



1ST: PAUL BIRD & KIRSTY RIDDICK



RAYMOND CONLON/DARREN MCCAGUE



ROB WEIR/ROSS WEIR



SWANN'S SONG: ROB SWANN'S TEAM!

Bird Flies in Barbados!

The Sol Rally Barbados received a record number of international entries this year. Around 30 crews travelled half way around the world to the beautiful sun-soaked Caribbean island, and many of them made the trip from the UK and Ireland.

While our Ed navigated for Ballyclare's Glenn Campbell (see overleaf), they were just one of a host of crews that had lots of fun in the sun!

Heading home the list of local contenders were Paul Bird and Kirsty Riddick. The Ford Focus WRC crew won the event, becoming the first overseas crew to secure victory since Kris Meeke won in 2009. It was appropriate then that Kris was on hand to present the trophies at the event's prizegiving.

Bird's attempt at sealing his maiden Bajan win got off to the best of starts with victory at the Sol Go Further/Scotiabank King of the Hill, a hillclimb which took place one week before the rally.

The result bode well for his Sol Rally Barbados challenge, and he was quickest out of the blocks when the rally started in earnest. But it didn't all go to plan, and a spin followed by a double puncture dropped him down the leaderboard.

At that point, local pilot and 12-times winner Roger Skeete assumed the advantage, and he had started to accelerate away from the pack when transmission problems sidelined his Subaru.

With Skeete out of action, Sean

Gill took position at the top in his Suzuki SX4 WRC, despite not having claimed any stage wins. By that stage, Bird had recovered to second overall, and he entered day two just 2.3 seconds behind the leader.

Steve Perez, Paul Bourne and Geoffrey Pantan were also within striking distance, with 16 seconds covering the top five crews. An interesting scene was set for the Sunday stages...

On the Sunday morning, it was Paul Bird and Kirsty Riddick who were quickest out of the blocks. They moved into the rally lead by half a second from Sean Gill, and one stage later, Paul Bourne moved into second position after he set fastest time.

Then third placed Gill was forced out with mechanical problems, leaving Bird and Bourne battling for the win. Unfortunately for Bourne, trouble also befell his Focus WRC, with some overheating issues leaving him 16 seconds adrift with two stages to go.

Those final two stages were probably the longest of Bird's rally career, but he kept his cool to maintain position at the top and secure the rally win on what was his fifth attempt.

Bird and Riddick were the best of the local crews, and while Paul Bourne and Megan Bryant finished second ahead of Jeffrey Pantan and Michael Fennell Jr, it was Steve Perez and Paul Spooner who completed a quartet of Ford Focus World Rally Cars in fourth position.

You don't have to look much further down the order to find a few more British crews, with Roger Duckworth and Aled Davies claiming sixth in their Impreza WRC, while Rob Swann and Darren Garrod sealed seventh overall. The entire Swann crew were over the moon at the rally finish!

Whether or not crews retired or finished, there were smiles all around at the rally finish. It was a real party atmosphere outside Bushy Park, with thousands of spectators getting up close and personal with the competitors.

And regardless of what happened during the rally, most crews were already making plans for a return in 2013 for another charge at the Sol Rally Barbados. Yes, it really is that addictive. If you have been to the event, then you'll know what I'm talking about. But if not, then make sure you get your flights booked for next year!



JOE MCQUILLAN/GENE MCDONALD



MARTIN & EDDIE TAYLOR SIDWAYS!

Other Locals...

18th: Martin Stockdale/Mark Swallow (BMW M3 Compact). Notes: 3rd in class.

19th: Tim Peacey and Neil Shanks (Escort RS1800). Notes: 1st in class.

23rd: Martin Donnelly/Colin Fitzgerald (Evo 9). Notes: 2nd in class.

24th: Gary Thomas/Phil Ralphs (Escort Mk2). Notes: 1st in class.

27th: Harold Morley/Graeme Finlayson (Porsche RSR GT3). Notes: Second in class. Navigator Finlayson had originally hoped to enter the event in his Lancer Evo 3, only to roll out of the hill climb event during the previous weekend.

28th: Andrew Costin-Hurley/Shawn Mellett (Ford Puma Evo). Notes: 3rd in class.

30th: Raymond Conlon/Darren McCague (Corolla Twin Cam). Notes: 4th in class. Changed clutch at end of day one. Survived a big moment at the hill climb during the previous weekend - they lost their rear bumper in the incident, but luckily their service crew were on hand to pick it up and return it at service!

31st: Ailan Mackay/Mo Downey (Anglia WRC). Notes: The heroes in Barbados! They also sported some rear damage to their Anglia after some crowd-pleasing heroics the hill climb.

32nd: Simon Wallis/Carolyn Pearce (Impreza). Notes: 3rd in class.

34th: Matt Shinnors/Catherine Lewis (Escort Mk2). Notes: 3rd in class.

36th: Conor McMeel/Sean Devlin (Escort Mk2). Notes: They had a final stage overshoot in front of thousands of spectators!

38th: Ronan Curley/John McKinley (Escort Mk2).

