



# WINDSCREEN

The Magazine of Swansea Motor Club



The days before Covid – is there light at the end of the tunnel?

## March 2021

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## Editors Intro

Welcome to another edition of your club magazine.

At last it is beginning to look as though we will be able to get back to doing events and socials in the not too distant future, something I am sure we are all looking forward to. In this issue we look back at the Rally of the Vales, thanks to another article from Ken Davies and some, never before seen, pictures from Brian Jenkins. The Vales ran as a night road rally from the late 50's until the early 70's and then as a daytime Classic rally in the 1990's. I was fortunate enough to do three of those classic events, though sitting on the wrong side of the car with road book and maps in hand, but even then they were a good test.

We also look forward as the Swansea Historic Vehicle Register have announced that their annual show, traditionally held in May, has received approval to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> August this year in Singleton Park. Swansea Motor Club has supported this event for many years, providing an eclectic mix of vehicles, both road and competition, for the paying public to admire. We have had everything from the 1930 MG M type of Steve Lloyd to the Formula 2 March 792 of Chris Jones along with various race, rally and sprint / hillclimb vehicles and even karts and motorbikes as well. Let's hope we can put on a good show this year on the Club stand.

In order to join us for that event you will need to be a club member and, as I mentioned in the last magazine, all memberships will now run from 1<sup>st</sup> January until 31<sup>st</sup> December. That means 2021 subscriptions are now due so if you haven't already paid up and want to remain a member please do so asap.

Stay safe

Neil



## **Book Review**

### **Brian Culcheth – Global Travels of a Rally Champion**

**By Pablo Raybould & Brian Culcheth**

Written by Pablo Raybould in close collaboration with Brian Culcheth, this book meticulously charts Brian's career as a professional competition driver from his formative years – duly inspired by a proactive Harrow Car Club – to becoming one of the most successful factory drivers with more than 125 national and international rally starts to his credit. Brian remained at the forefront of rallying for two decades during which time, the sport was perhaps at its global zenith. Versatile, capable, dependable, and determined, Brian spent most of his career with BMC/British Leyland and Triumph, scoring 7 outright rally wins and 21 class victories. One of these was on Finland's 1,000 Lakes Rally, the first non-Scandinavian driver to do so and, driving a Morris Marina, an unlikely rally car he spent time to engineer and develop into an international class winner.

Then after joining Opel, Brian became 1978 British Rally champion, winning his class in all 7 rounds of the championship in a Kadett GT/E against fierce international competition. Opel's Teutonic efficiency and the instant success it brought 'Culch' just confirmed that he had spent too long driving flawed and mechanically unreliable competition cars – read Dolomite and TR7 – and what could have been if he had switched teams sooner?

Also ranking among Brian's high-profile rallies was 24th overall on the grueling 1968 London to Sydney Marathon with Mike Wood and Tony Fall in an unloved Morris 1800 Mk2 and second overall on the 16,500-mile 1970 World Cup Rally in a British Leyland Triumph 2500 PI, with regular co-driver Johnstone Syer. These achievements should not be underestimated as the events were popularly considered the toughest rallies ever run and unlikely to be repeated again. Brian's vivid recollections also include the capricious nature of major motor manufacturer's competition budgets and some unfathomable team management instructions, including disconnecting anti-roll bars and using slick tyres in wet weather – without consulting drivers!

This well-written book, with foreword by friend and former BMC colleague Paddy Hopkirk, chronicles individual rallies, races and rallycross events that Brian accumulated on his CV during an illustrious career that began as co-driver on the 1959 London Rally in a VW Beetle, and ended as a works Opel driver on the 1979 RAC Rally.

Now living in Porlock, Brian's distinguished rally career is perhaps summed up in his own words: 'It was frustrating that after a fourteen year association with BMC/BL, I never won a championship, but after just one year at Opel I became a champion.'

