

We're there!!! Well almost.

The Severnside Motorsport / Express Windows Saxo has finally sailed on its maiden voyage, with a trip to the seaside for the Carbase Somerset Stages Rally, based in sunny Minehead.

The week leading up to the event was a bit stressful for all involved with the car, and there may be two divorces coming out of it as well. Of course I will be home by 5 o'clock for tea darling, Yeah right!

The engine arrived a few weeks before the event, but due to work commitments for both Steve, myself and with Severnside's workload, the transplant was put off for a week. The Easter weekend saw all hands on deck to finish off all of the small jobs which take all of the time. Make sure any small holes are filled in the shell, cover this bit, do that bit and oh, best get engine started. Saturday saw the first attempted start of the engine, but after a quick rewire of the ignition system there was much joy and sighs of relief. Bank holiday Monday saw myself and Andy from Severnside have a quite morning finishing off the dashboard area and centre console, ready for the mad week ahead.

Tuesday and Wednesday was spent finishing the rest of the small jobs, like fitting the sump guard and the like. A few runs up and down the estate road found a few problems which were ironed out quite quickly. We managed to get the car MOT'd on Wednesday eve which meant it could be taxed. Steve followed us to the MOT station and commented on the noise, as a small tear rolled from his eye. It was either the noise of the car echoing through the trees, or the fact that we left some of his tyres on the way out of the unit. I think it was the second thing personally!

Thursday saw a trip to Cinderford for the log booking of the car. The rain poured down and in. A few leaks that we didn't know about, but hey, it's a rally car! Mr Loveridge was complimentary about the car and told us that we had put some thought into every thing. Nice! Cheers Paul. When we got back to the unit the thought of that we would actually be doing the event crossed our mind. I know that rooms had been booked months ago, but it looked so far away then. Thoughts of not getting there had crossed all of our minds. Stickers! Where had all of the stickers gone? Image Signs 'n' Stuff were called only to find that some had been lost in their unit move. What was there was brought down and fitted. We were assured that all would be ok. The boys from Image were in the unit just after 5 on Friday morning finishing off. Fair play! The car looks the mutt's nuts. Big and yellow and all there. Finishing touch to a very professional looking car. Severnside hold your head up high. You have done Steve and I proud.

Putting it on the trailer Friday put the whole package together. Off to Minehead. The car was getting looked at all down the motorway with quite a few thumbs up from passing cars. Noise check went all ok, with a very small brake problem found, but Andy and our new crew person James (had to get his name in because he will be embarrassed), sorted it out straight away. The amount of interest in the car in the service area was magic, and the bonnet was up more than down. We all felt a lot better after that, and off we went for a well earned curry. A few of our sponsors were also with us for the afternoon, so we were all on our best behaviour. Right, as if. There is now video evidence that Graham from Express Windows and Martin Watts, yes Martin, are gong into the entertainment business by singing on the pub circuit. By the way guy's, who the F**k is Alice?

Saturday morning started far too early with breakfast at 6:15. Why? Not enough sleep all round, apart from Steve who went home early. (It wasn't that early!) Big breakfast. Just what the doctor ordered.

Off to the start and a final check over of the car. A few nuts and bolts loose, but that is to be expected. The attitude for the event from all of us is that the more mileage we cover the better. If we finish that will be a bonus. First run of an untested car on gravel. Sounds like last time!

The run to stage 1 was about the worse thing we have ever been on. The forest road, and I use that very loosely, was awful. First gear up a one in four hill with massive ditches and holes is not a good way to start the event. It was bad last year, but this is silly. Up on top it was not too bad, with the stage rough in places. We decided to take it very gently as we were unsure of how the car would go. Off the start not too much wheel spin and straight on the notes. The thing picks up speed very well, and we were soon into the rhythm. There seemed to be a bit of a rubbing noise from the back, which turned out to be the rear arch catching the tyre as the bumper bracket is very close. We were making a mental list of problems as we went. Steve was unsure of the brakes, as they are now non servo'd and need to be pushed, but after halfway he was happy. The hand brake works very well and is in just the right place. After last year in the 106, the amount of power is great, and the gearbox ratios are spot on. After a good and steady run, we stopped the clock 1 Min 17 Sec quicker than last year. Yes I know it was foggy last year but that's not bad for taking it easy.

Stage 2 was the spectator stage and we know that there was some very long uphill drags from hairpins. The car loved it. We really struggled last year but not now. The car rocketed out and was great. Again, a very steady run through but not the slowest by any means. The rubbings getting worse on the back and a few second gear selection problems.

Stage 3 was going very well, with Steve getting use to the brakes and handbrake. The corners were coming thick and fast. The thing handles really well, but a bit soft on the backend. Something else to look at later then. Going into a downhill 90 right, we noticed Martin and Karen Watts on the bank with another of our sponsors, Mr and Mrs Cherry Pie. Best make it look good then. Handbrake to get her round. First gear away, where's second? Got first and third. Whoops. After a bit of scraping we went off again up the hill. No swearing in any way shape or form took place. Steve managed to get the car going but we had lost a lot of time. The run across the last half of the stage is very quick and Steve decided to push on a little harder. Very bumpy, and we had the shift light flashing in fourth, when the car hit a compression and took off from the back landing with one wheel on the stage, and the others luckily on the grass verge. Both of us were quite taken back and the run to the finish was slowed down. Didn't expect that, as it had behaved well up to then.

On the run from the finish to the next stage start, we had major problems getting into second, so decided that with that problem and the back being too soft that would be it for the day.

Nice to now that the car goes as well as it looks, and that it will be competitive over the next events when we both get used to the car. Also keep an eye out for the sporty looking crew as we are both now going, not trying, to loose some ballast from the car!

Thanks go to all of our sponsors, every one of you because you have stayed despite the technical difficulties.

Down Ampney testing next, on a round of the CMSG Tarmac series, so let's hope all goes well, then selected rounds of the championship ready for a full attack on the BTRDA 1400 Championship in 2007.

Mark and Steve.