

# Sprinting Round Britain

*Mark McLean* recounts his four RBRRs

I have never experienced anything like this event before in any capacity in life. The concept seems like sheer madness to begin with, a punishment even, and yet, having done the last four of these fantastic events, neither I nor Jo could imagine missing one. The decision as to whether to enter the RBRR has become something of a no-brainer for us and the event has become very much part of our lives.

Those who are not involved in classic car circles (and even many who are) do not comprehend the attraction and the only way I can silence them is the fundraising angle, which speaks louder than their scepticism. Nonetheless, it is quite hard to explain just why this event is so special, charity links aside. A lot of it is being part of something quite unique, part of a large convoy of these great cars and the feeling of achievement.

The fundraising side of the event is a sound justification for such madness and I am pleased to say that Jo and I have provided about seven thousand of the many thousands of pounds raised for worthy causes. With carbon

footprints at the front of many people's minds these days, maybe the event will need to add extra justification in the future?

Each of the four times has presented different challenges and we have been lucky enough to complete the event each year. The feeling of reaching the finish line is the same though – relief, pride and elation.

There is always so much to tell after a RBRR and to try to condense the four events we have enjoyed into one article is impossible. So here is a summary of each one.

Year 2000, 2000 miles, fundraising target £2000 – it all seemed so logical when Jo and I signed up. Then we started thinking about what we had got ourselves into, oh dear.

The car was a Dolomite Sprint, SEO 521S, of 1978 vintage. It was my first car and very much a part of the family. It was very much a condition two car, so it was tricky to know exactly what to do to prepare it. The gearbox worried me, the alternator was



due for replacement and the exhaust system did not fit properly. I decided to leave the gearbox as it was and the rest, together with a good service and a thorough check over of the car, were dealt with.

Regarding luggage, we probably overdid the toolkit, but it's better to be safe than sorry I always say. We really overdid our own 'luggage', with an impressive array of bedding, food and drink, cameras, spare clothes and so on, 'just in case'. In particular, we carried a rather potent coffee called Rocket Fuel to keep us going and it most certainly did. When combined with plenty of Red Bull, our eyes must

have been positively bulging in the latter stages of the event.

We averaged 33.5 mpg and raised £2000.

Regarding car problems, we encountered paranoia with all of the noises on the first few legs. This was mainly as I had not driven the car much in the previous three months – ideal preparation for a 2000 mile trek! It burned almost as much 20/50 as it used petrol. The increasingly noisy propshaft through the event was later diagnosed as ‘ready to fall to bits’ by Dave Mac in Coventry.

We had success with the scotch pies, having one each. Truly magnificent!

As for memorable moments, there were absolutely loads, as this was our first event. The atmosphere at the start of the RBRR is electric. Watching other motorists’ faces as they see Triumph after Triumph is incredible. Jo reaching for her slippers, in one of the many bags we had brought, partway up the A10! Jo throwing the Sprint through a series of sharp bends near Corbridge, in a way in which Lewis Hamilton would have been proud (the indentations from my fingers are still present on the top of the dashboard!). The sunrise in Scotland, which is the best I have ever seen. The A99 on those twisty bits, a bit like the Monte Carlo rally. Reaching John O’ Groats in one piece. And then realising that there are still 1300 miles to go. Watching a lady, who had drunk several litres of Red Bull and Rocket Fuel, try to stop her hand from shaking so that she could eat her breakfast. The single track roads in north Scotland. Those scotch pies at Stirling. Amazement at how the body can keep going on no sleep for 48 hours. The twisty roads through Wales and the big grins on mine and Carl Shakespeare’s faces when we got to Gordano. The length of the A30 – it felt like 500 miles. The panic with the increasing noise from the propshaft. The anticipation when just a hundred miles from the finish. The feeling of elation when turning into The Plough on Sunday night. The realisation that we still have 100



miles to drive home. The strange sensation of movement even when sitting still, some days after the event. The redefining of what constitutes ‘a long way’ for months to come.

The best driving was Wales, definitely: worth staying awake for.

In 2002, here we were again! The difference this time was that Jo was five months pregnant.

The car was SEO 521S once again. There was probably slightly more rust, but it was better fettled this time, with the propshaft sorted and a fairly thorough check over the car well before the event. This check yielded a broken bolt on the front suspension which was a lucky find. After the oil burning of 2000, I decided to allow an expert to try to rectify the problem for me and Dale Barker duly obliged with a substantial amount of top quality work within my budget and, most importantly, bang on time. We were still running the car in until we got to Stirling though, so revs were limited to 3000 rpm just to be safe.

