

Trevor Godwin,

September 13, 1996

Dear Trevor,

Further to our recent telephone conversation, I would like to confirm details of our proposed budget rally car test. As I explained to you, this will form part of the third in a three-part series, the purpose of which is to encourage our readers to get out there and have a go. Having covered racing in our September issue, and speed events in October, the spotlight now falls on rallying; this will appear in our November issue.

If all goes to plan, we will have four cars to test: Richard Tuthill's Vauxhall Nova; Chris Mitchell's Fiat Uno (both from the 1300cc ex-Colway Championship); a Skoda Felicia from the Skoda Trophy; and your good self with the Mini. I think this will make an interesting cross-section. Our intention will be to sample each car, both from the co-driver's and driver's seats: I don't expect we will need more than 15-20 minutes in each car. Needless to say insurance has been arranged for accidental damage.

The venue is Bill Gwynne Rallyschool (map attached) and the date is next Thursday September 19, 1996. I don't believe you will need to be there all day, but it would be useful if you could aim to be there for 10.00am: I anticipate you should be able to get away no later than around 15.00.

Thanks in advance for your attendance; I look forward to seeing you there.

Yours faithfully,



Art Markus,
Features Editor

DIRTY

on the



ROAD RACERS



If you wanted someone suitable to test a selection of low-cost entry level rally cars, who better than yours truly, CCC's resident circuit racer... and a roundy-round Eurocar-type oval racer at that? Not only that, but someone with a known antipathy to rallying (as it has become). Yup, I was the perfect man for this assignment all right....

But wait! I do have some rallying experience. Yes! Way back in the dim and distant past, I did a bit of rally co-driving back in my native New Zealand, when stage rallying was still in its infancy down under. I soon decided that rallying wasn't really for me, and certainly not from the co-driver's chair, although of course I would have leapt at the opportunity to drive. The challenge of driving as fast as possible along a previously unseen road *still* appeals, and I just think it's a pity that this is all too rare in modern rallying, at least at serious international level. But don't let me climb on my pet hobby horse. Sadly, the opportunity for me to get behind the wheel didn't arise, and my rallying career was over before it had really begun.

And now, some mumble mutter mumble years

later, I was to drive four club rally cars, representing four different approaches to getting started in rallying.

It is probably fair to say that Richard Tuthill's overall win in the 1996 Formula 1300 Championship in his Vauxhall Nova has not been greeted with universal acclaim in certain quarters. Richard, you see, is the son of the famous Francis Tuthill, renowned for rallying a Volkswagen Beetle at international level long after anyone else, and more recently for his

preparation of historic rally Porsche 911s, one of which he took to victory in the 1993 London Sydney Marathon.

It is easy to assume from all of this that Richard simply rallies with an open cheque book, and because it's an easy assumption to make, most people have. Not so. He claims to have spent no more than £4000 to win the championship in 1996. He does all of the preparation himself, and spends all his own money on the car, money he earns working for

DEEDS

cheap

Four entry-level rally cars tested by our resident circuit racer, Art Markus. Our Man is bowled over by a Nova, plays the ninny in a Mini, has a skid in a Skoda, and... oh, dammit....



Prodrive part-time, weekends and university holidays mainly. Yes, believe it or not, 21-year old Richard is actually a student, studying automotive engineering at Oxford Brookes University. Obviously he doesn't have vast sums of money to spend going rallying, contrary to popular perception. "We always stay in the cheapest b&b we can find", he laughs.

Indeed, to minimise expenditure, on most events Richard even does without a service crew. His sister Katy, who used to co-drive for Richard

and claims to be his best friend and biggest fan, drives the support vehicle, but if anything goes wrong with the rally car Richard just pulls his working overalls on over his Nomex and gets stuck in. That's determination....

Sadly, it seems that people are reluctant to accept that here is a highly determined and capable young man who is a bloody good driver, and who has built himself a good rally car. However being the son of Francis Tuthill does confer certain advantages. He is the first to acknowledge that having all the equipment, facilities, and expertise around him is a huge benefit, one that someone without them would have to pay dearly for. It also helps Richard gain support from the likes of Colway (tyres) and Mintex (brake pads), for example.

