

HERO 27th Classic Marathon 2018



Steven Collins sweeps away from the sea in his AC Ace. Photos Blue Passion

Words by HERO

When the first Pirelli Classic Marathon competitors were flagged away from London's Tower Bridge in June 1988 it was the start of something very special and, 30 years later, the 2018 event was no different.

The Historic Endurance Rallying Organisation took the event to a new location, in Greece with an anti-clockwise route around this beautiful country. 62 crews had made it to the Athenian Riviera for the official start of the 27th Classic Marathon, 60km from Athens, in Marathonas, to begin their seven-day adventure on the start line of the legendary marathon race.

The heat was a common concern for many crews but as soon as they reached Amfikleia, the heavens opened and a thunderstorm passed through the mountains as temperatures plummeted from 31 degrees to a chilly 15, bringing with it torrential rain. The last regularity of the day, was an 'Alpine Climb' in true Classic Marathon tradition, which scaled hairpin bends on the fir-clad flanks of Mount Parnassus. The end of the first leg took competitors to the Archaeological Site of Delphi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and early leaders were Paul Bloxidge and Ian Canavan in their Porsche 911.

Leg two was a tough day as crews headed into traditional Acropolis Rally territory, with the famous old Bralos Pass and its winding descent

down to Gorgopotamos. The lead had been cut to a single second at this mid-point, following a stellar morning by the Jaguar E-type of Marcus Anderson and Matthew/Lynn Rose. From lunch, it was a stiff climb to over 1800m, passing the Velouchi Ski Centre and a spectacular mountain vista on the subsequent descent down into the valley on the twisty roads around Vracha. The route then returned north to the day's final regularity at Fanari, where Tomas de Vargas Machuca and Leigh Powley took the best time. The final challenge was a test at the tight and twisty Meteora Race Park, where crews were enthusiastically welcomed by an excited local crowd of spectators. Two crews shared the best time: Anderson/Lynn Rose in the Jaguar E-type and Jayne Wignall/Kevin Savage in the Sunbeam Tiger.

On Leg three crews quickly reached the first scenic highlight of the day – the spectacular Monasteries of Meteora, built atop the immense natural pillars that dominate the local area. Four regularities before lunch tested the crews, no more so than a superb 30km regularity featuring a series of long twisting ascents and descents tracing the route of the Arachthos valley. The lunch halt on the side of Peranthi Hill overlooked the city of Arta and the surrounding countryside. As temperatures began to climb into the high 30s crews tried to cool their cars as much as possible. Bloxidge and Canavan were unfortunate to lose the lead on the final regularity of the day when a small error in navigation at a tricky junction cost them a minute. Best on-day award went to de Vargas Machuca and Powley, in the Porsche 911, who also took the lead of the event with an impressive leg total of just 37 seconds.

Leg Four wound its way from Rio to Kalamata, home of the world famous olives and was a slightly easier day on the crews, although the searing heat was still a major factor. The Porsche drivers continued to show concern for their tyres with chunks of rubber flicking off in the hot conditions. Paul Crosby/Andy Pullan managed to find a garage on the route and had two new tyres fitted and balanced, whilst de Vargas Machuca/Powley used the assistance of the HERO mechanics at lunch to get new tyres fitted onto wheels in order to be fitted to the Porsche.

Having enjoyed a few hours of mountain roads, crews descended to the flatlands making for the afternoon break on the southern slopes of Mount Ithome and overlooking the ruins of Ancient Messini (founded in 371 BC). Top of the pile were Anderson/Lynn Rose matching Crosby/Pullan on two seconds to seal a great day for both crews with minimal penalties. After four days of motoring, the top five crews were split by less than a minute.

The rugged backdrop of the Mani Peninsula, with its mountainous and windswept landscape, peppered with small tower studded villages, was the setting for leg five. The rally lost the early leaders when Bloxidge withdrew with a clutch arm failure. The afternoon section from Marmari started with a climb away from the coast offering stunning vistas and the 'sunward coast', where the mountains drop dramatically straight down into the sea. An early finish allowed crews the chance to visit the breathtaking medieval Mystras Ruins (a fortress, a palace and surrounding

walls) – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The battle at the top heated up with just four seconds splitting the top two crews.

Leg six to Nafplio climbed above the tree line to the high plateaus, with ever-changing landscapes. The leader board changed with Crosby and Pullan taking the top spot, however by afternoon coffee this had changed again as Anderson and Lynn Rose took charge and extended their lead to 18 seconds by the end of the day.

The morning of the final day was spent exploring the lesser known roads of the Argolida Peninsula before finally leaving the Peloponnese to return to the 'mainland' for the run back to Athens. The second regularity took to the hills through a classic arid Greek landscape dotted with occasional orange and olive trees with a few of the now customary 'gravel' loops to add some flavour. These sections took crews to an early rest halt at Epidavrus Archaeological Site, with the mighty Amphitheatre.

The lead was turned on its head as Anderson/Lynn Rose made a navigational error and collected 1m59s of penalties. Meanwhile Crosby/Pullan took just 18 seconds of penalties and rocketed into the lead of the event, followed by a great performance of Daniel Gresly and Elise Whyte in their Porsche 911. There was time for some photos as the cars were driving over the Corinth Canal, before a final regularity and a test took the crews on the finishing line back to where it had started over a week earlier, in front of the Divani Apollon Hotel.



The Marathon winning Porsche 911 of Paul Crosby/Andy Pullan.



Marcus Anderson/Matthew Lynn Rose in the Jaguar E-type battled for victory



Greece provided a stunning backdrop for the Classic Marathon