Luggage? No Rocket Fuel or slippers this time! We had a good selection of spares and tools, probably still too many, but you never know! We still opted for a blanket and pillow though – it’s nice to be comfortable even if you can’t get to sleep. The car was not quite on the bump stops this time.

The average fuel consumption was 33.8 mpg. The fundraising total was £1700; it was harder to coerce cash from friends this time around.

Regarding car problems, there was a pool of oil under the car at the start, we never found out why. The main beam switch burnt out on a dark country road in deepest Wales – I thought I had gone blind!

We had no success with scotch pies as we were one of the last teams to arrive, so they were all gone.

As for memorable moments: Jo and I nearly coming to blows before we even got to the A10, as she could not get the camera working to video the start. The oil rigs in the Cromarty Firth at sunrise. A hot shower at the Sea View Hotel, John O’ Groats – bliss! Those roads in north Scotland on a dry day with lots of road ahead visible. The joy at achieving the ‘running in’ mileage and being able to let the engine breathe. Jo getting the Sprint sideways at a roundabout in Oswestry. The panic when the lights went out in Wales and the



relief that we were still on the road when we stopped the car. I managed to sleep, although only for 30 seconds or so when my head fell off the little head rest. The three car convoy through Wales on the twisty bits – Carl Shakespeare (Sprint), us (Sprint) and Dave Marshall (2000). Quote of the RBRR02 from Dave Marshall, “I have had 2000s for years and I now know the limits of their handling – on the door handles!” Poor Dave had caught us up just as we got to the twisty bits and his co-driver was asleep, so he wanted to keep up with us to avoid getting lost; the pace was hot to say the least. Massive grins all round at Gordano! The fog on the A30 on the second night without sleep made it even harder to stay awake. Appalling driving through Dartmoor from the local Sunday drivers. Carl Chinn’s dreadful Hawaiian shirt at Fleet services. The same feeling of achievement when The Plough homes into view.

The best driving had to be mid-Wales again.

The entry for 2004’s event was never in doubt. There was just one problem though – I didn’t have a roadworthy Triumph! I took SEO 521S off the road in April 2003 for a quick restoration on a small budget and, despite best intentions, the car was not ready (and still isn’t!). To the rescue came my old mate Carl Shakespeare, keeper of several Triumphs, including a 1975 Dolomite Sprint which was his daily driver at the time. He even serviced and prepared the car for us – this is the kind of RBRR preparation I could get used to!

The car, LCG 367N, was a 1975 Dolomite Sprint. It was probably more of a condition two car than SEO in the bodywork and trim department, but that engine was a belter! All I had to do was give it a clean and polish and apply the stickers.

The luggage was much reduced this time. There is no need for large stocks of food and drink, as the entrants are always so well catered for. There

were large stocks of spares and tools as usual.

The fuel consumption was 31.8 mpg. The fundraising achieved £1700. There was lots of help from Pippa at Children with Leukaemia with some great fundraising tips.

Problems with the car? The passenger seat belt jammed, we suffered a loss of tyre pressure and that was it. Again, we had no success with scotch pies.

Memorable moments included: torrential rain on the A1(M) – that's when you realise how crap the windscreen wipers are. The 'rollercoaster' road just after Corbridge – always fun. Me doing a double take near Jedburgh. The conversation was as follows: "Did you see that, Jo?" "No. What?" "I am sure there was a Spitfire facing backwards by that bridge." "Didn't see a thing. Maybe you need a coffee?" "I am going to turn around and check." Sure enough, a Spitfire had gone off the road and was facing backwards at a rather impressive tilt down the bank of a river. It was held up by not much more than a fence if I remember correctly. The drivers were both well, thankfully. The trouble was, all other entrants passing stopped to see if they could help, right on the exit of a blind bend. Much locking of wheels ensued and crews were waved on hastily before another accident occurred. Nearly forcing Bill Oddie off the road in his VW Camper in the north of Scotland. The spectacular lightning storm just as we left Stirling. Meeting the driver of a TR6 in his slippers in Westmorland Services at some ungodly hour in the morning. Getting lost on the way to Oswestry. Super roads in mid-Wales, as usual. Surprise at just how good I felt after only 40 minutes sleep in 36 hours. Leading the American crew in the GT6 through Newton Abbot – these guys must be quite mad! Hallucinating on the roads across the south coast through lack of sleep – I nearly ran that green pixie man over several times! Memories of track days at Goodwood when we arrived at this new stop. Quote from Derek Pollock, "Greater love hath no man, than he who is prepared to lay down his Sprint for a friend!" – how very true indeed. The warm reception at The Plough. Getting home and giving our baby daughter an enormous cuddle.

