

Night Trial 2012

This year it was the turn of the South Coast Group to organise the Night Trial. The starting point was Rackham Old School in West Sussex. In keeping with the age of the cars and because these are times of austerity, as in the 1930s, an appropriate menu was used. The first duty for the Clerk of the Course (Michael Joseph) was to go out and shoot 9 rabbits in his field. To the pot were added 6 pheasants and 8 partridge and all came free. With the hot game pie was served mashed potato and cabbage followed by boiling hot rice pudding. 50 folk sat down to the feast. Cars had come from as far afield as Derbyshire but the real star of the entry was Gary Caroline. Having got up early, he drove his Morgan from Guildford all the way to Bicester to compete in the VSCC Driving Tests. He then drove all the way home again in time to give the car a quick service before setting off for Rackham where he teamed up with his young navigator, Robert Carter. This amounted to a round trip of some 175 miles before the night trial even started.

Whilst drivers and navigators began their plotting the marshals went off for their briefing.

10 cars set off at intervals from 2200 on the 125 mile route, much of which was through the new South Downs National Park. It was a clear moonlit night but temperatures were as low as -4°C and there was sheet ice everywhere. With ample marshals there were 22 check points where there were tests and questions. These were split into categories covering everything associated with driving, navigating, owning and maintaining a Morgan in the local environment. Most of the questions were multi-choice and included an element of humour to keep the spirits up. The half way halt was at the Pease Pottage Services. At this stage, the contest was very close with the young guns Robert and Howard Joseph (combined age 48) just ahead of Mike Sythes/Steve Lister and Andy Brown/ Ruth Ross. Andy Brown's Super Sports from the Isle of Wight had been suffering from fuel leaks and gear selector issues. The second half was no less challenging and as the dawn replaced the dark, the cars began to return to Rackham. The only retirement was John Houlihan and Richard Sherwin who had a flat battery, the capacity of which was affected by the cold weather. Whilst the scores were added up, hot breakfast was served and crews and marshals began to thaw out. In the car park the Morgans were still covered in frost and icicles.

Congratulations to overall winners Robert and Howard Joseph driving the only 2 speeder. With a cone clutch, cable brakes, hand throttle and no reverse gear they did remarkably well and were the only crew not to miss a check point. Conditions were tough for everyone and the fact that no cars were damaged is a great credit to the drivers.

Following the prize giving it was time for weary crews to make their way home. It had been an entertaining Night Trial and all agreed that it had been great fun.