

Assorted Thoughts and Memories

Dave Langrick looks at his Round Britains

As I write this piece in October 2007, the next run is exactly 12 months away. Lester French and I are looking forward to the 2008 Run which will be our tenth consecutive entry and the 21st running of the event.

Following the request from Tim Bancroft for assorted ramblings from entrants, what follows here is a collection of memories of our nine runs to date on this truly unique event. I hope readers and fellow RBRers will find it interesting. I also hope it serves as good press for those who have not entered before and are thinking of having a bash at it! Presented in chronological order, here goes...

In 1990, pre-internet days of course, I spotted the RBR advert in the December 1989 copy of *Classic and Sportscar* magazine and immediately thought, "We will definitely have some of that." Lester said okay as co-driver. I joined CT and a letter from Derek Pollock had us in at number 53, (third reserve) in February 1990. The usual drop-outs later on ensured our entry was accepted. The car entered was my Spitfire LWE 893K, it was the only Triumph between us! It had non-reclining bucket seats and harnesses, Frenchie is six foot four! It is not the most comfortable car to spend two and a half days in, but we were both a lot younger then.

Looking back now the car's reliability was not a major worry for me as we were both regular attendees to the once very good International Spitfire Weekend in Holland, the most recent being the previous month.

I recall being at the drivers' meeting and not knowing anyone there and only at the start at Broadfields Garage did we see Paul Peake and Jayne Sparkes who we met in Holland. (Paul's ex-Mk 1 PI, RON 375G, is still around I believe.)

There was a good friendly atmosphere at the start, I remember seeing a Mk 2 PI having its radiator swapped at the start with a fellow Club member bringing one from home at a moment's notice... Some things don't change.

There was a real buzz in our car when setting off, with fantastic new roads, heading north in heavy rain, with me being on the edge of my seat going up the A68 for the first time and the route past Inverness was a joy. A car

that stood out at the time was a green Mk 2 PI that was having a lot of engine trouble throughout the event. It was indecently quick. I offered help at the John O' Groats stop as the metering unit was being changed. The driver was a certain Mr Nigel Gair.

It was a bit of a long haul to Gordano via M6-M5, following Paul Peake and a Dolly Sprint. I opened one eye to see Frenchie pulling 5000 rpm in overdrive top down the A30 somewhere and decided to close my eyes! It was a lovely day on the Sunday with the roof off from Land's End to London. We pulled over near Exeter as the temperature gauge rose above normal. Nigel Gair stopped behind to check we were okay. We were okay, it was only an air lock in a water hose. Then there was a nice run up the old A30 to a successful finish. I was on a high all the way home to Nottingham despite the tiredness. I have the 1990 book in front of me; petrol was 50p per litre!

Needless to say, we were in agreement that we would be having another bash... We were in the Spitfire again in 1992 and 1994, not much different from 1990, still PI but with a new body and chassis following a very heavy roll in April 1991. Again, they were successful finishes with no controls missed, but electrical issues in very heavy rain on one Friday night approaching Edinburgh. A quick fiddle with the fuse-box and

we were okay. Frenchie complained about the footwell filling up with water. It was good teaming up with Jayne and Paul again, Nigel Gair's now well known blue saloon made its first appearance in this year, it's quick of course and we had a blast in convoy at various points through the weekend. Much better than the first run, now knowing more Club members of course.

In 1996, we had both had enough of my Spitfire for the time being. By then I had a Mk 2 saloon, BKV 355K, that offered a nice big back seat and a heater along with Minilites, Witor Springs, polybushes, straight through exhaust etc. Lovely and a nice change.