The best driving? Wales – spot on!

There was still no end in sight to the restoration of SEO521S again in 2006, as the bodyshop had just gone out of business for the third time! Still, we don't let minor details like this stop us.

The car was LCG367N, the Dolomite Sprint. The plan was to borrow the car once again, but this time, Carl

needed to sell it. What better choice than to buy a car whose history was known? The deal was struck and Carl set about pulling his tuning bits off the car, together with minor ancillaries like the engine, gearbox and axle. They were swapped for spare units which Carl had in stock and, as in 2004, the car came to me having undergone a rather intense preparation. This is the way to buy a car! There were still a few jobs to do though and we needed to get some miles on the car to ensure that the mechanicals were tried and tested.

The luggage consisted of a mega-toolkit as usual, plenty of spares (but not the only consumable item I actually needed!) and much reduced stocks of food and drink for us, concentrating on water and fruit, which proved to be the best option yet.

We achieved an average of 32 mpg. The fundraising raised £1500 of funds. It seems to be getting harder to persuade people to part with their hard earned cash these days.

We encountered some problems with the car: failure of the main beam in almost the same place as four years ago on SEO 521S. It was the same problem – a burned out switch. The alternator was difficult to secure in position, leading to much twiddling and adjustments at fuel stops. The fan belt was eventually thrown off while we were progressing at speed on the A30 to try to catch up the field after a 30 minute snooze. We managed to make it to a garage who stocked no fan belts of any description and were about to be given a lift to Land's End, by Pete Jordan in his lovely 2500 estate, to collect a spare fan belt from a fellow Sprint owner, when an AA van pulled in. He had a belt and even insisted on fitting it. Off we went, somewhat delayed. I've still got the same belt on the car and a spare in the boot!

Again we had no success with scotch pies and were disappointed to read of some entrants consuming several of these delicacies and even gloating about it. Whatever happened to moral standards?

This time round, memorable moments included: big relief that our two children were prepared to stay with various babysitters over the weekend. The joy of sat-nav while Jo grabbed some sleep from time to time. The even greater joy of sat-nav on those roads through Wales – its like having X-ray vision and pace notes at the same time! The mad dash to John O' Groats for breakfast, keeping up with



two well driven, and modified, Triumphs. The chaos that a blocked road in north Scotland caused with Triumphs heading in every direction in the quest for the fabulous B871. Being part of a fast moving convoy of Triumphs on the B871 – it was incredible driving by all. Disappointment at discovering that Carl Shakespeare and Becky Govier had suffered a shattered windscreen on the B871 and slight feelings of guilt at driving off in his former car. Delight at being able to help another crew out with my spare alternator – I knew I had put it in for a good reason. This year's event seemed to be full of crews with alternator problems. Foul language when the fan belt came off, followed by fouler language when I realized that I hadn't put the spare in. The laughter at my pathetic attempts to fashion a makeshift fan belt from a pair of ladies tights! My surreal moment on the south coast – I always struggle on this part of the event, as the tiredness really kicks in: we were driving along with me at the wheel and I kind of went into a trance, autopilot was fully engaged and then I snapped out of it, saying, "Oh! Where are they? Oh my god, we have forgotten them!" "What?" "Where have we left them?" "Left what?" "The kids!" "We are on the Round Britain Run you moron!" "Oh yeah.", autopilot resumes; quite bizarre. Fantastic new stop at Pimperne for tea and cakes with a warm welcome. The ever joyous feeling of achievement at The Plough on the Sunday night.

Best driving? The B871 in north Scotland. It was a struggle to find it, but I am glad we did. It was almost worth sacrificing the scotch pie for!

As for 2008, will we be entering this year? You bet! SEO 521S has barely progressed since October 2006 and LCG 367N has been sold. We do have a 1972 Stag however, so this is the likely mode of transport for the event. I just hope I can get sponsorship for the fuel bill!