39th: Rob Weir/Ross Weir (Impreza). Notes: 2nd in class. Father and son crew. It was Rob's second event after a long layoff from the sport.

40th: Stuart Deeley/Alastair Dood (Nissan Micra). Notes: 1st in class.

43rd: Ding Boston/Jon Pulliston (Alfa Romeo Sprint GTV). Notes: 3rd in class. The Oxford Universities Motorsport Foundation crew had plenty of 'OUMF'!

45th: Joe McQuillan/Gene McDonald (Lancer Evo 7). Notes: 3rd in class. Neil Finlay had originally planned to navigate for Joe but pain from a broken arm put paid to those hopes. During the event, Joe lost seven minutes and a potential second in class as a result of some troubles. He was also lucky to escape without any damage after a trip into a field!

48th: Peter Gallagher/Rene Forde (Talbot Samba). Notes: 2nd in class. Few had a smile larger than Peter's at the prizegiving - he was chuffed with the result!

50th: Martin Taylor/Eddie Taylor (Proton Satria). Endured a number of dramas which included a leaking radiator.

COMPETING IN BARBADOS

WORDS: JONATHAN MACDONALD // PICTURES :: JAYNE TRIMBLE & KEVIN WOOD

Caribbean Tackled!



OUR ED WITH GLENN CAMPBELL

COMP WINNER PHIL & KRIS MEEKE

PAUL BIRD & ROBIN...

Jumping in at the deep end (and not into a swimming pool)... that's the only way I can describe my visit to this year's Sol Rally Barbados! It all started with a chance phone call from Glenn Campbell a few weeks before the event...



ALLAN & MO INTERVIEWED

JAYNE, ALLAN, GLENN & SERVICE MAN
DICKIE HALLPROUD OF THEMSELVES... AFTER
DEFYING THE LAWS OF PHYSICS AND
SQUEEZING INTO THE MICRA TOGETHER!

By that point, I had already been nominated to attend the rally in a Pacenotes capacity. Glenn called to ask if I knew of anybody that would co-drive for him. Before I knew it, the words "I'll do it" escaped from my mouth. It was only when I put the phone down that I really started to think about what I'd let myself in for!

Don't get me wrong, I have navigated for others in the past. But when I sat down to think about it, it had been six years since I last read a road book, and almost as long since I last read pace notes. Those were revelations that I thought I best keep to myself... until now!

Even as we left for the beautiful Caribbean island at the end of May, the full gravity of the situation had yet to sink in. In many ways, I wasn't convinced that we'd be able to squeeze my 6'8" frame into Glenn's Nissan Micra, so there was a backup plan in place should the worst come to the worst.

But shortly after we arrived in the near 30 degree heat, a trip to 'the garage' – a hub that housed the numerous Irish and British competitors' rally cars, as well as copious amounts of fridges which were full of a range of beverages including the local favourite Banks beer – confirmed that the so-called backup plan wasn't needed. And in my mind, the proverbial brown stuff was about to hit the fan!

Two days and a cocktail party or two later, we arrived at scrutiny, which was held at Simpson Motors in St. Michael. This was scrutiny like I'd never seen it before. It can only be described as a motorsport festival!

Literally thousands of people attended the venue, getting a

chance to see the cars and the stars up close and personal. With trade stands, autograph signing sessions and promo models, not to mention live interviews with competitors displayed on a big screen, it was akin to a WRC service park, only better.

I had to keep reminding myself that this was merely scrutiny! Normally a low-key affair at home, somehow organisers of the Sol Rally Barbados had managed to transform it into a major spectator attraction.

Bearing in mind this was still one week before the rally, it was the first indication of the sheer enthusiasm that the locals have for motorsport. It was a real eye-opener to say the least!

The Hillclimb...

After scrutiny, next on the agenda was the Sol Go Further/ Scotiabank King of the Hill. This was a hillclimb which took place the following day, on Sunday 3 July, and an event which organisers used to help seed the entrants for the 'main' event.

The hillclimb helped break me in gently as far as road books, pace notes and time cards were concerned. Glenn already had a set of notes for the stage, so all I had to do was get us to the start without getting lost. Thankfully, we succeeded!

The crowds through the short 3.4km (2.1 mile) stage were incredible, particularly near Vaucluse Raceway. Organisers estimated there were more than 5,000 spectators lining the stage, all of them just as enthusiastic to see car 100 as they were car 1.

We completed three runs through the stage, finishing the day second in class. We decided not to contest the final run, instead heading back to the start to join the spectators.

That was the first opportunity I had to see the crews in action, and it was the first time I witnessed

the spectators' reaction to Allan Mackay and Mo Downey driving past in their Anglia!

Allan and Mo are renowned for pulling crowd pleasing stunts in Barbados, but it was a straight piece of road at this particular location. That didn't stop the crowd from going wild when the Anglia flew past!

Recce

With the hillclimb completed, we had a day's rest before heading out to recce the stages. That was another baptism of fire. I've never had to write notes for a driver before, so it was a new experience.