We had a major propshaft vibration problem from London to Scotland. It was



horrendous and only eased off above 80 mph. Frenchie kept us at the required speed, the famous spirit of the event came to our aid for the first time. Our problem explained, resulted in the car up on the four-post lift at the now closed Macrae and Dick Garage stop at Dingwall, the propshaft was split and the front and rear joints were aligned correctly. From then on it was hammer down all the way to another finish with all the signatures in the book. We had an absolute hoot on this run, Frenchie enjoyed taking my car to its limits. It goes, handles and stops very well for a scruffy looking saloon. First timers this year (I think) were Dave Pearson with John Kipping in the desert Herald – brilliant little car, I remember. There was growing interest in the event that year with *Practical Classics* and *Triumph World* (Tony Beadle) involved as drivers. It was by then taken as read that RBR couldn't be missed. No holidays, weddings, nothing that will clash. It is that sort of event!

We attended the Finishers' Awards Dinner for the first time the following March – an excellent evening in good company with many RBR stories swapped over a few glasses of claret.

Looking at my 1998 entry list, among the first timers that year were Tim Bancroft and Alan Chatterton! Regulars included Chris Allen (Courier van) Dave and Clare Pearson (rare TR5 entry), Dave Kent, Dave Tongue, Tim Hunt and Keith Bennett, Jayne Sparkes, Nigel Gair *et al.* making up a now growing event with 76 cars.

My car was mechanically improved from 1996 with a fresh engine running a Piper 2TR cam and a worked head. 6500+ rpm was easily achievable and sounding like hellfire. Bodywork not improved at all. We could just about keep up with Nigel! It is what I would call now 'Club Triumph fast road spec'.

It was a bit different this time as Derek Pollock had had an approach from a TV

"I have the 1990 Road Book in front of me – petrol was 50p per litre!"



company who wished to make a short film of the event. Derek asked whether I could carry the chap round in my saloon. How could I refuse?

We took round producer/cameraman Michael Lachmann who worked for LWT with his silver boxes full of cameras. It was quite Top Gear stylee with a compact camera suckered to the windscreen and him filming in the back also! He ended up on the floor between the seats at one point as I took a hard left without warning. The car was given such a hard thrashing from London to Gordano We had gearbox issues from Gordano onwards as the laygear started to make loud noises! Up to then the car was an excellent drive. We got to the finish without any assistance though! The cameraman was stranded on the M25 as he was in Jayne Sparkes's PI which failed. He got a lift back to The Plough to film the ending. Careful editing made up for his cock-up! Michael said he had shot nine hours of footage. The resulting seven minute film was shown in the November on Sky TV's Speed programme!

In 2000 Lester had Round Britain fever proper and had purchased a really nice original Mk 1, one owner saloon, AKX 575B. It then acquired Minilites, polybushes, quick rack, PI camshaft and HS6s, louvred bonnet, Mk 2 saloon brakes and an overdrive conversion... Ha ha, another 'CT fast road spec'!

Among the first timers in 2000 were *Classic and Sportscar* editor James Elliott (Mk 1 PI) and James Shackford, again in



a Mk 1 PI. The Club got good articles two years on the bounce from JE in *C&S* magazine and a bonus photo of our group at John O' Groats.

The 2002 event also saw Andy Thompson fly in from Australia just to do the event –he flew home with a six-cylinder extractor manifold as hand luggage – top man.

Pregnancy did not stop entrant Jayne Sparkes doing the run: baby Lily had done one run before birth! Needless to say, we all had a brilliant weekend with assistance given (alternator donation) and received (sticky SU carb) by ourselves. We were pushing hard in Scotland on the Saturday afternoon; I was in Nigel's car and Frenchie ended up facing the wrong way on a traffic island. He said there was a diesel spill on the road! The true Club spirit endured, Nigel in particular spent a lot of time helping other entrants. Year 2000 also saw the inclusion of the Oswestry stop and subsequent brilliant Welsh section on the Saturday night. Well done to Nigel Abdullah on finally getting us off the M6 motorway. We also discovered that a Mk 1 2000 inlet manifold warms up a foil-wrapped sausage roll in about 20 minutes, lovely with HP sauce.

My entry list shows a crew of six in a Herald: the Canley's Stretch made it to Blyth only – what a sight.

