

## South West Double

The South West had not been a happy hunting ground in 2019; 10 miles into The Bagger in January the clutch cable had snapped and a 6 hour journey south was called into question, along with our sanity, which can happen when you come away with 20 minutes of seat time and a DNF. However friends were made and gauntlets were laid down, The South West Double, were we game?

For those not aware this consisted of a 30mile Targa Rally around Worthy Farm, home of Glastonbury Music Festival, on Saturday, the first time this format had been trialed yet a clear descendant from the legendary Great Bustard Endurance Rally. Worth Birkill and his team from Salisbury & Shaftesbury Motor Club are popular organisers in the south and rightly so for they laid on an amazing test of driver, navigator and machine. The Targa scene is really booming in the South West and they've had a championship in 2019 continuing in 2020, for those considering it, just get on and do it.

From a navigators perspective I had heard about the tulip diagrams and sub-tests and was thinking I would be up and down watching the tripmeter all day. In reality I didn't switch it on and navigated these tests by "short, medium, long" distances which worked quite well but the slots were so numerous and so close together you were just shouting them out as soon as they appeared. It just flowed so well and with tests ranging from 5 to 10minutes this wasn't car park stuff.



Photo by M&H Photography, <http://www.mandhphotography.co.uk/>

In addition we had 4 map based tests which provided another level of challenge, lots of detail and faint crossroads with numerous passage checks and sneaky route checks to catch out those not paying attention, absolutely brilliant.

We had no expectations of the event, the seeding had us at 9, which we were perfectly happy with as you never want to be too close to the front on a Targa. Carnage was engaged from Test 1 with a number of cars damaging the fence and some being put out for the rest of the day, not

many were surprised when car 2, Owen Turner/Rachel Vestey posted a time 17 seconds quicker than the rest of the field, headed by us.

John Davies/Jamie Mills took the spoils on Test 2 although their charge was short lived in the Puma as a broken driveshaft ended their day prematurely. Care had to be taken going from loose to grippy surface and since no nobblies were allowed on this event finding grip and holding momentum was massively important.

We entered Tests 4 and 5 ahead of car 8 whom we had caught earlier and Bevan set down to work setting consecutive fastest times well clear of the chasing pack which gave us the lead of the event. I would like to claim me shouting "keep it neat" helped but I suspect it did more to distract than assist! This continued to two more fastest times where upon we were informed of our overall placing by fellow Northern raider Iain Tullie. The nerves were real.

Our final runs through were, if we are honest, scrappy and a bit tense, we were in awe of the sportsmanship of car 7 Ben Smith/Simon Harris who let us past with no loss of time, absolute gentlemen and they had their own top 10 fight on their hands eventually finishing 7<sup>th</sup> only 4 seconds off 6<sup>th</sup>, which was probably pulling over for us, sorry but thanks guys!

Teifi Valley Motor Club crew Dan Morris and Geth Johnson stormed through the final test to take fastest time and with it steal 2<sup>nd</sup> overall from Owen and Rachel. TVMC crews also grabbed 4<sup>th</sup> and I don't think that will be the last of the Welsh crews the South West Targa scene will see.



No prize giving for us, and apologies were made to the organisers after our overall win, but we had about 100kg of Worthy Farm to remove from the car. Morrisons in Wells will never invite us back after the destruction left in their jet wash! The car spun its wheels in the dirt trying to reverse out...

Photo by M&H Photography, <http://www.mandhphotography.co.uk/>

After a day finishing at 4pm at the Targa it was time to get the car on the trailer and head south for the night rally, the Historic Motorsport South West Barbara Carter Memorial Rally organised by Daniel Pidgeon, local road rally legend and all round top bloke. Tiredness had already set in for me and a beef burger and chips did nothing to improve the situation. Plotting took a fair effort to get through for both driver and navigator, reams of grid references are certainly practical but not my favourite for getting the route down.

We had a high seeding on this event at car 5 with previous winner Brendan Wellman at car 1 with Welsh navigator Dafydd Evans in the hot seat for the first time. Other notable entrants were M-Sports Rich Millener navigated by welsh champion navigator Michael Gilbey and a further northern crew of Steve Retchless/Sasha Heriot in the flying Escort Mk2.

Lining up for MTC1 it was a pleasant and humorous sight to see Sam Spencer sprinting across the car park to regain the map he had left in our car, I am not sure how far we would have gone before realising he couldn't make it out the car park! And before we knew it, into the lanes...



Straight into a white and Mr Manston from M&H Photography was out flashing and caught some cracking shots on a 90 Right / 90 Left combo. Unfortunately the second section near Tiverton saw car 4, fellow double contenders John Davies/Jamie Mills go wrong with a miss-plot but we were bang on pace dropping just 3 seconds over the first few

Photo by Motion Media, <https://www.facebook.com/motionmediauk1> time to the second sections ending time card 1 with a lead of 56 seconds over car 17, Dave Webb/Shawn Layland in the little Sirion. The final time control of the section causing a number of crews to go wrong, such is the complexity of lanes and tight plotting.

