

ANOTHER MICRO ADVENTURE

for Suzie Prevett

Brrrrr! This was my third and Kelvin's fourth Exeter Trial, and it was going to be a cold one, but at least it looked like it'd be dry! Our friend Steve offered us a lift from the Passage House Hotel up to Yeovil, just a stone's throw from the start. This was a lovely surprise, with sub-zero temperatures forecast.

Arriving at the Passage House we saw that Andy, Mike, Pete and Steve Plain (our chauffeur) had all arrived, and were busy prepping bikes and kit. It was lovely to see them. We transferred our bikes into Steve's van, with all of our kit...there was a lot of it. Forgetting any of it could have meant a more uncomfortable trial!

Andy tried starting his bike, not happy to say the least, struggling with any kind of throttle. LDT task number one was a team effort to get the top of the bike apart to dismantle the carb. Once all uncovered and carb successfully opened, we left Andy, Mike and Pete to carb cleaning with a couple of strands of wire taken from Kelvin's wire brush from the van. Luckily, their efforts were fruitful, and we got a message enroute to say they'd all see us at Haynes. Phew!

In Yeovil, we met Mo and Rob, grabbed a bite to eat and got kitted up again. H/Bar Muffs a definite 'must' on this occasion. I could barely get onto my bike with all six top layers, and three bottom layers, and bending my elbows was a bit of a struggle. My circulation was challenged too when my elbows were bent, so I'd need to avoid bending! At Haynes, it was straight to scrutineering, which we passed swiftly. When I got back to the museum I saw that I hadn't got the badge to show I'd passed scrutineering, back to retrieve it, to the 'sign-on', showing my thankfully successfully renewed ACU trials licence, and MCC card. Sorted!

Team 'Chicken Legs' (Kelvin, Andy and Mike) and Team 'The Coddiwomplers' (Suzie, Mo and Steve, with Pete joining us as a first time Exeter trial-er)

were all set to go. Team Chicken legs set off first, and a little while later we were off too, Mo leading the way.

My bike had a thin layer of frost over parts of it where it'd been sitting still for a couple of hours, inviting! It was good to get going though, and I'd plugged in the battery to my heated top and put it on the lowest setting. Although it added about an extra KG of weight at least it'd help to stop me freezing for a short while. Despite the heated top, by the time we got to the Windwhistle test the tips of my fingers were numb. Even more-so by the time we reached 'Underdown', the first section. Besides, my battery didn't last long so I may have to rethink my options for the future.

The beginning of the observed sections brought with it some much needed activity, with my fingers thawing out. We made our way carefully down the muddy track to the section, where in some places the track had frozen. As we made our way down the hill, a couple of us in each rut saw a later numbered bike came flying past us!

Underdown went well, and it was great to get the first section under our belts. Even with the concentration I remembered to shout "Thank you" to all the marshals as I bounced on by,. It's good on the longer sections like this, with some dirt track to get to and from them, to keep us warmer. It was then on to Musbury garage where the control marshal offered us a chocolate each as we signed in. I'd not had a Curly Wurly in years. Small things! One chap also lent Mo and I his head torch so we could use the portaloos around the corner (Thank you). Mo was feeling a lot happier on her newly mapped KTM Freeride, which had had some real TLC following the Edinburgh Trial, where it had misbehaved. We refuelled bikes and bodies, and set off once again.

Next was Waterloo (OS2), but no good this year.

I came around the corner and all I could see in front of me was thick, horizontal tree roots. As I bounced over them, I got sent across to the right and into the bank. OW! A couple of strong push-offs with my feet to get going again, out at the top, but failed. Pete had done a restart when it wasn't required, he also failed but not from lack of skill.

After cleaning Norman's, across the 'hump' to take on Clinton (OS4). As I came around the muddy corner on the right, I started to head up the hill and managed to get bounced off on to the right bank. I stuck a foot out and footed once off the bank to keep me going in the right direction. Could I have got away without footing? but I did foot, and that was that. As usual the finisher's certificate was the aim of my game, so I'd be genuinely happy if I just made it to the end. The Observed test at Wiscombe park was well lit, although I was cautious as the ground was frosty and I didn't want to end up sliding too far over the 'astride' lines.

Steve was a bit braver and I could hear him giving it some welly on his trusty Tricker, which definitely paid off when the results came through.

Next was Rill Path (OS5), and another successful section. Then the extra challenge of the ice to contend with - I think we'd been quite lucky so far given the temperatures, and the rain before the trial. However, as we made our way to 'Stretes' (OS6), we started descending a hill and came across a cone on one

side, so we went to the right of it, as that seemed to be the easiest route. Mo hit some ice, but managed to stay upright. We met 'Chicken Legs', Kelvin told me he'd seen the cone and put it there to get people to move out to the right because it was black ice. Andy Craig, leading their team, had hit the ice and then hit the deck. Nothing broken, but a real shakeup. When we came across them halfway down the hill, Andy Beveridge, a travelling marshal and sidecar driver with passenger Rob, had walked up the hill to warn us of more black ice, just before a tightish right-hand bend. Needless to say, we took it very gingerly down the hill. It was so kind of Andy B to warn us of the upcoming ice. He said they'd hit it and only just managed to make the corner, so well saved again!