In 2004 Lester's saloon was not ready in time – PI engine not ready. We teamed up with James Shackford in his now very well sorted PI. On the Friday evening we came across a Spitfire that had hit a bridge parapet on the A68. This was the first RTA I had seen on the Run. It's rear was hanging off the edge of the road –Andy Thompson and myself climbed through what was left of the fence, down a muddy bank and kept the back end up and level as the car was dragged back to the kerb and safety! My notes in the road book are favourable to Shackford's car – I pushed it to to the limit from Wales to Bristol. My weather notes show rain all day Saturday and Sunday. Despite this, we had a blast again – weird conversations with JS in Scotland about 'hiving' saw me crying with laughter so hard I had to pull over for a while.

Donuts were on the menu in the Shackford PI at Gordano, but were only served in the car park at 04.00 hrs.

Newcomers included Blake Discher and Pat Barber from the USA in Pat's GT6 that had been bought over. RBRR status and reputation is spreading far and wide. It goes without saying that we had a successful run. The entry list in August shows 88 entrants, bigger event and more atmosphere throughout the run.

In 2006 we were back in Frenchie's Mk 1 – now 2.5PI with Piper 2TR cam, Stag brakes, the lot –full CT fast road spec! He had put a lot of effort into the car to get it ready. Two-up only, our preference, keeps the weight down chaps! Quite a few cars, including ours, suffered from alternator problems – cheap imported components we think. We helped Tom Key, Martin Randle and Carl Shakespeare who had issues with alternator/tiredness/windscreen. There were no other real issues for us.

The entry list was over 100 at one point; there was plenty to talk about with so many cars participating. The most memorable aspect this year was a fantastic run to Land's End in convoy.

The big shock this time around – we missed one blasted signature in the Road

"We missed one signature in the Road Book – the first checkpoint we had missed in 16 years"

Book due to lateness on the Saturday night. This was the first checkpoint we had missed in 16 years!

Digital cameras/videos were now the order of the day, along with fuel at £1 per litre plus in Scotland!

And so to the present day and full circle to this piece really. Lester and I have done the event five times in a car of mine, three in his and once in James S's PI. I have not entered a car of my own since 1998. It is high time I did, so my Spitfire will be back for 2008. Lester will be in his own car of course. I suppose it fell out of favour with me in the late 90s as a long distance car – just an easy 500 mile run to ISW in Holland was a pain in the *derrière*. It was poor with bad seats, poor roof and no heater. Although it has always been continuously in use I have spent quite a lot of time on it in recent months sorting out the roof, seats and so on. In the last year it has also had suspension and brake improvements and, crucially, a 50 litre petrol tank is fitted. It is now a joy to drive on long distance events, June saw me take part in La Carrera Caledonia which proved a useful shakedown (literally!) for the Ten Countries Run. A successful 10CR only last month saw the car passed

fit and ready. The car's spec for 2008 will be 2.1 litre with Lucas PI, tried and tested in Scotland and excellent throughout.

Those reading this who have not done this event before may think that it seems like a bit of a trial – 2000 odd miles in 48 hours does look like a big ask on paper. However, broken down into short sections with social breaks at regular intervals, it passes with ease. All that is needed is a bit of thought and preparation beforehand, after all, Triumphs are relatively mechanically simple cars. If a problem does arise, help will always be on offer from some quarter or another. The RBRR has it all – driving on some of the best roads this country has to offer with breathtaking scenery, a great

driving route and not forgetting a good variety of Triumph cars.

You only need to look at the GB road atlas: the A9, A836 and B871 in the far north are fantastic roads. Even now after nine runs I find there is always something new to see.

The other major draw of the Run is the challenge of course – both preparation and participation. The event focuses the mind brilliantly on getting your car ready. Your car need not be a show car – my 2000 Mk 2 looked well past its best in 1998 – as long as it stays together an excellent weekend's motoring is guaranteed.