We dropped an unfortunate 2 minutes on the next section after I insisted we returned to check for a missing code board. It turned out just to be missing but our spin around cost us time and I was kicking myself not trusting our convictions but caution following some cheeky codeboards was overall safer. By this time Steve/Sasha and Tim Hodgson/Sam Spencer had both sadly retired after car maladies in their Escorts. Worrying times for the French car when a metallic knocking also started appearing from the rear, or could it just be spending prolonged car in the company of a straight cut gearbox!?

Our 2 minute caution loop cost us as we ended the 2<sup>nd</sup> timecard 42 seconds behind Rich/Michael in the Corolla but into petrol we took a 5 minute lead over car 17. The fuel stop at Cullompton was empty with just us and car 2 around, Devon had taken some victims and was proving its reputation being at times a lonely place!

For those not familiar with how this event differs from perhaps your local road rallies, the lanes are tight, many not as map, the roads are broken and covered in mud and the slots are numerous. Its like a version of gravel rallying on welsch lanes but with less passage checks, brilliant.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> half on regular Barbara Carter roads was a real trial of endurance, not even a McDonalds coffee at the fuel stop was helping me and I was struggling to see my own pencil line on the map. We approach one NAM diagram and neither of us could find it on the cross roads and even when we did we couldn't figure out which way to leave.



Photo by Motion Media, <https://www.facebook.com/motionmediauk1>

Eventually our brains deciphered it, not an organiser issue just sheer tiredness, 4 years competing together we knew what it was going to take to finish this rally and it was testing us.

The end of timecard 3 saw the clever addition of a short plot and bash section near Exeter Airport over 4 minutes with a closed envelope to rip open first, taking more time out of the competitor. It easily went down onto the map and we ended up waiting at the control for 20 seconds but it gave me the kick up the behind to get back into gear and concentrate to the finish.

The final timecard was where the rally really came together. Our wake up on the plot and bash lead us to set quickest time overall on TC8B, just before Barbara's house near Exmouth, 19 seconds up on previous year winner Wellman who had car issues on the first half dropping them well down. A determined charge saw them up to 4<sup>th</sup> overall by the finish and demons demolished after it came together in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half. We shipped another 40 seconds to Millener/Gilbey with 2 sections left to go and the pressure was mounting in the car. You know the driver is keen to finish when he asks for a running commentary on mile by mile countdown to the finish!

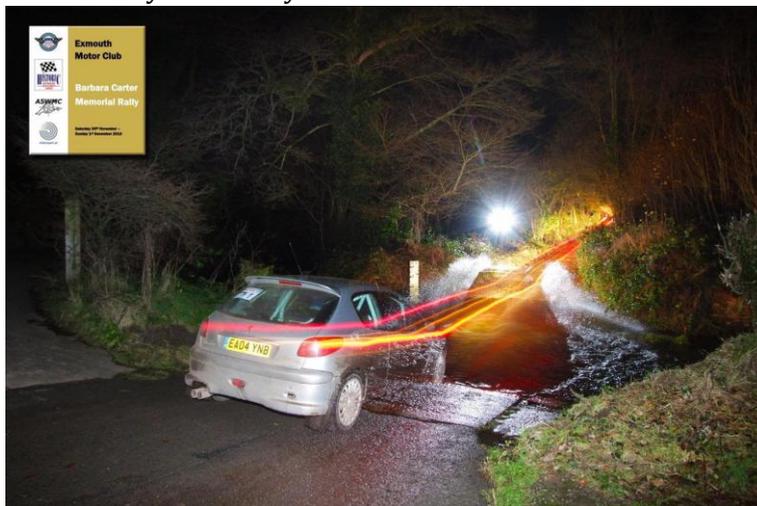


Photo by M&H Photography, <http://www.mandhphotography.co.uk/> Fortunately the final 2 sections between Sidmouth and Cullompton were relatively short and pain free and a pint of Guinness with breakfast perked me up no end. A win by 3 minutes was unexpected but no less than what our performance had delivered on the night. The rally was one of the toughest, most rewarding and challenging endurance challenges we have faced, and the best description is a "mini-bagger". You might think comparing to another event is faint praise; I assure you it is not.

Giving a winners speech having won two events in 18 hours, it was all a bit surreal. It took 3 days for it to sink in and actually realise that we celebrate for weeks having won a single event, let alone two. The South West Double, if you want endurance, you need to do this. If you have lanes in the veins, you need to do this. If you want to compete on the some of the best events in the UK, you need to do this.

SW rallying, thank you. Please be closer to Yorkshire.

Bevan Blacker/Niall Frost Peugeot 106