Sometimes too, you need a little bit of luck on your side. For instance Richard, having won all four previous rounds of the championship, only had to drive down the start ramp on the Manx Rally, held just a few days before our test, to clinch the title. This he duly did, and then promptly put the car in a ditch on the first stage to record his first dnf. Indeed, this was the first time he had

ever been off the road in a rally, having started his rally career in the 1992 RAC Rally in one of his dad's multi-coloured Beetles.

And when it came to repairing the damage, he was lucky again. Apart from the suspension, damage was confined to a front wing and the bonnet, but time was tight before the Nova's scheduled CCC appearance. Somehow, Richard bought a Nova scrapper locally for fifty quid, sold the seats – for fifty quid! – meaning the replacement panels cost him zip, and then of course, he was able to fit and paint them in the family workshops. Sometimes when the momentum is running with you, you can't go wrong. Enjoy it while you can, I say!

Richard's Nova is to Group A specification with the exception that it is on carburetors rather than fuel injection: obviously it could easily be converted to full Group A spec if required. As such it was easily the fastest car on test on the day, not only because it had the most power, but also because it had the best brakes, the best handling and the most traction – courtesy of its limited slip differential no doubt – too. Indeed, the lsd is the dominant factor in the handling, making



its presence felt through the steering. If you tried to accelerate hard with a lot of lock on the steering became very heavy, almost locked. For that reason I found it was best to keep the front wheels as straight as possible, steering with the rear. When I drove the car I quickly realised that my usual style, of working with the car rather than fighting with it, just wouldn't do: this car *demand*s to be bossed around. But the firm yet well-damped suspension made it probably the most obedient and predictable too. This is a well-sorted car, and although it's an amateur-built car, it's obviously been done professionally, if you know what I mean.

Having thoroughly cleaned up the Formula 1300 Championship this year, Richard is keen to move up, and is presently examining his options. Taking the next step though is difficult, not only because inevitably it will be much more expensive, meaning he will need to find a good sponsor, but because it is difficult to



even identify what the next step should be. As Richard says: "there is no real structure for young drivers". Maybe that's something for the RAC MSA to address when they get a spare five minutes....

Chris Mitchell and his team are affectionately known within the Formula 1300 Championship as NAT Rallying. With his hairstyle and dress sense you see, Chris looks for all the world like a new age traveller. Get him behind the wheel of his Fiat Uno rally car though, stick a crash helmet on his head, and you couldn't imagine a greater transformation. New age traveller be damned: the man is a *demon*. When he was driving me round initially, just to show me what the car could do, tearing about, leaping over the bumps, scattering the marker tyres, and raising huge clouds of dust... well, I thought he was never going to stop! Certainly riding in these cars reminded me why I gave up co-driving all those years ago!

Like so many in rallying, 24-year old Chris started in a Mini, built and prepared

entirely by himself, with no previous experience. He ran the Mini in the Colway Championship as was, then sold it at the end of 1995 and bought the Uno, a former Uno Challenge car, intending to compete in the 1996 Formula 1300 Championship. Unfortunately a run of silly but difficult-to-diagnose problems, like failed electrical connectors, caused him to dnf in the first two events. He was then a promising 3rd on the Scottish, but with no real chance in the championship he decided to withdraw, and regroup. Chris is now planning to do a few minor events this year before mounting a serious assault on the Formula 1300 Championship next year.

Chris works for Mini man Trevor Godwin in the latter's classic car restoration business, Coventry Automotive, so he is another who enjoys

access to good facilities, which in Chris's case is a substitute for hard cash. This is real budget rallying.

When I drove the slightly battered Uno, it was obvious that it had done several hard seasons of rallying. There was nothing noticeably wrong with it, you understand: it just felt well... loose, with lots of rattles and squeaks, just like any high-mileage car really. Riding with Chris I was reminded yet again of the fearful pounding rally cars (and co-drivers!) get as a matter of course, which seems to be amplified by the constant barrage of stones cannoning off the bare metal floor. Of course it doesn't help that the engine revs its nuts off with a banshee wail, adding to the general din and confusion. Indeed if you have any mechanical sympathy, then perhaps rallying is not for you!