The depth of detail contained in this niche, self-published book illustrates that he maintained detailed diaries, notes, and images, capturing almost every event. The author himself is a former BMC employee twice removed, having been an Austin/Rover engineering apprentice and competitor, providing him with a realistic understanding of how the motorsport world works. If you are an enthusiast, you simply cannot afford to miss-out reading this book! Copies available direct from Pablo Raybould at £32.00 inc UK P&P. Email: [pablodaybould@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:pablodaybould@blueyonder.co.uk)

Report & images Ken Davies ©



*Brian Culcheth with old friend and competition adversary, the late Barrie 'Whizzo' Williams at Castle Combe Rallyday 2016.*



*Brian Culcheth is reunited with his 1970 World Cup Rally Triumph 2500 PI*

### **Kwiktest – Suzuki Swift Sport Third Generation Lightweight Sport Supermini**

Launched way back in 1983, the Suzuki Swift was never really about performance. That all changed in 2005 with the introduction of the 1.6 litre Sport model which produced 123 bhp, evolving to 134 bhp in later editions. The new Sport now increases this peak horsepower to a respectable 138bhp, achieved by replacing the normally aspirated 1.6 engine with a lighter and more efficient 1.4-litre Boosterjet turbo unit, delivering 0-62mph in 8.1s and 130mph top speed. All with 230 Nm of torque, some 70Nm more than previous.

Suzuki has devoted much attention to developing the Sport's chassis dynamics to offer more rigidity and control by introducing the stiffer, lighter 'HEARTECT' platform that underpins the standard Swift model. The suspension set-up has also been revised to offer greater driving stability and roll rigidity together with improved dynamic response and from what I experienced, these changes have been successful.

The Sport's total kerb weight of 970kgs is a whopping 200 kgs lighter than main sector rivals, the Renaultsport Clio 200 EDC in particular and that's one good reason why the Suzuki can match the Renault's performance, despite offering considerably less power.

Using an exclusive frontal design with a grille and bumper that project the Sport's nose beyond that of the standard Swift seems to give the Sport the appearance of Action. Blacked-out A-pillars and vertically arranged front and rear lamps are brought into vivid relief in this top version, with black aerodynamic under spoilers spanning the front, sides and rear, and a roof-end spoiler at the back. The rather garish Champion Yellow body colour of my test car originates from the Suzuki works junior rally team, but the Sport also comes in one solid and five metallic colours with unique Sport trim, all at no extra cost.

Inside, the designers have tried to create an interactive sports driving environment, starting with red interior accents and a driver-oriented instrument panel where main gauges feature contrasting colours, with fuel and coolant temperature gauges incorporated into the main display. Bucket-shaped front seats look good and the dimpled leather steering wheel provides a secure grip and with the chrome-finished shift knob and drilled-alloy pedals subtly completes that sporty image.

A modest budget of £18,500 doesn't usually buy you much performance or even quality but its price doesn't stop this Sport also being very well equipped with a six-speed gearbox option. Other features include a Bluetooth-compatible Smartphone Linkage Display Audio Display unit with a 7-inch touchscreen and an SD Card 3D-map navigation. Other aesthetic touches include thin-spoke alloy wheels. The Swift's safe too, with a package of camera-driven attributes that



include five key features – autonomous braking, adaptive cruise control, 'Lane departure warning', a 'Weaving alert function' and 'High-beam assist'.

Built at Suzuki's Sagara plant in Japan, the Swift Sport is a genuine hot hatch and also about the most affordable simple form of a five-door body-style. When drawing up their short-lists, potential buyers look to economy and emissions and the Swift Sport scores fairly well on both thanks to its clever 1.4-litre Boosterjet turbo engine featuring a small displacement, high torque turbocharger with a variable fuel pressure control system that more accurately optimises fuel injection to suit driving styles. Expect around 50mpg on the combined cycle and 125g/km of CO<sub>2</sub>, a big improvement from the previous model's 1.6-litre normally aspirated unit which delivered 44.1mpg and 147g/km of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Every Swift variant now comes with a three-year, 60,000-mile warranty, even so Suzuki should consider that some of its rivals are now offering four, five or sometimes even seven-year plans. But there's also a useful year's breakdown cover that extends across the whole of Europe, including roadside recovery. Put simply, I really found nothing not to like about this Supermini hot hatch bargain.

