

WITH UMG 662

By
GREGOR GRANT

On the way between Llandrindod Wells and Dover, we stopped in London for George Phillips to develop some films. At the Welsh control, I notified the Lucas representative that my windscreen wipers were not operating properly; he telephoned Dover and the technicians there said that they would fix it.

A brief refuelling halt at Sidcup impressed us with the efficiency and hospitality of the Clifton garage people who, annually, entertain competitors on their way to Dover. Arriving at the port, I drove straight to Martin Walker's garage, where the Lucas folk cured the wiper fault—a minor trouble, but one which required a good deal of work under the fascia panel.

There was a brief flap at the port—I lost the boat tickets which were found by an AA man in the customs shed. So, apart from the big AVC coach, UMG 662 was last car aboard.

The crossing was uneventful; the Neil sisters lost their chance for sleep owing to their presence being required by the TV cameraman who was travelling in the Kemsley / Fotheringham-Parker Sunbeam-Talbot.

At Boulogne, the mayor threw a champagne party. I was grabbed by Radio Lille for an interview, to which I replied in atrocious French. Getting in touch with the meteorological people, it was learned that the snows in Central France were rapidly melting, and that there was also a chance of the Athens starters getting through.

From Boulogne, the British contingent made its way to Liège, 323 kilometres away. The local club was most hospitable, and I managed to have a word with one or two of the Monte Carlo starters.

From all accounts, there would be little snow in the Massif Central and Maritime



COL CLIMBING: The Grant / Phillips 1¼-litre MG. on the Col des Lecques daring the Gap-Monaco regularity section.

Alps, as the thaw had set in completely. A non-arrival at Liège was Doc Hardman, whose Daimler seized its engine. Out of Liège there were many miniature G.P.s, as crews were "guided" out by local helpers, mainly in very fast Porsches!

On the way to Amsterdam it rained very heavily. Several people got themselves lost in Brussels, and had to motor fairly rapidly to get to the Dutch control in time. The M.G. cruised happily over the fine Dutch roads at 120-125 k.p.h., the engine sounding as if it would run for ever. First people we met at Amsterdam were Irishman Colm Hogan and Tim Seccombe, co-driving in the former's 4cv Renault.

We had time for a good meal at Amsterdam, sharing a table with Irishmen Charles Eyre-Maunsell and Brian McCaldin, and Dennis Taylor and Lew Tracey. In Brussels it was still raining but the city looked extremely busy at 6 am. There was plenty of time for a bath and a leisurely breakfast, and a chance to listen to some Jack Reece stories.

Brussels to Rheims was a fast run, and we took the opportunity of renewing acquaintance with the "Welcome" Hotel. The A.C. de Champagne had arranged a control, with information imparted from PA equipment. Each car was sent off by a man with a chequered flag, and the crowd looked for (and received) a series of Grand

Prix starts.

Paris was looking very springlike, and there were the usual lively scenes at the Avenue d'Ile-a control. Much hospitality was provided by the proprietors of L'Action Automobile, including the much-admired hostesses who were even more helpful than they were decorative. Jabby Crombac was there to give us a flask of hot coffee, and a large-scale map of the Le Puy-Valence section, with all possible routes carefully indicated.

Crombac said that the sudden rise in temperature was spoiling the rally for the public, and that general interest was rapidly declining. We noticed this on the run to Bourges; the crowds in the villages and towns were nothing like as big or demonstrative as in former years.

Bourges was its always hospitable self. The people in this lovely cathedral city—the navel of France—make it the opportunity for a sort of carnival, and there is nothing that they would not do for competitors. Again we learned that the possible absence of snow was disappointing to followers of the rally's progress.

Near St. Eloy the M.G.'s progress was halted—and for a time it looked as if our chances of reaching Clermont-Ferrard in time were remote. Of all the annoying things to happen, a Bowden cable end slipped through the nipple on the accelerator pedal! Anyone who has tried to re-thread a frayed cable will understand why both Phil and I had sore fingers attempting to coax at least a few of the wires to enter the tiny nipple.

Car after car flashed past with blazing headlamps—that is except James Glasgow and the crew of his Jaguar, and the Reeces in their Zephyr. The Jag folk had no suitable piece of cable, but Peter Reece produced some likely looking wire. Eventually, after a great burst of profanity,



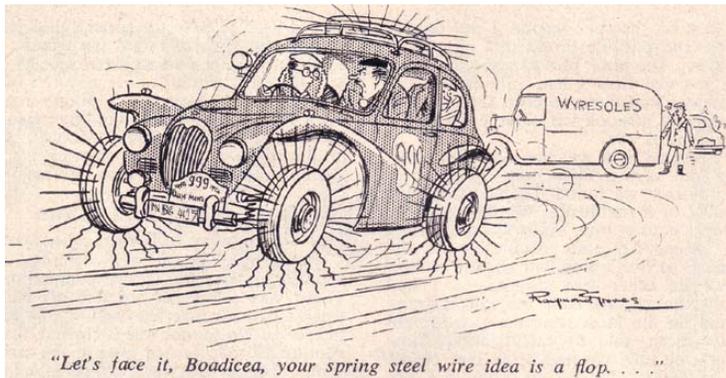
BEST CLIMB on the Col des Lecques was record by Stirling Moss in his Sunbeam-Talbot, here raising a cloud of dust as it storms through a bend.

I heard Phil mentioning that he had got three of the b—strands to hold!

We removed the throttle return spring to lessen the strain on the cable and G. E. Phillips set off to reel off the kilometres to Clermont in record time. The rev. counter hovered around the “5,500” mark all the way, and we made straight for a garage.

A suitable inner cable was eventually produced and fitted; but as soon as the engine was started, the nipple pulled.