I conclude with the following. Firstly, one must take one's hat off to Derek Pollock

for instigating this event and long may it continue – I know it is in good hands presently. Secondly, it is the friendly nature of Club Triumph, its members and all those involved with RBRR that makes it such a special package. Whilst static car shows do have their place – some are excellent e.g. Silverstone in July, they don't really do anything for me now. We gave up with ISW in Holland, we couldn't even be bothered to leave the chalets. A photo album full of neatly parked cars on show is very boring to look at... To quote Andy Thompson, "Rev that motor or she will rust". Enough said!



Recollections of a RBRR Veteran

Tim Hunt describes his sixteen times Round Britain

My late father bought TR4A NGP 86D in September 1970. We joined Club Triumph in 1974 and soon after that heard of the Round Britain Tour, as it was then known according to my finisher's tankard, at one of the monthly meetings at The Jolly Farmers in Enfield Road. The idea immediately appealed and I would have liked to do the event with dad but he was seventy and thought it would be unfair for me to have to do most of the driving, particularly at night. The late Les Mills, then an active committee member and later to become the Club's President, kindly introduced me to a young Australian, Russ Kennery, who was a work colleague of his at Thorn in Enfield. We hit it off and Russ agreed to do the event with me. Russ was friendly with the then-owner of the *Australian Times* newspaper, which catered for the large Antipodean expat community in London. Russ managed to convince said individual that it would be a good idea for his paper to sponsor our car on the Round Britain Tour. In return we carried promotional material for the journal and provided articles on preparation of the car and our experiences on the Tour. This was the first and, unfortunately, the only time that my fuel costs for the event were covered.

The 1974 event started from the then-British Leyland Head Office in Marylebone Road, hard to imagine in a current Friday evening's rush hour traffic. Remember, though, that in 1974 there were only twelve starters, a far cry from now! I had forgotten that I had blanked off the radiator grille to encourage the car to run hotter and more economically and on the last stretch of our journey to the start the engine overheated and I had the embarrassing experience of the radiator boiling over in the underground car park of BL's HQ. The lost coolant was soon replaced and the whole run passed off without further incident. Memories of other participants are now hazy, but I vaguely recall Derek Pollock and Les Mills in a yellow Dolomite Sprint works entry and two very nice TR2s, one red with a hardtop, the other BRG with a tan soft top. Unfortunately, the red car made it only as far as the Finchley Road before retiring with a failed drive shaft. The owner had his car recovered home and rejoined the event some hours later in his daily driver, not difficult since it happened to be a three-litre



Ford Capri. Russ duly returned to Oz and, for reasons that I cannot now recall, I never got around to entering the 1976 event. I have regretted this ever since.

For 1978 I teamed up with Paul Howell, owner of the green TR2 I had admired in 1974, although we used the 4A since we deemed it somewhat more civilised and comfortable for a 48-hour event. Another consideration influencing my choice of car was that Paul was very keen on originality and insisted on keeping the 'tripod' type headlights with the old bulbs in his TR2. I much prefer to see where I am going at night! I see nothing wrong with a halogen

conversion for an old car; after all, one can easily put the original lights back for a concours competition. Paul was once also the owner (custodian) of OVC 276, the very first 'works' TR2 which finished seventh in class on the 1954 Mille Miglia. Our car ran faultlessly to John O' Groats and down through the north of Scotland, but on the approach to the new Ballachulish Bridge over Loch Leven we heard a rattling noise, seemingly from the top end. Vital signs were okay so we motored steadily on through Glencoe. Just past Bridge of Orchy the car started to overheat and this was accompanied by increased noise from the engine. We stopped to investigate and found the water pump bearing to be knackered. We were finished; I had no spare pump on board and no prospect of finding one on a Saturday evening in the Scottish highlands. Fortunately, Martin Horton happened along shortly after we stopped and kindly towed us to Tyndrum where we found a hotel for the night. Ever since that experience I have carried a spare water pump and gasket in the boot, more of this anon. The following morning, having judiciously removed all the event stickers, I arranged recovery home by AA Relay. This was a bit of a marathon involving five or so legs and my one clear abiding memory is of the over-enthusiastic AA driver getting his recovery vehicle, complete with my pride and joy on the back, almost sideways on a wet A82 by the side of Loch Lomond! I had noticed a leak from the water pump when checking the car prior to the event and had in fact changed the offending item. It was particularly galling to have the new pump fail and it was little consolation when the supplying British Leyland dealer subsequently replaced the faulty item free of charge.

