

Woodpecker Stages Rally 2006

We all headed off to Ludlow for round 8 of the BTRDA championship with a bit of a skip in our step, as testing the previous weekend had helped iron out quite a few bugs in the SM Rallying Saxo S1400. A change in the service crew had also seemed to help steady the ship as well.

Friday scrutineering was a bit of a nightmare, as there was a queue of about 30 cars waiting for noise check, but without anyone being there with a noise meter! A chat with the Silverstone tyres people on the Thursday meant that a new set of tyres were waiting for use. The suggestion from them was that wet weather was due in on the Saturday, so mud and snow tyres were the best choice. These were fitted, scrutineering was gone through, and off to find the digs for the night. We got to the digs to find that we had our own private test stage, but the owners were not too receptive of that suggestion even though a ride in the car was offered! An evening out with Liz and Karen was on the cards, but not before I had to go back to signing on to swap the management pack, as we had the wrong one given to us. Teach me for not looking. After the meal we all headed back for a good nights rest.

Saturday morning was glorious sunshine. Mud tyres my bottom! Steve commented that “the bloody sheep had kept him up all night”, but there was not one piece of straw around in the bedroom, so god knows what he was on about??

Sat having breakfast in the morning, there were suddenly spots of rain on the conservatory roof, so perhaps Silverstone were right. Yes they were. Rain steadily started falling and kept on failing for most of the day. The service was set up at the race course start, and off we went to MC1.

The first stage went very well, with a nice steady run through the stage and no chances being taken. We both felt that the car handled the bumpy stages much better, and even though the times were not the best, overtaking the Skoda half-way through really made us feel good.

Stage 2 went again really well, and we passed a lot of cars in the stage that had either hit something, or just broke because of the roughness of the stages. Only one mistake on a slowly shouted note, caused a half spin, but we quickly recovered and felt happy at the stage finish.

Stage 3 saw us begin to crawl up the leader board, and we began to start pushing a bit harder. Some lovely uphill bends towards the end really suit the car and the thing just rockets out of these. There were a lot of people about despite the rain and now windy conditions.

Service went without a hitch and just a quick bite, and car wash was all that was called for. We did have to take down the easy-up as this had been blown over in the wind. Noticed that there were a lot of spaces beginning to appear in the service area.

Stage 4 was the big one of the day. 12.9 miles of already used roads. A few sections had not been used before, but after over an hours wait we headed in. Rough was not the word to describe the stage. Sections of the stage were ripped to pieces and the car just skidded on the sump guard in the tyre ruts. We had no option but to slowly go up some of the tracks, because as soon as the throttle was pressed, the front wheels were just spinning. Not the best stage we have ever competed on. We later found out that our 22 minutes of car hammering had been to no avail, as the stage was cancelled after a big accident by a car in the open class.

Stage 5 saw us go for the finish. We decided that we would back off a bit and get the finish that we needed. We still had a good go at the stage, but could have gone a lot quicker than we did. The finish line was greeted with a large roar from the driver's seat and a big smile on my face. The service crew had walked into the finish of the stage and were greeted big thumbs up from us as we drove up. This was what we needed. A trouble free run has lifted all of the spirits within the team. Thanks to all who have helped and offered help in the last few months after our problems. Next outing? Watch this space and website.