach models. So bring your chequebooks and you could be driving home in a new car!

Also onsite is a 4x4 test course, a skid pan and handling course. If you want to experience any or all of these (a professional MB instructor will take you round) they have to be pre-booked, and paid for well in advance. If enough members express an interest in being taken around the test facilities in a new Mercedes then please let me know as soon as possible so that I can try and negotiate a group deal.

The planned itinerary is for us to meet at the museum restaurant for lunch at 1pm. During the afternoon you are free to look at all the exhibits and leave whenever you like.

Also onsite, and only a few hundred metres away is the Brooklands Racing Circuit museum so you could visit both places if you wish.

Please e-mail [malcolm@csmawmx.com](mailto:malcolm@csmawmx.com) to register your intent to come along and also indicate whether or not you would like to take part in the test track experience.

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