In 1980 I teamed up with Mike Hockaday, a friend from a motor club in Harpenden where I lived at the time, who was to be my regular co-driver for the next eleven RBRs. Both Mike and his brother Pete had 1500 Spitfires although I recall Mike progressing? to an early Speke-built four-speed TR7 coupé. Some time later, he was fortunate enough to have this car stolen from outside his digs in Wolverhampton when he was working for Goodyear's Racing Tyre Division. Our 1980 run passed without memorable incident.

On to 1982 when unfortunately the gremlins struck again. I had the hammer down on the A30 on Bodmin Moor when I suddenly noticed the oil pressure gauge

"The engine had spewed out all its oil from a failed oil cooler hose and the main bearings had run"

reading falling. I switched off immediately and coasted to a halt. Unfortunately the damage was already done, the engine had spewed out all its oil from a failed oil cooler hose and the main bearings had run. This time it was the RAC that recovered the car to my home, courtesy of Mike's membership. I had had a replacement steering rack fitted only the previous week by my local BL dealer. On investigation it became clear that when the new rack was fitted an oil cooler hose had been carelessly routed and been allowed to rub on the rack, eventually chafing through. To their credit, the dealer admitted liability and rebuilt my engine at their expense, but once again it was small consolation to me for having failed to complete a Round Britain Run for the second time, through no fault of my own.

The 1984 Run passed without incident, bringing us to 1986. This time, on leaving the Perth fuel halt in the early hours of Saturday morning the ignition warning light came on. The fan belt was fine and correctly tensioned and all connections to the dynamo were good, so we were looking at either a problem with the control box

or an internal dynamo fault. I had a well-charged heavy duty battery and there was bright moonlight so we decided to press on, using dipped beam only

and switching the headlights off whenever possible. We were relieved when dawn broke near Inverness and we reached John O' Groats with no problem. There we tinkered with the control box to no avail, although it seemed to be functioning correctly. Unfortunately, no one had a spare dynamo for us to try. Fortunately the day was dry and clear so we were able to motor on using as little electrical power as possible. Soon after passing Bonar

Bridge we noticed a couple of decrepit Land Rovers outside a garage in Ardgay. We pulled in and, as luck would have it, were allowed to remove a scruffy looking C40 dynamo from one of these vehicles. We fitted it to the TR and, hey-presto, we were charging again! We left our original dynamo as an exchange and went on our way much relieved. Unfortunately, after some hundred miles or so the replacement dynamo gave up the ghost. I guess having spent a quiet life in a Land Rover it was just not used even to occasional excursions to 5000 rpm! When we reached Morrisons garage in Stirling we were able to strip the dynamo on a workbench but were unable to find the problem. We faced a long drive through the night with a battery that must soon go flat and it was at this point that Andy Roberts came to our rescue. He very kindly shepherded us for the rest of the Run and we swapped batteries a few times as soon as ours became discharged. The clue each time a swap was due was the failure of the overdrive solenoid to operate. We were also careful to park on a slope wherever possible and bump start the car to avoid starter motor drain.

Mike and I completed the 1988, 1990 and 1992 Runs without incident. On the 1994 event there were road works on the A1 near Norman Cross and we made a detour on to minor roads to avoid the consequent long delays. With Mike driving we were travelling at a good pace, fortunately on a straight stretch of road, when



suddenly we lost the headlights completely. It was drizzling at the time and there was no moonlight but an on-coming car provided some illumination and Mike was able to pull safely to a halt. By good fortune two other crews, who just happened to have taken the same detour, turned up a few minutes after we had stopped. We still had sidelights and by driving between these two cars we managed to get to Blyth services where we could work on the car in good light. Needless to say, it was the light switch that had burned out and we jury-rigged wiring to bypass this switch and give us dipped beam. We then finished the Run with no further problems. I subsequently found that a new switch would set me back about £40, so I stripped the failed component and restored it by building up the burned contacts with new solder.