Ken Davies ©



*Suzuki Swift Sport track-tested at Castle Combe (Image - Jeff Bloxham)*

## **Ancient & Modern – the Rally of the Vales**

### **Part 1 1955 – 1973**

Conveniently situated on the southern edge of some of the UK's finest road rallying country, Swansea Motor Club – formed 1924 – created a signature event, originally called Rally of the November Night 1955-57, although the 1956 event was canceled due to Suez fuel rationing. The 1955 winner was G. Reason-Jones in a Triumph TR2 and W. G. Cawsey's similar TR won in 1957 and 1958, when the title changed to Rally of the Vales and BBC filmed the start and tests for their Welsh Newsreel programme.

Those inaugural rallies started at Swansea, Cheltenham and Cardiff, to converge and follow a common route to Brecon where, after a short break, the first 15-mile section started, usually terminating near Cray reservoir, where those unable to follow a simple route-card fell by the wayside! Competitors then faced a 150-mile navigation section which sorted the wheat from the chaff and became progressively tighter, with lost time creeping up to the limits and often forcing competitors to cut controls in order to finish this section on time, meaning more cars went OTL.

Following a 90-minute break at High Noon filling station near Carmarthen, cars embarked on a challenging navigation section plotted from references onto OS maps, before regrouping back at the High Noon. The rally concluded with a regularity section, finishing with an acceleration test before cars made their way to the Caswell Bay Hotel on the Gower Peninsula for breakfast, results, and prizes – 400 miles in total.

After hardships endured on the 1959 rally, won by E. Malkin/G. Robson's Sunbeam Rapier, including torrential rain and fog, one rally-hardened driver remarked: "I have never been on a rally run by this Club before but it has been the toughest, best marshalled event I have ever been on. I'll be back!" The alumni of winners included stars like Gibbs/Morgan Cortina GT 1964, Bullough/Barrow Lotus Cortina 1968, Sparrow/Raeburn Cooper S 1970 and Videan/Vipond Datsun 240Z in 1973, the original Vales final running. The Vales truly earned its spurs as one of the best rallies on the calendar and at its 1960s peak, qualified for an impressive quartet of contests: National RAC Championship, Motor News Championship, BTRDA Gold Star, and Welsh Rally Championship.

We recall here an example of Vales Magic from the 1969 rally, round 6 of the MN championship.

Scrutineering 7pm at the Automobile Palace Llandrindod Wells followed by two hours of frantic route plotting by the lake before local heroes, Alun Rees/Hywel Thomas's Cooper S – its third bodyshell – led 59 crews away at 9.45 pm on a bone dry, clear night and headed south to the first selective over Abergwesyn. Malkin's Imp, fitted with Jenny Nadin's borrowed engine, was quickest just 1m 22s over the 15m set bogey. Roy Fidler's BMW second and Bloxham's Escort TC third.

Little respite and on to the Rheidol valley with long, hard sections following in quick succession and only passage controls and relaxed sections enabling breathless crews to stay within time. After 14 controls first petrol was taken at Penrhyncoch, and attrition was high. The rally continue with more of the same in the SW corner of OS 127, then headed to Lampeter and across the long Farmers Road loop before Mynydd Pencarreg and then the welcome lights of the Checkpoint Service Station for the second fuel stop.

The frantic and relentless tempo meant that Roy Fidler's BMW 2002Tii developed severe brake problems then, whilst climbing a slippery hill south of Abergorlech, Malkin's Imp slid into a concrete bollard, lost 7 minutes with a puncture, and retired in disgust. Five controls from home, drivers faced the impossible hairpin west of Llansadwyn, causing minor traffic jams, before dazed survivors headed for the finish at Penoyre Country Club near Brecon; 200 frenzied miles done and dusted between supper and breakfast.

Results swiftly processed, the Bloxham/Harper Escort TC was declared winner from Bullough/Barrow's similar car, with Fidler/Hughes third in Autoextra's brakeless BMW! As usual there were a legion of good tales throughout but worthy of mention were the three helpful RAMA Landrovers running at the tail of the field all finished, the first a remarkable 16<sup>th</sup> overall and, a Swansea Motor Club trio scooped the team prize! Motoring News reported the following week: 'The event was well received by the competitors and will no doubt be remembered for quite a time as one of the good, old fashioned quality thrashes in the best traditions of the Vales'.



