



RAC Rally Of The Tests 2018 - Day One

It was a relatively early 07:45 start from the Crowne Plaza Hotel this morning for the long 280-mile drive south through the Eastern Counties to the overnight stop at the famous Belfry Hotel. On the cards for this first proper day of the event were eleven Tests and six Regularities.

As crews gathered at the Time Control in the Hotel Foyer it became apparent, we had lost one of the pre-event favourites in Paul Crosby and Andy Pullan who unfortunately had a terminal problem with their brakes and could not continue with the event. They were also joined by Daniel Gresley & Sean Toohey who had spent half the night in the underground car park trying to repair their alternator on the stricken Porsche, but to no avail.

Having escaped the morning rush hour traffic in and around Harrogate, the day's action started at the fabulous Harewood Hillclimb, run by the BARC Yorkshire Centre. As usual, crews were given two "goes" at this famous venue, but with a difference this year as the tests ran DOWN the hill! The flowing nature of the tests, proved to be a Porsches benefit and it was no surprise to see Tomas de Vargas Machuca and Nick Bloxham taking the fastest time on both of the opening two tests in the Arrive & Drive 911.

Unfortunately here we would see the loss of crew number 42, Dave Maryon and Bob Rutherford, both regular competitors, who made a slight rearrangement with the navigators door against some Armco and were forced to retire.

Then it was quickly on to Bramham Park - an RAC rally stage of old and now home to the Leeds Music Festival. Having tackled a quick test around the farm buildings, it was on to a 'busy' marked map Regularity around the estate's private gravel tracks. Eight Timing Points in seven miles meant that crews did not get much chance for a breather with Paul Wignall & Mark Appleton proving most adept on a total penalty of 28 seconds.

Crawling out of the final timing point with a rough sounding Triumph 2000 were Tony Sheach & Rachel Wakefield with a suspected Differential failure. When will this crew regain some good fortune?

Turning east along the A64, the route made for Acaster Malbis airfield, a former RAF Bomber Command training base, for two tests along the old runways, organised by York Motor Club. Mastering the slippery conditions here, once again on the first test was Tomas de Vargas Machuca who took the honours, although springing into the top spot on the second test were Patrick and Hubert Lynch in their Morris Mini Cooper S.

After that flurry of action, we rejoined the A64 to skirt the historic city of York *en route* to the morning coffee stop at the Balloon Tree Café, Gate Helmsley. This preceded the next 'allocated start' Regularity that wended its way across the gently rolling Yorkshire Wolds. Three map references defined an intricate route that ran along the edge of two maps for 20 miles. Over the five Timing Points, the best performance was posted by Jon Dunning & Henry Carr in the Alfa Romeo Giulia GTV, claiming a penalty of just five seconds.

Another former RAF airfield quickly followed at Driffield for three more tests, run by North Humberside and Beverley and District Motor Clubs, to round off the morning action. The Crew of Paul Bloxidge and Ian Canavan in their Porsche 911 Carrera 2.7 proved fastest on average over the three tests.



With eight tests already completed by midday, crews were ready for some sustenance and that was provided at Papa's Fish and Chips in Willerby. This award-winning restaurant also houses a 'Fish and Chips' Museum. However, most navigators were more interested in getting their hands on the next set of route instructions, which were issued as they left for the afternoon section.

The leaderboard had been shaken up by the mornings adventures and it now showed Paul Wignall and Mark Appleton taking control at the top and impressively taking 21 seconds less penalties than any other crew over the morning route.

Having crossed the mighty Humber Bridge, the afternoon action started with an innocuous looking map Regularity through the Saxby Wolds. However this is the Rally of the Tests and crews always need to be on their toes... So it proved here with very careful map reading being needed to spot the shortest route to the End of Regularity by way of a difficult 'slot' onto an old airfield and then a run down the A15 Dual Carriageway! The final Timing Point was located on the airfield and saw many crews pick up high penalties. Proving to be the exception, the top two crews of Paul Wignall/Mark Appleton and Howard Warren/Iain Tullie posted a score of just four seconds across the three Timing Points.

A long run then followed across country to Blyton Park Driving Centre for two long tests laid out on the main circuit and well marshalled by local motor club members. The nature of these tests were always likely to suit the bigger engined cars and so it was no surprise to see the Volvo of Mike and Lorna Harrison and the Porsche of Thomas Koemer and Manuel Maeker topping the timesheets.

Regularity 1/3 and that final Timing Point was a hot topic of conversation among the navigators as crews stopped for afternoon tea at the Giant Bike Shop Café on the Doddington Estate. Results here showed that Paul Wignall/Mark Appleton lead from Howard Warren/Iain Tullie by 49 seconds.

Heading back into the lanes, a short Regularity around Bassingham was next and, as expected, was easy for most with many crews getting low scores. For the later runners, it was already getting murky by the time they tackled this section and for most, darkness was upon them for the final test - a two-lapper around the enjoyable Fulbeck Kart Circuit.

The next Regularity started just south of the fabulous Belvoir Castle and traversed the Leicestershire Wolds. Two pages of Jogularity instructions defined an 11-mile route with four Timing Points to find. In a twist to the normal Jogularity style, the Timing Points were not located at the given landmarks.

With it now being close to the evening rush hour time and with the roads around Loughborough not being suitable rallying terrain, a long drive followed to the evening 'supper' Time Control in the fine surroundings of the Tithe Barn Café at Bosworth Battlefield. The Battle of Bosworth was the last significant battle of the War of the Roses. Battles of a different kind were the main talking point here as crews enjoyed 'soup and a roll' refreshments before setting off into the darkness once more.



Leaving the Time Control, navigators collected the navigation instructions for the final Regularity of the day around the Warwickshire Lanes, west of Nuneaton. With a decent run to the start of the section, navigators had chance to plot the route from the list of Spot Heights provided. This unveiled an intricate 15-miler on some surprisingly challenging roads and private tracks. Along the way, there were no less than seven Timing Points manned by a band of enthusiastic travelling marshals.

All that then remained was a short run to the luxurious Belfry Hotel for a welcome meal and drink or two in the bar. This had been a relatively tame first day by Rally of the Tests standards but had still been a stern enough challenge for most. Results posted on the Official Noticeboard showed that Steve Entwistle and Ali Procter are currently leading by 14 seconds.

That is all for now. Tomorrow promises to be a tougher day as the event heads into the classic rally terrain of mid Wales. We will be reporting all the news throughout the day on the HERO Facebook page and this webpage.