

ALPINE TRIAL

Vintageants take to the Alps

Three days and 1000km in pre-war cars on the best roads in Europe

Words Glyn Tucker Photography Gerard Brown

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and France

THE REVIVAL of the 1930s Alpine Trial attracted 45 entries who answered the call from the Endurance Rally Association to storm the passes in the original manner. Even the basecamp hotel was authentic: the Imperial by the lake at Annecy, overlooked by the snow-capped giants of the Mont Blanc range. Among the entries were two cars that were there in 1934, John Ruston bringing his bright green Talbot 105, the very car that had won it in the hands of Mrs 'Bill' Wisdom.

John's venerable car was in the top ten throughout and settled for seventh overall, but Gareth Burnett and Jeremy Haylock in a similar car went better, with Jeremy's ace handling of the maps and stopwatch getting the car round the three-day route with a 'clean sheet' while everyone else chalked up penalties – the effort netting them the sole Alpine Cup awarded.

Laced with fine mountainside stops for lunch, it was not exactly a press-on-regardless style of heads-down rallying, because route-plotter Keith Baud, who gained fame for devilish route creations for the old Monte Carlo Challenge in the 1980s, planned the route with pre-war cars very much in mind. Yet there was no hanging about and most crews found coping with the route instructions – all marked-up maps – a challenge, and nothing like the usual tick-box mentality of a Tulip routebook.

Michelin maps can hide all sorts of things that delight a route-planner, such as a tight 90-left behind a farmhouse just before a

T-junction, which saw most turn left at the T-junction only to drop time beetling back to the correct turning once a mistake had been admitted to a fuming driver.

'Enormous fun' was how Ruston described it at the end of day one, and the grin on the faces of the Talbot team remained throughout. Delage, Delahaye, two Alfa Romeo 8C Zagatos, rare tin-top Peugeot saloons, Invictas, Jaguar SS100s... the scene in the parc ferme each evening was an eye-popping delight for any car



enthusiast. As well as John Ruston's veteran of the 1934 event, David Hescroft brought an original AC that also knew its way around the mountains. The polished alloy Ford Model A Speedster of Bill Cleyndert locked horns with William Medcalf's Bentley Super Sports, and even managed to beat the Alfa 8C Zagato of Bill Ainscough, who reckoned he had 280bhp under his right foot and displayed it by spinning the rear wheels in third gear away from controls.

The route won applause for the forgotten, narrow Alpine passes that not even cyclists use, resulting in open-road motoring of 1930s flavour. In the small-car class, Rileys battled it out with an MG TC, while Aston Martins and a flock of Frazer Nashes made an indecent noise sufficient to rattle the windows of the Hotel Imperial, thrashing bigger cars in the process.

'Flat-out climbs up the side of a French Alp are simply wonderful,' said Model A man Cleyndert at the finish. 'I'm not sure how much longer we are going to be allowed to drive like this, but it's absolutely bloody marvellous and there is a whole bunch of us urging the ERA to do the same again next year.'

Organiser Philip Young's response was a suggestion to pencil-in the first weekend of September 2015.

From top

Bill Cleyndert and Matthew Abrey were second in Ford Speedster; John Ruston and Michael Birch in the Talbot that won the original Trial; Bill Ainscough and Jason Dearden's Alfa 8C Zagato came fourth.

