

Colin McRae Forest Stages

Saturday 30th September 2006

Calum MacKenzie & Alan Clark

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After a two year break from rallying to build a new Vauxhall Engine MK11 Escort, Calum and Alan made a return to the stages on the 2006 Colin McRae Forest Stages Rally. This years rally was based in Perthshire, using the forests around Kenmore and Aberfeldy.

The crew were quite nervous on the morning of the rally and there was an air of silence in the car, on the run out to the first eight mile stage in Craigvinean forest. On the run out Alan asked Calum, "What's the plan today then?" and the response was "Attack!" "We're not here to make up the numbers!" "Excellent," was Alan's reply, and the silence continued!!

The stage condition in Craigvinean was to be the best of the day. It was a good gravel surface, and although it was slippy in places it was pretty consistent. The stage started off really well but up along the top of the stage there was a lot of mist and visibility was very poor in places. This Calum described, was a contributing factor to an excellent 3rd fastest time overall and 2nd fastest 2WD time, although they were still some 22 seconds behind the fastest time of a flying Alister McRae. However, they were three seconds faster than the WRC Subaru of Barry Johnson, and 5 seconds faster than Dave Weston in his WRC Focus.

Calum said:

"It was an excellent stage with a good surface, which made it easier to commit to. With the mist up at the top end of the stage I decided to really attack, as time can be made by committing totally to the notes when you can't see where you are going!! Alan was spot on with the notes, so it made it quite safe, although I think there were a few times he didn't agree!!"

It was an excellent time, for a brand new car on its first ever competitive stage, when you take into account that it is was self built by Calum in the restraints of a 21ft x13ft garage.

Stage two, Fonab was the shortest of the day at four miles. The crew set off into this very slippery stage in the same attacking frame of mind as the first. Alan commented on the stage:

“We came into a left nine corner where both of us heard a substantial pop, and after the corner the car did not want to go in a straight line. We were convinced we had a puncture and backed off for the last 2 miles.”

The crew came out of the stage to discover they did not have a puncture, and also found out that many other crews were complaining of the same lack of handling due to the greasy conditions. The result, was a time 9 seconds slower than their nearest class rival.

Stage 3 was Griffin 1, and had been described to Alan by Alister McRae as *“one big greasy hole!!”* It certainly was greasy, resulting in the car under steering in the fast corners, which didn't help Calum's confidence:

“I took it too cautious in the R3, R4's in there as the car seemed to under steer and did not want to turn in so well” “With the available excuse of the 2 year lay off and a brand new car I think I will use it on this stage for not being quick enough!!”

Trevor Moore was 10 seconds faster over this nine mile stage, and this now left Calum and Alan 2nd in class and 12 seconds behind Moore. The other problem was that the car seemed to be struggling in the higher gears and a strong smell of petrol was apparent in the car.

Calum said:

“I think there is something not quite right with the mapping, and it's over fuelling causing it to hold back. It's not pulling as clean as it was”

Service was next and to the crew's surprise and disappointment the tyre vans were not in their service but in another industrial estate. This meant they had to use a different tyre to that they had been using on the morning stages. Nothing could be done to the mapping in the time available either, so the crew would be persevering for the rest of the day.

Stage 4 was Errochty. This stage is infamous for punctures and although the crew had every intention of getting time back from Moore, the technique in here was to ensure they took no cuts and kept things tidy. However, regardless of this, they still picked up a puncture and had to stop and change it. Alan said:

“We were well on it in there and it was definitely going to be a good time, but it obviously wasn't to be.”

Drummond Hill was the venue for stage 5, and Calum had decided after losing 4 minutes with the puncture there was no point in heroics and steady till the end was the plan from now. They duly did that and posted a 13th overall stage time and fastest in their class. Trevor Moore picked up a puncture close to the end of the stage.

Stage 6 took the crew back to Griffin for a re-run with less mileage but there was now some double usage. Surprisingly the stage was still in good condition and had more grip than in the first run in the morning. A steady approach again netted a 13th fastest overall again and a happy crew, as the car finished still in mint condition after its first forest adventure.

At the finish it became apparent that stage 4 (Errochty) had been cancelled as the stage ambulance had to help a spectator who had become unwell. This meant the crews time on Stage 4 was dropped, which was where they had received their puncture. This resulted in the crew finishing a creditable 7th overall, and first in class on their first outing in two years. Calum said afterwards:

“We’ve seen the other side of the coin with luck in the past so it’s nice when it goes our way for a change....although if we had known that our time for stage four would be dropped on the way to stage 5 and 6, we would certainly have tried harder, as we only lost 6th overall by 3 seconds!!”

“It has been a excellent day though, and it has shown us that the engine still needs a bit of work, and we need more miles to get my own confidence back up so we can get up to pace again”

The crew would like to thank their mechanics for their help on the day; Mark, Mark, Kevin and Ross, and to their valued sponsors; Nicolson Maps and Graham Hire. With an additional thank you to the marshals, event organisers and safety crews.

Details of all stage times can be found on www.flyingfinish.com



Photograph courtesy of Alistair Farquhar



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