The 1996, 1998 and 2000 events passed without significant incident. Mike was unable to accompany me on the 2002 Run since he was in the middle of some important exams at the time. I duly recruited Mark Irwin from the local Institute of Advanced Motorists group. We had a trouble free run as far as the car was concerned but, as an old hand, it was somewhat embarrassing for me to miss the turn off the M9 for the Forth Road Bridge while I was navigating, necessitating us having to double back along the A904 to pick up our route. I recall thick but patchy fog on the A30 between Oakhampton and Bodmin. The traffic was very light but, as is always the case in such conditions, more vehicles passed me in an hour or so than would in several week's normal motoring. I was glad to hand over the wheel near Truro. Arriving at Land's End we learned that Andrew Howarth's TR4 had suffered water pump failure and was stranded in a garage in Oakhampton. I, of course, still had a spare pump and gasket in my boot that had been there for 24 years following my experience on the 1978 event. My spare had a pressed on and non-removable pulley and

another entrant, Pete Cox, kindly supplied the correct 3/8" UNF/UNC stud to replace the bolt on Andrew's car and without which it would have been impossible to fit my pump. After a hurried breakfast we made good speed to Oakhampton, located the garage and soon had the replacement pump fitted. We then enjoyed a spirited drive together in the two TRs via the A30 and A382 over Dartmoor to the Dartmoor Lodge control and lunch stop where we arrived on schedule and met up again with other entrants.

For the 2004 RBRR I teamed up with Mike Godfrey who had co-driven Pete Cox in a TR2 on the previous event. Lucas the 'Prince of Darkness' was to strike again and the light switch began to play up on the A10 on the Friday evening. We found that by setting the switch carefully we could find a position in which dipped beam worked and this lasted us until the Saturday evening when it became too much of a fiddle and we had to stop and do some rewiring to restore control over the headlights. This lasted us okay to the end of the event but our problems were far from over. On the final leg round the M25 I was conscious of a rapidly deflating tyre on the rear offside. This was in a road works contra-flow near junction 13 and fortunately a 40 mph limit was in force at the time. I spotted a place safely to pull off the carriageway a short distance ahead and was able to stop before the tyre was ruined. I called the AA and the car was removed from the motorway so that we could fit the spare in safety and we were soon on our way again to The Plough.

I repaired the light switch as I had done previously but before the 2006 Run, which



I again entered with Mike Godfrey, I fitted relays for dip and main beam in the hope that this would prevent the switch ever burning out again. Dale Barker kindly helped me finish the wiring at The Plough just before the start. Mike and I enjoyed a trouble free drive on this latest Run and the car did not miss a beat the whole weekend. We were, however, able to be of assistance to other crews, particularly Pat Barber and Blake Discher from Michigan in '70 SPIT' (as the car is licensed) who we saw with the hood up at Edinburgh Airport. Their dynamo wasn't charging and on removing it we could see that both brushes had worn down almost to their springs. I had a brand new set in the comprehensive spares kit that had been in my car for over thirty years and Pat's dynamo was soon restored to health. At John O' Groats I provided hydraulic fluid so that Pat could bleed an ineffective clutch and a little later he availed

himself of my ten-litre emergency fuel supply. By this time I was beginning to feel a bit like a mother hen. It was nice to be able to help someone out this time having myself been the

recipient of assistance over the years in the best RBRR tradition.

I now look forward to the 2008 Run, my seventeenth, with undiminished enthusiasm for the Club's flagship event and would like to think I have few more left in me yet!

"Lucas, the Prince of Darkness' was to strike again..."

"It's nice to be able to help someone out, having been the recipient of assistance over the years in the best RBRR tradition"





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