Datsun 240Z of 1973 Vales winners Kevin Videan & John Vipond at Swansea start (Image – Speedsports)



## Part 2 1990 – 1999

Now fast forward to the late 1980s when historic rallying was gathering traction and responsible for introducing new blood into the sport and even enticing experienced competitors back with a relaxed, uncomplicated, and fun premise. These were historic rallying's formative years, when it was comparatively easy to find historic rally steeds by trawling the classified ads and, you did not need the fastest car to compete at reasonable cost with a chance of victory.

During the winter of 1989, a meeting took place between Hywel Thomas and SMC's Alun Morgan, Stuart Phillips, and Derek Davies. Significantly, all had been involved in the original rally in some capacity and quickly hatched a plan to replicate the original Vales, but in 'historic' format. The result of that and many subsequent meetings was the first Classic Rally of the Vales held on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1990.

The benchmark had been set and the rallies that followed ran to a simple formula; tulip roadbook, crafty regularity, and speed tests, all delivered in a genial and social atmosphere. But, success was hard-fought and as always, a Vales trophy was a worthy pot on a rally man's sideboard.

This popular USP soon captured competitor's imagination by filling the boring motorsport vacuum around Christmas and New Year and also providing a series of imaginative routes over parts of the original rally's course including the Bettws mountain road, daunting Abergwesyn, Devil's Staircase and Rhandir-Mwyn. The Welsh weather even provided authenticity, sunshine, snow, rain, sheet ice and occasional freezing fog!

First rally was based at the windswept Baverstocks Hotel, ideally situated alongside the A465 high above Merthyr, but the 1991 event moved to the Hilton Hotel Swansea before finding an ideal home at the Marriott in Swansea's Maritime quarter, with city centre convenience and good road access. The Marriott's large function suite proved ideal for the crucial social aspect of the rally which was an uproarious black-tie post-rally dinner, sometimes entertaining almost 200 guests with a money-raising theme and among the charities to benefit from the rally were CISS, Stroke Association, MS Society and VICTA.

Over its nine-year second incarnation the Rally of the Vales filled the big shoes left by its elder brother and provided a list of distinguished participants. But they always say retire gracefully when at the top and the rally always meant weeks of non-stop work for the small organizing team, including Christmas holidays. So, with the millennium approaching a decision was made to take a break after the 1999 rally. Amazingly, that has now been 20+ years, so perhaps it might be time to review that decision – who knows?

Ken Davies ©



Stephen Lloyd / Ron Bowden on the 1996 Vales  
(Photos – Brian Jenkins)



Len Smith / Neil Samuel at Carmarthen Showground 1998

### Rally of the Vales Sequel – bad news is buried!

The rally of the Vales article in February *oldStager* obviously stimulated memory juices with several former competitors ringing to swap tales, which recalled an odd sequel. We were looking for a course opening car for the 1973 event and the British Datsun importers were keen to promote its range, so Datsun (Baker Street) had fielded a trio of SSS 180's on the Tour of Britain driven by Graham Hill, Tony Fall and British saloon car champion Frank Gardner, who spent time sorting the cars with a class victory as their target.

We rang Datsun who provided a well-used Bluebird SSS 180B in lurid orange which had been Graham Hill's Tour practice car and collected it from the south coast the week of the rally. The late Alun Morgan was clerk of



the course and a competent, former competitor, so he and Derek Davies, who helped compile the route, set out to open the first half, which started at 23.00 hrs from Fletchers garage Swansea.

They made good progress until about 5 miles from the halfway at the Nant-y-Caws services on the A48, just a couple of miles from Alun's home in Gorslas, so he was familiar with the roads – too familiar! Pressing on through a downhill tightening right-hander, Alun ran out of road and clouted the bank. They quickly reversed out, pulled the wing off the wheel before making a sheepish entrance at the floodlit Little Chef services, which was packed with inquisitive spectators.

A quick handover had been arranged as the second half of the route was being driven by Brian Cosker, himself a regular competitor and secretary of the event, but few words were spoken during more frantic repairs – wing, inner wing, front panel, lights – before Cosker and regular navigator Alan James refuelled and set out in a battle-scarred Datsun, only to experience a puncture on the narrowest road on the route.

