

18th Round Britain Reliability Run – Car 35, Triumph Spitfire 1500

by Steve Waddingham

It's funny how things sometimes just drop into place in life – I've always had an ambition to drive around our country, so I was pleasantly surprised to discover just after buying my Spit' in 1998 that Club Triumph organises a Round Britain Run. When I first bought my Spit' (FNV 96T) in 1998 it was a long way away from being suitable to undertake an epic journey like the RBRR – not without sponsorship from Duckhams anyway! (she used to burn a lot of oil). Since 1998 FNV has had an engine rebuild, plus gearbox, front suspension, and brake system overhauls. After running out of excuses I finally made the call to Club Triumph and filled out the application form to join the 2002 run. My co-driver for the event would be Will Green, who works with me at Aston Martin. Will and I first decided to “do the run” after a long day of Motorshow stand duty in a bar after a few beers – as is normally the case with such decisions!

Earlier this year I started to prepare the car – the front suspension and trunnions were checked over, new poly bushes fitted, etc. Also new front callipers were fitted and the ignition up-rated with a sports coil. The week before the event was spent checking the car top-to-bottom, re-fitting the hardtop, overhauling the clutch hydraulics and fitting an oil cooler. Rather unexpectedly I had to also replace the entire exhaust system due to a severely blowing down-pipe-to-manifold joint (complete with knackered studs between the two, hence the decision to replace the whole lot). Deciding to bite the bullet I took the car to Jigsaw Racing where (Jigsaw Racing proprietor) Mark helped me fit a new stainless sports twin pipe and manifold system. This also meant new needles and springs for the carbs plus a tune-up. Mark and Jo at Jigsaw were excellent and sent me on my way with a box of spares “on sale or return” – which I'm pleased to say were returned, unused! plus some smart Jigsaw decals for the front wings.

The run...

Before we knew it, it was Friday 4 October 2002 and we were parked-up at the start-line, The Plough at Crews Hill. After tucking into a plate full of gammon and chips we were ready for the off – neither of us knowing what to really expect: would the car make it? would we make it?

Will had been working all day so I decided to drive the initial leg of the journey whilst Will settled in to the navigator/co-driver seat. We soon found ourselves zipping along the A1(M) at a steady 70mph, overdrive on, exhaust humming its new tune. (Apart from our occasional renditions of 70's TV themes and swearing at/ moaning about modern car driving skills this was set to be the only “in-car entertainment” – no radio in FNV!)

At the first stop, Blyth Services, the atmosphere was good – other crews were checking cars and everyone seemed to be weighing-up who was who and newcomers like us were starting to get into the flow. Light relief arrived in the shape of Canley Classics stretched Herald limo – complete with a boomerang TV aerial on the boot and the “crew” dressed as the Blues Brothers! Lots of photos were taken and the engineering details of the limo discussed (no type-approval or crash testing to worry about I guess!).

After Blyth we trudged on towards the next stop at Bishops Garage, Corbridge. The route book stated “extremely quiet please” – which meant “don't slam your car doors and keep your voices down”. Unfortunately with 50-odd old cars, most with loud exhausts,



Another crew member suffering (not us!)

it was difficult to “keep it down”, however, we did our best... The local Dolomite guys were on hand to greet us and we were supplied with a welcome cup of soup! Time for us to swap, “Flight Lieutenant” Green at the controls – my turn to sleep!

Next came the jog up to Edinburgh Airport, which took us through Northumberland. I woke up at one point to find us overtaking a line of about a dozen Triumphs on a long hill section, a speed camera looming on the other side of the road! I reminded my colleague that we weren't on a road rally special stage and that “you pay your own fines!” In reality we probably weren't even breaking the limit and it was good fun blasting along this seemingly never-ending, arrow straight hill!

After further “control points” at Edinburgh Airport and Perth we carried on the A9, making our way through Scotland. Just before Inverness Will and I swapped over again, just as dawn was breaking. Within seconds Will was “out for the count” in the passenger seat and it was just “me and my Spitfire!” By now the car was singing well and running smoother than it ever has in the last four years. I almost thought I was dreaming – had somebody swapped the car over?

Minutes later we caught up with a couple of TR's. We gently passed them and followed the A9 through Inverness. For me these next few hours were some of the best of the whole run: stunning scenery, dramatic clouds forming above the blackened sea and rugged shoreline. As we crossed Dornoch Firth we caught up with Car 25, the Bond Equipe and Car 40, a TR2. We were soon blasting around the hairpin bends of the A9, just us and the TR2 – great fun!