To make matters worse, Glenn decided to put me under pressure from the start. A group of us headed out to the stages in separate cars, and Glenn decided that we would be the lead car. I suppose there was no better way to make sure that I wouldn't get us lost during the rally...the pressure was on!



RECCE WITH ALLAN & GLENN

Followed by Joe McQuillan, Neill Finlay and Dickie Hall in one car, while Allan Mackay and Mo Downey were in another, we did a recce of every stage on the Tuesday.

There were 22 stages in the rally, but many of them were repeat runs through the same stage or they were run in reverse, so it was fairly easy to recce. It also gave us an opportunity to see parts of the island that you wouldn't normally see. There are some fantastic views out there!



UH OH! SITTING INSIDE THE RALLY CAR ON THE BACK OF THE RECOVERY TRUCK



BRADFORD

SCRUTINY



NEIL BARNARD HOSTS DRIVERS' BRIEFING

I'm pleased to say the recce passed without any major incidents (i.e. we didn't get lost!) With the notes made, we headed back to our hotel. Later that week, I took another run out to the stages to make sure we knew where we were going on the road sections (it would have been very easy to take the wrong turn in some places), and then we were ready to rally!

Rally Time!

Armed with copious amounts of ice, water and Powerade in large cooler boxes, we headed out for the first leg of the rally on Saturday 9 July. 12 stages were on the agenda, with the last couple of tests set to take place in the dark.

All of the stages were fairly short, which is no bad thing in such extreme heat. I wouldn't fancy tackling the likes of Knockalla in 30 degree heat, but I could cope with a selection of stages that averaged around 3-4 miles. In fact, the longest stage of the event was just under 5 miles long.

The event started well and we immediately placed second in class with Glenn's 1300cc Micra. A couple of stages later, local driver Sean Cox retired his Suzuki Swift, leaving us leading the class. Suddenly, dreams of a class win were on the cards!

With a potential class victory in mind, we concentrated on keeping our noses clean during the day. And out of all the stages, I will always remember stage 10. It was cancelled due to the sheer amount of spectators, so everybody drove through the test at non-competitive speeds.

Despite driving slowly, it failed to detract from the enthusiasm of the thousands of spectators that lined the stage. We waved at them as we drove past, and more often than not we were greeted by cheers from the crowds. We felt like superstars!

There were two more stages to contest after stage 10, both of which were in the dark. We were lying 55th overall and had a comfortable lead in the class at that point. But unfortunately there was going to be a sting in the tail...

We safely guided the Micra through both tests but at the end of the day's final stage, Glenn felt a loss of power. Just as we arrived at the stage finish control, the engine cried 'enough! Unfortunately, it proved terminal, leaving us to wait for a recovery truck to return us back to base.

The results sheets show we finished the leg in 51st overall, leading our class by almost two minutes. We didn't have any time penalties (phew!) but sadly that was as far as we were going to get.

Spectating

Every cloud has a silver lining, and although very disappointing, our retirement allowed me to spectate on day two along with our competition winning marshal, Philip Bryans. We headed to a popular spot on the Stewart's Hill stage, where media mogul Robin Bradford was broadcasting to the masses on RallyFM.net.

It was there that we met Kris Meeke, who had flown over to enjoy the rally as a spectator this year. Unfortunately he wasn't there in a competitive capacity, but he hasn't ruled out another visit to the island in a bid to secure his third victory.

Joining the thousands of spectators on the Stewart's Hill stage was another eye-opener. You could really feel the enthusiasm that the locals have for the rally.

The island of Barbados is only slightly larger than the Isle of Man, but it has more than three times the population density. That means even more motorsport mad fans, and it certainly showed on the stages!

And when a couple of crews - including Allan Mackay - decided

to do a few donuts during the final run, the atmosphere was electric! After the final stage, all crews returned to our location to mingle with the spectators. It was another real festival type atmosphere, with the party continuing until nightfall.

The End

With the rally over, which incidentally was won for the first time by Paul Bird and Kirsty Riddick, all that remained was the prizegiving. That took place in Bridgetown the next day, and was followed by another party that continued into the small hours of the morning.

The following day, we were on our Virgin Atlantic plane, heading back to Belfast via London. It was the end of a fun-filled two weeks, and the end of an incredible experience in the Caribbean.

The reception we had from the locals was fantastic. We were made to feel very welcome, and combined with great food and great weather, Barbados really is the perfect location for a holiday, not to mention the perfect recipe for a rally.

It's difficult to put into words just how incredible the experience is. Best thing to do is cross off the 2013 dates in your diary and find out for yourself!

It was my first visit to the island, and hopefully it won't be my last. After all, Glenn and I have some unfinished business to attend to. Here's hoping...!



JOE & GENE AT BRIEFING



GOOD FISH & CHIPS!



BALL JOINTS WERE FLOWN IN WITH GLENN'S PARTNER (VIA RAYMOND MASON) 2 DAYS BEFORE THE RALLY!

CAUGHT ON CAMERA IN BARBADOS

PICTURES :: JONATHAN MACDONALD & JAYNE TRIMBLE