We made a spectacular entry into the control, with the throttle wide open and using the ignition key as a control. We had just one minute in hand, and lost another twenty after leaving, to have new nipples threaded.



“Let’s face it, Boadicea, your spring steel wire idea is a flop. . . .”



JUNIOR STEPS OUT: The little Standard Eights showed up well in the Rally. Here is D. O’M. Taylor’s fast, modified car at the Gasworks hairpin.

Le Puy was reached with about 10 minutes in hand. During the drive over the ice-covered roads, I began to feel rather peculiar. Although it was still my turn at the wheel for the Le PuyValence section, Phil had to take over. I fought against a sensation of dizziness, but had to give in and settle down in the passenger’s scat, expecting to pass out at any moment.

Pulling out of Le Puy, we came up behind the Nancy Mitchell/“Bill” Wisdom Zephyr. Anyone who has any doubts about the capabilities of Britain’s leading lady drivers, should watch the performance of Nancy Mitchell on icy roads. She handled the car to perfection hardly sliding yet getting along at a very high speed. Phillips reckons that he learned more about fast driving on icy mountain roads during that 126 kilometres drive, than he could ever have done elsewhere—and 1 second that!

The Neil sisters were obstructed by a too-cautiously driven car, and just managed to clock in at Valence on time. Francis Dundas and Jimmy Bain failed to arrive with their Javelin, apparently having abandoned it somewhere in the mountains.

We learned that many cars had suffered from that notorious cassis in Clermont, on which Peter Reece and I nearly wrecked an Austin-Healey in the 1953 “Lyons-Charbonnières”, Mike Couper’s Armstrong Siddeley Sapphire hit it with a resounding

crash. To add to his troubles, he had a puncture, and was run into by a following car. One of the crew of a Riley was knocked out when his head came into violent contact with the roof.

All this may be great fun for the local folk – but why the police don’t put up huge warning signs is beyond my comprehension!

Strong black coffee at Valence seemed to cure my feeling of nausea and I was able to resume, whilst Phil snatched some sleep in the back. It was a fast run to Gap, and we were able to have a leisurely breakfast.

Starting the speed-regularity test, the official unexpectedly yelled 5-4-3-2-1 go! We shot off, got half-way down the main

street, when the door flew open and the precious “carnet de la route” flew out. Fortunately I noticed its passage and was able to retrieve it.

We stopped about a kilometre from the start of Section 2, to decide at what speed the Col des Lecques should be taken. Jack Broadhead, who was spectating, said that there were one or two icy patches, but otherwise the road was dry. However, after having decided our time, and crossing the start line more or less on the split second. I did one of those inexplicable things that happen in rallies. The M.G. proved to be far faster on the Col than I had anticipated, and I slowed Phil down to cross the finishing line—and mistook the observers’ box for the control box.

I pressed both watches, and Phil lifted his foot saying “Well, that’s over.” To our horror we found that we had come nearly to a standstill. We shot past the proper control box, but it was impossible to gauge our time accurately as the second section watch had already started, and the other was stopped—if I had only thought to stop the chronograph hand on the facia instrument, we might have been able to calculate our time from the total covered up to that point!

At Grasse I tried to work out our probable time on the ‘Col’ so as to give us a time of arrival as close as possible to our proper one. In the end, I chose a time at random, arriving at the final control not having the slightest idea of what should have been our arrival time. Actually, we were just 14 seconds out!

This was a great pity: the M.G. had proved itself to have the speed, reliability and handling which might have made a good performance on the final speed test on the G.P. circuit. To cover 2,000 miles.



SCRAP; Stirling Moss (Sunbeam-Talbot) and Lyndon Sims in A. P. O. Rogers’ Riley, during their fierce duel in the speed-performance test.

without dropping a single road mark may not be an outstanding performance in a not-too-difficult "Monte", but to do so and ruin our chances by a timing mistake is more than galling!

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MONT-AGEL HILL-CLIMB

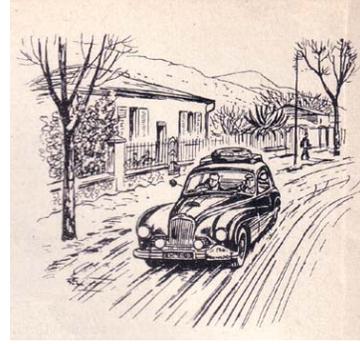
ON the Sunday following the speed tests, a hill-climb was organized at Mont-Agel, with 100 invited competitors. There was a certain amount of delay when a Citroen inverted itself and barred the road. No sooner was it cleared than another Citroën turned over at the same spot. The event was completed after about 66 drivers had a go. Results were:

Category 1: 1, Louis Chiron (Lancia), 3 mins. 22 secs. (13.T.D.); 2, Georges Houci (Alfa Romeo), 3 mins. 36.4 secs.; 3, Cecil Vard (Jaguar), 3 mins. 38.6 secs. 4, René Arnaud (Lancia), 3 mins. 40.4 secs.; 5, Ronnie Adams (Jaguar), 3 mins. 44.4 secs.

Category 2: 1, M. Iauga (Simea), 3 mins. 50.6 secs.; 2, E. Morillon (Peugeot), 3 mins. 55 secs.; 3, Mme. Terray (Peugeot), 4 mins. 4.6 secs.

Category 3: 1, G. Poidebard (Panhard), 3 mins. 50 secs.; 2, M. Grosgeat (Panhard), 3 mins. 51 secs.; 3, O. Capelli (Fiat), 3 mins. 31.2 secs.

Category 4: 1, M. Gignoux (Panhard), 3 mins. 48.4 secs.; 2, R. Duboit (Renault), 3 mins. 56.4 secs.; 3, J. Vial (Renault), 3 mins. 59 secs.



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