By around 8.30am we were parking outside the Seaview Hotel at John O'Groats and making our way in for a freshen-up and breakfast. During a previous stop we were tipped off about the lack of hot water available for showers. We grabbed a room and had a quick wash in what amounted to a mug-full of hot water! After a “fry-up” we were back on the road, pausing for some pictures whilst still at John O'Groats.

Next up was probably the most spectacular “stage” of the run, following the route along the A836, B871 and B873. One section found us blasting along an almost single-track road, hugging the shoreline of the River Naver – Will once again at the wheel. On to

18th Round Britain Reliability Run – Car 35, Triumph Spitfire 1500 continued.....



Heading South

the next control point at Conon Bridge and then more spectacular scenery through the Highlands, passing various Lochs including Loch Ness.

Another stop, this time at Morrisons Garage (nice hot pies, thanks chaps!) and we were on our way for the last leg to Scotland, on to the hardest and least enjoyable Motorway sections (M80, M74 and M6) with myself at the wheel – at this point I was beginning to wonder how we would make it through the rest of the night, not realising that there were some more interesting roads to enjoy in between here and Cornwall!

Will took care of the M6 section and we changed again at Oswestry, ready for the drive down through Herefordshire and on to Bristol. With Will looking worse for wear and a series of navigational points to look out for I decided to tuck-in behind another car. Just as we were about to leave Oswestry I spotted the GT6 Mk.2 of Tim Bancroft and Richard Arthers. I soon realised that these boys were running at our own pace (60-70mph) so I tagged on. We seemed to descend for hour after hour, gently winding our way through sleepy villages and what must have been beautiful countryside and rolling hills. We quietly made our way past the drunken jobs being herded into police vans in Hereford (a reminder that this was a Saturday night/early Sunday morning, the only other people awake being those who were leaving the clubs!) and on to Bristol.

Time for a coffee at Bristol Services. By this time Will was in the “land of nod” again and I felt quite invigorated after the enjoyable Herefordshire leg. I asked Tim and Richard if they minded if we continued to follow them and left Will asleep in the car. Once again Tim and I set off in convoy. Our next stop would be somewhere in Cornwall where we planned to swap drivers (“this is the bit where you start hallucinating”, said Tim!).

Somewhere on the M5 it all got too much for Tim and me. Just as I was starting to really struggle, Tim pulled over and said he had had enough – time to wake Will up and swap over. Will took some waking and this nearly led to our first row when he said “just give me a few minutes to wake up”. What, on the hard shoulder of the M5? With me having no idea of where we were exactly, there was no way I was going to lose Tim and Richard. “Will, wake-up you lazy git” (words to that effect) – I then sprayed some water in his face

and more or less dragged him out of the car!

The next thing I knew we were fighting our way through thick fog in Cornwall. It cleared in time for us to see dawn break again and we arrived in Penzance around 7.30am, stopping for petrol. We arrived at Land’s End minutes later, glorious sunshine awaiting us, and we made our way through to the famous sign for a photo session. Considering the number of cars coming through the photographers were excellent and gave us enough time to savour the moment – well worth spending the £15 for two decent sized photos...

After a “hearty” (as in heart attack!) breakfast, we sorted ourselves out for the final return leg to London. For some funny reason a feeling of anti-climax, almost a “we’ve made it” mood settled over us – some crews talked about a quicker way back to London; we decided to stick to the route and enjoy the rest of the journey. We then made our way back up over Dartmoor and after a minor “detour” (we missed a junction on a short stretch of the M5 and had to cut across further up) worked our way through Salisbury onto the M3 and the last stop at Fleet Services.

From Fleet it was then onto the dreaded M25 and a slow procession round to Junction 24, our turn-off for Crews Hill. At 6.50pm we crossed the finish line of The Plough – we’d made it! A few victory pictures were taken and we shook hands with a few of our fellow drivers. It seemed really strange, almost unreal that 48 hours ago we had stood in the same car park wondering what lay ahead...

Would we do it again? I imagined that we would never want to see



The A-team at the finish

a Triumph ever again at the end of it – but no, we had really enjoyed the whole event.

Before finishing this story I would like to thank Derek and everybody involved in making this event happen. We were impressed with how well-organised everything was and at how professional and encouraging all the marshals and well-wishers were – especially the people who turned out to cheer us at Bristol at 3.00am! The standard of driving amongst our fellow crews was also very high – we didn’t see anything untoward happening and nobody took any risks (apart from a few idiot modern-day car drivers who got caught in between some of us!).

Thank you all again, see you in 2004 for the next run!