The Uno's gear shift was especially vague, with a loose and floppy action, while the handbrake lever was exactly the opposite, being stiff and heavy. This made it very awkward to co-ordinate handbrake turns as you needed a firm hand on the handbrake lever, and a delicate touch on the gearstick. But no matter. Chris is aware that the car is not perfect, and has plans and modifications in mind, as and when time and funds (funds mainly) permit.

Chris enjoys some support from his employer Trevor Godwin's Coventry Automotive concern, and from Carstins Fiat dealers, who provide a spares package on a sale-or-return basis, which



is an enormous help even though it costs the sponsor very little in terms of cash outlay. This is typical of the sort of deal a determined club competitor can do if he really puts his mind to it. He is also registered for the Demon Tweaks Competitor Bonus Scheme, in which photos appearing in certain magazines with the famous DT logo visible qualify for vouchers, and although CCC is not actually one of the magazines included in the scheme, I think they should pay up, don't you? In fact I think an appearance in a quality publication like CCC should be worth *double*. Come on Alan (Minshaw, boss of Demon Tweaks), don't be so stingy... send the boy a voucher.

I don't think Trevor Godwin would mind me saying that he is not exactly an up-and-coming young lad in rallying. The 49 year-old classic car restorer started rallying way back in 1969 in a

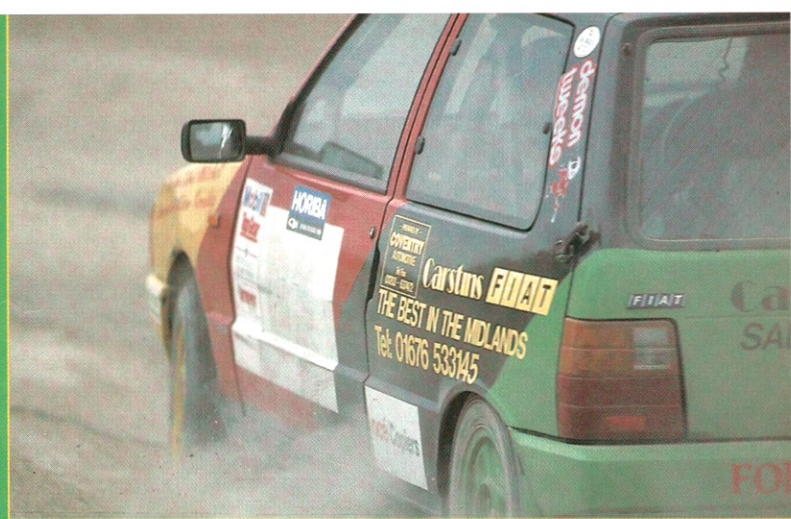


Richard Tuthill's championship-winning Vauxhall Nova is fast, but not easy to drive. Built by an amateur to professional standards, it's a tribute to what can be achieved with skill, determination... and not a lot of cash

Hillman Imp, and has driven no fewer than ten different makes and models of 1300cc rally car in his career.

What has made it possible for Trevor to go rallying in an affordable and enjoyable way in recent years is Rover's recent homologation of the humble Mini Cooper 1.3i into Group A. As he says, rallying a Mini opens a lot of doors, such is the residual affection for the little brick around the world (except in France perhaps! Especially down Monte Carlo way).

For instance at the time of our test Trevor and his crew had recently returned from the 1996 Neste 1000 Lakes Rally: just check out the number squares on the doors – how's that for instant street cred. But doing a major international event like that doesn't necessarily cost as much as you might think. Trevor and his co-driver Rick Spurgeon and two crew did the Finnish international for considerably less than £2000, spending some two weeks abroad in the



● *Silverstone Rally School is responsible for introducing Clare Morran (left) to rallying, via its annual Lady Quest contest; a highly commendable attempt to introduce female participants to a largely male-dominated sport. Vehicle is Group N Skoda Felicia, running in the Skoda Trophy, now in its twelfth year and gaining in stature all the time*

is debatable whether you actually need to handbrake it to get it round. And whereas the other cars needed first gear to pull out of the U-turns at each end of our course, the Mini's A-series engine was so torquey it was quite prepared to haul itself out in second gear.