At the finish in the Goodick Hotel overlooking Burry Port harbour, the distinctly moth-eaten SSS 180 was diplomatically parked nose first in a quiet corner and presumably, a damage declaration completed? A few days later the dust had settled, and it was time to face the music, so Alun and Brian set out to return the damaged car but approaching Datsun near Worthing a large pall of smoke hung over the factory.

On returning the keys to the office block and trying to confess to damaging the car they were swiftly waved away as the nearby factory was well ablaze and subsequently destroyed so in the chaos, a bent wing was the last thing in people's minds. The club secretary later wrote a nice letter thanking Datsun for the loan of the car and apologising for the damage but nothing else was heard about Graham Hill's recce car, except when the subject was raised, Alun Morgan would claim: "That SSS 180 had terrible brakes!"

Ken Davies ©



## Washington Grant James 1933 – 2020



### Welsh World Cup Rally Hero, Celebrated Tenor and Businessman

Washington James, the last surviving member of a tenacious 1970s Welsh rally team, died peacefully on New Year's Eve in Newcastle Emlyn aged 87. Washington - known affectionately as 'Washy' - from Cenarth in Cardiganshire, was joined on the 1970 World Cup Rally by two friends, renowned Cooper S road-rally star Alun Rees from Carmarthen, and Neath navigator Hywel 'The Mac' Thomas.

In May 1970, the trio's doughty privateer Hillman Hunter took on the might of the top international works teams and professional drivers in the arduous and unique 16,000-mile event from London's Wembley Stadium to the Astec Stadium in Mexico City via the most varied, tortuous, and difficult terrain across three continents. One hundred cars started with just 23 completing the route and remarkably, 'Washy' and co-drivers finished 15th in a car prepared at his Rootes dealership in sleepy Cenarth, which he opened in 1959. The crew's epic achievement was not underestimated, and they arrived back to a rapturous hero's welcome at a Carmarthen park, attended by civic dignitaries and several hundred enthusiastic Welsh rally supporters.

The Teifi Valley rally driver originally cut his rallying teeth in a series of quick Hillman and Sunbeam Imps on the demanding Welsh and Motoring News championship road rallies of the era including the daunting Cilwendeg Rally, which started at neighboring Newcastle Emlyn cattle market. When not rallying, 'Washy' was a successful local businessman, operating the Cenarth Garage & Carriage bus company as well as being a celebrated Welsh tenor.

Although the world of buses provided his 'bread and butter' and rallying was his passion, singing was his first love, with performances that attracted praise from renowned eisteddfod critics such as Meirion Williams for the quality of his tenor voice. Among the many awards he won was the David Ellis Memorial Prize and the Blue Riband, presented at the 1993 National Eisteddfod in Llanelwedd, Builth Wells.

With that infamous 1970 World Cup Rally adventure behind him, 'Washy' became an avid eisteddfod-goer. His son, Chris James, said: "His passion was for the small eisteddfodau and he was incredibly supportive of those. So many times, he won the tenor competition at the National, and then of course he was still singing, singing every day at work. Unfortunately, he's given his last song."

Ken Davies ©



*L-R. James, Rees, and Thomas at Wembley Stadium before the start, finishing a month later in an incredible 15th place at the Aztec Stadium in Mexico City. Washington with travel-stained Hillman Hunter back at his rural Cenarth Garage*

*Images from Washington James Archive*



## Memory Lane



Ruth Atkinson trialling her famous plus 4 Morgan RA 444 somewhere in Gower early 1970's



Ken Davies with his 1275 Sprite at Snetterton 1975



# SHVR Singleton Show

## 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2021

As mentioned in my introduction the SHVR has received approval for their Singleton Show to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> August. If you would like to be involved and have a suitable vehicle to bring along please let me know. There is no charge for club members who bring a vehicle. SHVR have an age cut off for vehicles of 1990, so your car has to be earlier than that – though they do give us a bit of leeway with competition vehicles. A couple of pictures from 2019 and 2018 to remind you.

