

TOUR DE FRANCE, 1964

IT was with a great deal of uncertainty and a great lack of "savoir faire" that a small group of ragged idiots assembled on Coventry airfield early one Wednesday morning, destined to defend the honour of all black-pudding eaters in the dreaded Touring de France-type motoring event, or so the tale begins, for being my first international, it was, to me, a step into the unknown.

The party was four in number, Rev. R. Jones and myself, in a 1275-"S"-type Cooper entered, very sportingly, by Vitafoam Ltd.; ably assisted by B. Gillibrand and J. Goodliffe, the former being competitions manager of Vitafoam, the latter being B.R.T. Developments man on the spot. We were bound for Lille, in Northern France, where the event started, and after a short flight, a long wait while the service car cleared the customs, a quick dash, we made Lille in the late afternoon, where Rally Headquarters were quickly located and signing on formalities accomplished in gruff Lancashire French, which is supposedly worse than Yorkshire Chinese. A detailed road book was issued enabling the route to be drawn in on the maps the next day whilst the car was scrutineered, then checked and serviced, ready for the start on Friday evening.

The 9-day event, officially classed as a race, consists of a tour of the circuits and well-known hill climbs in France, designed so that one is at a circuit every day, i.e. Rheims, Rouen, Le Mans, Cognac, Pau, Albi, Auvergne, whilst the last, Monza, necessitated a dash in and out of Italy. The roads sections being 1-3 hour durations between time controls at a leisurely average, on major and minor roads, there being a night halt every other night. Cars were handicapped on capacity and had a set number of laps to complete in the time allowed on the circuit in order to qualify and remain in the event, each car being allowed to misqualify once. On the hills too, there was a maximum time above which one did not qualify, so it was obvious that cars had to be extremely fit to cover both high circuit speeds and long road mileages with very little maintenance.

On Friday afternoon, competitors reported back in Lille, and their cars were ushered into parc fermé leaving 3 hours of noddying before the start, which consisted of stopping on a ramp, receiving any final instructions, drawing forwards, setting watches, receiving a route card, then off at 20-second intervals into the dusk to Rheims; which was 3 hours away, and where the cars entered parc fermé for the night, after a quick service by the team outside the town.

Back at 6-30 we were escorted by police out to Rheims circuit, where the touring cars immediately commenced their laps for one and a half hours, our car just qualifying with a continual misfire which slowed the average. The rest of the day was spent relaxing before the restart at 4-30 on the night section, which we entered 15 minutes down due to a starter motor change. By 9-30 we were at Baumont Hill Climb, near the Swiss border, then back below Paris to Rouen by 8-0 the following morning, where the car was serviced before commencing the hour run on the circuit. We qualified again, but on the restart the clutch refused to work, and we departed in 2nd, after a great deal of gnashing of teeth; to the night halt at Caen. Le Mans came next the following morning, where the misfire occurred again, even after a coil and distributor change, so forfeiting qualification and leaving us on our last life.

The second night's route, which followed, proved unexciting, short section of red then a yellow or two taking us round Brittany and down past Bordeaux to Cognac for the following morning, the depressing feature being a slow drop in oil pressure and increasing engine noise. The airfield circuit here provided our Waterloo, the pressure being too low to attempt driving fast enough to qualify, so we retired, the Tour continuing on to Pau, while we gloomed, recovered and returned slowly, driving the car right to Boulogne before it finally expired and was returned empty at the end of a rope.

The Tour is certainly a tough event on the motors and this accentuates the feat of John Wadsworth, from Burnley, who finished first in his class, with a leaking oil seal right from the start. "Up the North!"

Any account of team activities on the return run is definitely omitted to protect the guilty, or something like that. A reet good "do".

J. C.

THE MINI-MIGLIA, 1964

WITH a route devised by Ron Hobro, the Mini was the first "Motoring News" Championship event of this year to head for the Lake District. For a Knowldale event, I thought the Final Instructions Sheet was badly thought out, with rather vague Out of Bounds instructions and a long list of "place names" for noise areas, if they had been map references, navigators might have plotted them, but to find village names scattered over four maps is asking a lot.

At the start, on the A6 just south of Kendal, the route was handed out one hour prior to competitors starting time, and a frenzied plot and ask session commenced, with loads of new white roads being used. An easy run through Kendal took competitors up the A6 over Shap Fell, to the 1st Control on the "Waterworks road" near Shap village. The First Section over to Rosgill saw the retirement of hot favourites David Friswell/Ken Binns with a front suspension tie-bar coming loose on their Cooper "S". Then out went Roy Fidler/John Middleton (Cortina G.T.) minus exhaust pipe.

Going to Control 5, the route was unmarked on the map, onwards over a humby field until, if you found it, the control appeared—David Thistlethwaite and Gerald Ryan found a river and dropped their Cooper in it.

Jennie Nadin/Mike Kempley attacked a banking with her Cooper—the banking won—Jennie retired to breakfast.

Then came the very worst section any rally has ever run over—an impossible white road with huge craters, humps and gullies, smashed sump-guards, sumps, floors and suspensions. Neil Edmunds' Cooper, progressing at 5 m.p.h. had the floor pushed up some six inches, and Mike Preston had the hydrolastic suspension collapse on his 1100. This track might be suitable as a tank-wrecking course, but for a Rally—NO!

Nearing the Petrol Halt at Keswick, Jimmy Bullough/Mike Wood lost the navigation lights in their Cortina G.T. and a few minutes as a result. After petrol, longer sections took the route over Uldale Fells and then South towards Calder Bridge, leaving several cars behind in its wake, including Don Grimshaw (navigation sickness), and Jack Tordoff, upturned Saab. Whilst Len Holt and Horace Beighton had a cold night in their Cortina minus windscreen.

After Calder Bridge came a frantic thrash over Hardknott, Wrynose, and Blea Tarn to a white road by the river in Great Langdales, Reg. McBride being fastest, followed by Phil Simister (Cortina G.T.) and "No. 1 Son" Terry McBride in his Anglia. The direction of approach for this control had been changed at the start, but Yves Champeau/Don Bennett attempted to bring their Anglia in from the original direction, spoiling an otherwise excellent trip.

South down the western shore of Windermere on a white track, the testing route continued to the finish at the Lakeside Hotel, and a good breakfast, easy chairs, and nodding natters.

VERDICT.—Apart from the points already made, the event was first class, and can be summed up in one word, "Scintillating".

S. N. K.

RESULT—1. R. McBride/D. Barrow (Cortina G.T.) 360 marks; 2. G. Bloom/A Taylor (Cooper S) 380 marks; 3. F. Davies/R. Redhead (Cooper S) 410 marks; 4 (equal), M. Dawson/K. Wood (Cooper S), R. Peters/B. Hughes (Cooper S) 440 marks; 6. P. Simister/Miss Y. Hilton (Cortina G.T.) 450 marks; 7. T. McBride/B. Potts (Anglia) 470 marks; 8. M. Offley/T. Harrison (Mini) 480 marks; 9. J. Bullough/M. Wood (Cortina G.T.) 530 marks; 10. (equal) F. Grange/T. Mason (Cortina G.T.) 550 marks; J. M. Ashall/A. M. Price (Cortina G.T.) 550 marks; 12. C. Knowles-Fitton/G. Nash (Cooper S) 560 marks; 13. N. L. Edmond/T. Rowland (Cooper) 570 marks; 14. (equal) R. Mapple/G. Smith (Cooper) 590 marks, B. Bayliss/D. Naywood (Cortina G.T.) 590 marks; L. Holt/H. Beighton (Cortina) 590 marks.