One thing you have to be wary of in the Mini is that if you apply too much power with a lot of lock on it does the driveshafts no good at all, especially when the suspension is set high to cope with rougher conditions. Oh, and another thing: if you hit a bump, or series of bumps wrong, you can cause it to kick up at the rear, a motion that can cause the Mini to fly out of control if you run out of luck. Obviously having two wheels off the ground doesn't do much for the handling.

In this and certain other respects (the cramped cockpit, seating position etc) the Mini's age is starting to show, and yet on the other hand it is amazing how effective it still is. Name me any other 37 year-old design that would be anything other than an embarrassment in modern rallying. Trevor, with a mature head on his shoulders, tends to drive the car mindful of these problems, and it's probably no co-incidence that he usually manages to finish when large numbers of potentially much faster cars do not. Simply finishing almost guarantees an impressive result for the mighty Mini.

There is another way to get started in rallying. You could win a competition to find a young up-and-coming rally driver. Silverstone Rally School (01327 857413) runs just such a competition, but there's just one snag: you have to be of the feminine persuasion to enter! But it's well worth winning Silverstone Rally School's Lady Quest if you qualify. First prize is a fully-sponsored drive in the Skoda Trophy. No, no... that's not the booby prize.

Nowadays, under the aegis of Volkswagen, Skoda is no longer a standing joke: the Czech manufacturer has transformed itself into a maker of small efficient family saloons that can stand comparison with anything. Anyway when was the last time you heard a Skoda joke, eh? So no more, right? Of course Skodas are not as cheap as they once were either, which is probably one of the reasons that the Skoda Trophy, now in its twelfth



another crack at the 1000 Lakes and RAC Rallies. Normally though, the Mini is entered in the 1300cc class in the Mintex National Rally Championship, where the organisers have been eager to attract entries in the 1300cc class to bolster the numbers, so some especially attractive deals have been on offer. For Trevor Godwin, rallying must always offer good value for money.

I found the Mini to be a real blast to drive, even if it doesn't feel terribly quick by modern standards. It is just so agile and so eager to please. One benefit of modest performance is that you can use more of the available performance more of the time.

But you could tell I'm not used to this rallying lark. Once or twice I arrived at the U-turn at the end of our test area, which is tailor-made for practising your handbrake turns, yanked up the lever, pushed the button to make sure it didn't lock on, and promptly spun to a dusty halt. Fly-off handbrake you see. A bit like left-foot braking, handbrake turns are only any good to you when they are perfectly executed. You only have to watch a little bit of European rallying on Eurosport to note how seldom you see a handbrake turn perfectly executed.

But in fact the Mini is so manoeuvrable that it

process. How is that possible? Well, the organisers offered a free entry, and free ferry travel. The crew was sponsored for their accommodation, and *Voila!* – budget rallying on a grand scale. This is probably only possible if you are prepared to rally a Mini though. Those rallying 'normal' cars will probably have to pay their way!

The Horiba Mini ran totally trouble-free throughout, covering a greater mileage on this one rally – even without bothering to do a recce! – than in all the other events through the year combined. Sadly, Trevor just missed out on third in class (by 18 seconds... to a *Frenchman!*), a result which would have been worth £500 in prize money to him.

Trevor insists that the overseas events offer much better value, and is planning to take in the Portuguese Rally next year, as well as taking



● Chris Mitchell's Fiat Uno has obviously had a hard life (left) but still capable of raising the dust. Trevor Godwin's Mini 1.3i (below) is easy to handle and – just as it did 37 years ago – makes an excellent car in which to learn the art of rally driving

year, is now attaining genuine stature. The series now boasts training in media skills for all contenders (sure worked on me...); competition car preparation and driving skills workshops; and even its own Skoda Trophy News publication, all expertly co-ordinated by enthusiastic series organiser Steve Iles.