We arrived at Stretes, even more cautiously now and Andy C informed the Marshal of the hazardous ice, suggesting that communicating this to Rill Path might be



Andy's carb removal
on the way to the
start

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helpful to warn competitors. It was also added to the What's App group, for anyone looking at their phone periodically. Stretes itself went well, now very much looking forward to breakfast.

Here we were at Greendale Farm, and after being greeted by several friendly marshals from the car park through to the café, we had time to eat breakfast, chat, keep warm, and for some power-naps...sleep. Following Andy's icy 'off', he was contemplating calling it a day, though he continued for now.

We signed out, and were warned that after the A30 there was a burst pipe in one of the villages meaning it was now sheet ice. Nothing like a bit of tension to ramp up the body heat though, eh?! Steve helped Pete to sort out a throttle cable issue, which was a quick fix and after a bit of a ride including a quick fuel stop before joining the M5, we got to Tillerton Steep (OS7). I realised quite quickly while leading the others that my front light had shifted its angle downward a little more, probably from one of my earlier jolts off a bank, so I couldn't see far ahead. Not ideal in the dark on frosty ground, but travelling as slowly as we were, it was ok. Fortunately, the forewarned sheet ice had become mushier by the time we hit it, and after the A30 I'd been riding super slow in anticipation. Tillerton was very slippery, but fun in a challenging sort of way. I'm not quite sure how we got up. Last year I'd ended up having a rest on the right-hand bank halfway up, so was glad I hadn't repeated that. Pete was loving his restarts and did another unnecessary one. Oopsy. (Andy C decided to retire after Tillerton). Fingle Hill is one of my favourites with its snaking track through the trees, nice and long to keep you warm! A short distance before we made it that far we hit some more black ice. I had a bit of a slip, tensed up, but luckily instead of braking headed my bike over to the roadside where I found traction and got my feet down. I had a little stop for a second to reset, and followed Steve to the section.

Photographer KHK Media and his dad braved the freezing conditions at Woosten. Thank you! Topley appeared, and it marked the beginning of daylight hours. I find the dawn brings with it an energy that is much needed after riding through the night,

and not only was it dawn it was still dry! We were steadily ticking off the sections now, and I was very much looking forward to Ilsgington. I hoped they had scrumptious ginger cake again, and yes they did! A quick catch-up with others, but I was feeling the tiredness now I was full of cake, in a nice warm hall. Push on before the end, with two of the three restarts of the trial for Class B.

Simms (OS13) is always a stomach-churner for everyone because of the crowd of people watching, with the restart at the bottom of the hill meaning you sit there looking up at what's ahead. It was bouncier this year, and I started to veer over to the right where the slabby rock is, where I'd often seen people spin-out in the past then back to the left whilst keeping some momentum so I wouldn't come to a slippery stop and I managed to keep it going, feet up, finally coming to a stop after the section ends. Hey, success! The only thing I was a bit concerned about was fuel.

Several riders gathered together before getting back to the tarmac, and Sam Cave (19) on his Honda C90 stopped next to us to check the turning. We confirmed he was right, and asked whether he happened to be carrying any fuel. To our surprise he had a 3L fuel container on the little C90 and was quite happy to give me 2L. How kind was that!! I quickly poured it in, then we all stopped on the way through Newton Abbott so we could get a reassuring litre of fuel each to see us comfortably through to the end.

Just one more section to go, Slippery Sam (OS14), and again one that I am 50/50 on, having failed last year due to hitting a 'R' marker board after going too far right on the restart box. Sitting in the line up, I smiled as I saw a fox in the distance, just calmly wandering across the open field, seemingly undistracted by the bikes, so I zoned-out watching it for a bit.

Pete had an issue with his brake line getting caught with his nav-tower, so he and Steve tried to free it and managed it just in time. It was soon my turn up the section, and I'd decided to go left on the restart after last year. Having stopped...the right looked far nicer! As the marshal dropped the flag, my front wheel got a bit of air as my bike squirreled away on the slippery rock. Maybe it moved about

less than it felt it did - anyway, much to my delight I remained upright, heading in the right direction and past the 'Section Ends' without any footing!

Woohoo!

The end in sight we arrived at the Passage House right on time, managing to sign off at scheduled times. It had been a challenging trial with the slippery rocks, sporadic black ice, maybe worse due to recent storms, but so pleased to have finished. Steve Plain's speediness on the timed observed tests definitely paid off as he earned himself 'The William Bray Cup' to add to his 'Lowe Award' from the 2024 Edinburgh Trial. Kelvin earned the 'Class Win' for class B, Mike and Mo got silver medals, Pete and I managed bronzes. Well chuffed!

Plus, 'The Coddiwomplers' earned 3rd place overall in the bike teams, which isn't bad at all; another great adventure with friends. All the marshals we'd met were in good spirits, and we were so thankful they'd all braved the elements for the event to go ahead. The road book was spot on, timings were really good, and most sections were open when we got to them. Thanks so much to all involved in putting on these great events, I am so very thankful. ■

No. 19, Sam, helping us out with fuel on the way to the finish

Suzie Prevett

