

MullMurmurs – Chapter 1

Wellhullawrerrchinasandhowzyernervesajinglin? Welcome one and all to the carameliciously unique 39th Tunnock's Tour of Mull Rally here in the world capital of international rallying, Tobermory. Forget Monaco and Lake Geneva, think Mull and Calgary Bay, besides our midgies will eat theirs for breakfast!

The rally got underway on Wednesday night with Rod Brereton's quiz involving 25 teams at the Mishnish in aid of the Pendleside Hospice on behalf of the late, and well loved, Jack Neal. The auction raised 150 quid for the BTCC weekend prize, a Kumho jacket went for 60 quid and a Renaultsport jacket fetched even more money. In total Rod raised nearly £700. No bad, eh? By the way, Rod would like the winning Team Avenger to make contact with him, he wants the trophy left on the gantry at the Mishnish, that's if Team Avenger hasn't pawned it already.

Last night it was that helluva nice big chap John Fife's turn with the annual Forum in the Aros Hall, solely in the aid of fun and frivolity. Our grateful thanks to Calum Duffy, John Cressey, Ian Grindrod, John Swinscoe, Paul MacKinnon and Louise Sutherland for taking the time out of their pre-rally preps to come and provide meaningful insight/inane drivel (cross out the one which doesn't apply) to the packed house which attended. Naturally there were a few bruises along the way – from the flying tee-shirts. If you don't understand, you weren't there!

There was also a presentation last night to the now retired Sergeant Ian Erskine who has shown great patience, and dare I say it, enthusiasm, for the rally over the years, since he became the chief Polis here in 1986. Sergeant Angie MacDonald is the new chief Polis on the island so take care out there tonight and tomorrow, she's got plenty of support. There's more polis caurs on the island than in an episode of The Bill. The Police are great here every year, but only if you behave yourself. So when out and about exercise care on the narrow roads and park sensibly when going spectating. Badly parked cars will mean cancelled stages!

And if you don't mind, here's another wee intimation. There will be a wee gathering at Brian's bench beside the cairn above Dervaig on Sunday morning at 11.00 am, for the scattering of Jack Neal's ashes. All welcome.

Now, if you've happened to notice the sartorially attired rally officials, you too can avail yourself of some fashionable excesses at the Aros Hall where team support gear and rally programmes will be on sale. This is essential reading as it contains maps and a timetable. Remember, if you want get into the stages you have to be there and parked up safely before the Road Closure Time and stay there till Road Opening Time.

And so to the rally. Friday dawned wet. After four dry Mulls, the clouds looked ominous this morning, but Mull regulars are used to it, whatever happens. First car into Scrutineering at Tobermory Distillery this morning was Neil MacKinnon's McKinstry Subaru. It is the same car as last year but the Team reckons they have sorted out the ECU problem which was causing the overheating problems last year, so the Ol' Man of Mull should start in fine fettle tonight.

John Cope was next through after getting his engine back and fitted on Tuesday of this week. The turbo had blown on the Pendragon, but remember he was leading the CSS Stages on the Isle of Man earlier this year when he put it off 2.5 miles from the Finish. So he should be on the case tonight. Just how fit is he? He's lost a stone and a half, two stones if he leaves his wallet at home, so he's now a lean, mean driving machine!

James MacGillivray was in a rush to get through Scrutineering, he was going straight back to the farm to round up the cows which are due at Oban market this afternoon. Fortunately for him, his Dad is going to take them over, but if you've ever seen his Dad drive the cattle float, maybe James should stand down from rally driving duties! Even so, James is hardly match-fit, his bad back is back and he's on pain killers.



Calum Duffy's Exocet MkII was next through the arch. He went out for a wee shot this morning. "The back was all over the place in the wet," said Calum, "the front was fine but I'm going to need to get softer tyres if it stays wet."

Willie Bonniwell's Subaru was looking better than it did after the McRae. Fred and the boys had done a sterling job repairing the bent bids and straightening the shiny bits. Oddly enough, all the damage was on the driver's side, according to the team: "He ain't that bright!"

Young Paul MacKinnon's N10 was looking well with its jet black highlights on the bright yellow car. John Pye said he painted it 'jet black' for the 'jet' who will drive it tonight. So no pressure then, eh? But remember the youngster was up to 2nd place overall last year before trouble struck.

And here's a sight for sore eyes, Wayne Sisson is back. Ten years ago he competed in an Astra but the lure of Mull was too much so he's back in a Lancer.

There are four German sausage tins in the rally again, three built by Daniel Harper and one customer car. The 'works' cars have benefited from more development since last year and the supercharged 1600cc BMW engines are now developing 265 bhp with 245 lbs/ft torque. They've also got a new gearbox Daniel Harper is driving one, the effervescent John Cressey another and Ian Dawes is in the third. As an aside, John Cresset reckons it never rains on Mull. No. What happens is, it rains 2 miles out to sea and then gets blown horizontally on to the island. I know what he means! There was another surprise. Cressey was using a credit card to squeeze the bubbles out from under his stickers. I didn't know he had one, or maybe it was someone else's.

Doug Weir's MkII was looking well, and four years after building the Browns of Tobermory machine they finally got to the bottom of a recurrent electrical problem. It was a broken wire. But could they find it? They made a new loom for it and tested it at an autocross before bringing it over for this year's event.

Dougi Hall was at it again. Cycling to raise money for charity. Yesterday morning he was out pedalling furiously the 22 miles from Gruline, round Calgary to Dervaig and did it in 1 hr 5 mins 36 secs – 2 mins quicker than last year. His top speed was 47.6 mph on the downhill hairpins and he averaged 20.2 mph. Maybe he should give up the Lancer and do the Tunnock's Tour on his bike!

First timer Wesley Patterson is here. "It's all Calum Duffy's fault," said the Irishman who finished top 2WD and 5th o/a on the Wexford, "he keeps going on about Mull and talked me into it – it's a lot tighter than I thought! They're narrow too with no hedges and no ditches. I'll need to keep it in the middle of the road."

Martin Healer is back for more. He tried ski-ing but got run over by a hoodie on a snowboard and carted off to hospital where they put a metal plate in his broken leg. Now he can't walk past a scrap yard without getting dragged in when they switch on the big magnet. So rallying is safer than ski-ing, that's official.

And fresh back from clog country and cheesy Holland, Paul Kirtley was 8th in the flat country before coming back to the hilly and rocky country. The 99 spec WRC Subaru looks the same as last year but it's a brand 'new' car built for Mull but remember he had a bit of a 'woopsy' on that sudden rain shower last year.

So just how serious is the Tunnock's Tour of Mull Rally? Just ask the Rintoul brothers. They're still speaking, but only just. They were out doing their own Notes on the Hill Road the other night and then went back to check them. But every one was wrong, so they had to re-do them. Then they went back a third time, but there was a difference. Jim started on the 1st page this time, not the 2nd page as he did before. Driver John may be small, but he's fiery when fully lit! I'd love to have heard them inside the car after that one.

Yer Auld Pal, Jaggy Bunnet – Friday, Noon, Tobermory.