Another major advantage of the way the Skoda Trophy is structured is that the series starts with four National B status rallies, then a National A, then an International. This allows a novice driver to start the year with no experience, and finish it with an international rally licence.

And first prize in the Skoda Trophy is a fully-supported 'works' drive in the RAC Rally. In previous years this has been in a Group A car, but the '96 winner is due to drive a new Felicia Kit Car, a prize well worth winning.

Clare Morran, a 29 year-old paediatric nurse, is the 1996 SRS Lady Quest winner, and a veteran of five rallies! At the time of writing, she was lying 7th out of 17 competitors in the Trophy, having finished every event, and been first lady in four of them. Not bad for someone who knew nothing about rallying prior to her first event!

Clare had heard so much about her police driver husband's derring-do behind the wheel she decided she wanted to learn how to drive fast herself. So she entered the Lady Quest competition. As she says: "You enter, but you never dream you are going to win..." But she

was called back as one of the ten finalists, and eventually won through. She may not have been the quickest driver on the day, but she was the quickest learner. Clare is co-driven on events by Silverstone Rally School director Richard Taunt, so she obviously receives excellent guidance.

Her car is a Group N showroom spec Felicia, and being the newest and probably the most standard of the four cars tested, felt the most 'normal', the biggest problems being a dire lack of traction, despite minimal power, and very slow steering, demanding lots of frantic wheel-twirling. In deference to Clare's relative lack of experience, we also had championship front-runner Gethin Jones – locked in a titanic battle for



the championship with David Jennings entering the final round as we closed for press – on hand to demonstrate the car's potential.

With just 65bhp to play with momentum is everything, and when Gethin was driving he was using left-foot braking, allowing him to keep his right foot planted firmly on the throttle; from the passenger seat it felt that the rear end of the car was pretty well glued to the road, reluctant to let go.

But when I drove, using simple throttle lift-off to get the tail out, I found it quite easy to get the tail moving. But then when I tried left-foot braking, I made a complete cods of it. I do believe left-foot braking might... just might, be an advantage with a low-powered front wheel-drive car, on a loose surface,

provided it is perfectly executed. Maybe...

The problem with left-foot braking is that it has to be done perfectly... or not at all. If you don't judge it just right – when to press the brake pedal, how hard and for how long – you'll probably make a worse mess of things than if you just lift off the throttle to get the tail swinging. But it's a complete waste of time when you get it wrong. I really must get some more practice!

I was then driven by Clare, and I was impressed. I don't know whether I was expecting her to be a bit of a wussy (probably was, if I'm honest!) but no way. She was really getting stuck in, if anything a little *too* committed with the throttle at times, as the slow steering meant she was losing the rhythm, and getting more and more out of synch with the corners. Admittedly the stage we were using at the Bill Gwynne Rallyschool (01280 705570) was pretty tight and twisty, meaning we probably couldn't come to too much harm if things went a bit wrong, but bottle definitely wasn't a problem. Feminine she may be, but this gal's got balls!

Apparently Clare's biggest problem has been, not her speed around the corners as you might expect, but her speed down the straights. By her own admission she has been reluctant to keep her foot hard in it when the road is straight (or as straight as it gets on most rallies anyway) but when she can't perhaps see exactly where the road ahead goes. But that will come.

Like Richard Tuthill, another young talent well worth a break, Clare is now considering her next move. Ideally she would like to continue in the Skoda Trophy, but she has to make way for the '97 Lady Quest winner, and will be on her own, probably with her husband co-driving. Therefore she, like so many others, is looking for a sponsor to help further her rally career. Attractive and with a bright personality, someone looking for a promotable lady rally driver could do a lot worse. Contact can be established through Richard Taunt at the Silverstone Rally School.

So what did we learn today? Only that our rally drivers are ordinary people, like you and me. Not one of them is a millionaire (unless there's something they're not telling me!); they are ordinary people with ordinary jobs and ordinary incomes. The only thing that sets them apart is their determination, and willingness to work hard to achieve their goals. If they can do it, so can you. What's stopping you? ■

