

## START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

When the history books are written. For the *Rally the Globe* (RtG) organisation team, today will be seen as the day when it all began. Just over a year of intense planning and meticulous preparation had led them to this. The first day of their first rally and, maybe there were some anxious thoughts which crossed their minds as they made their way from bed to breakfast. Like all good students though they'd done their homework thoroughly, they'd understood the theory and they'd completed all the necessary coursework - not once but twice. Yet, their final exam (the practical) still loomed large, and today, across the hills of Northern Spain they'd find out whether they'd made the grade.

It started well enough. Jim Smith was up first; as keeper of the RtG "dirigible" it was his solemn duty to ensure his inflatable arch stood proud and steady so that at the appointed hour, each car could make its way beneath it, to be waved away by Fred Gallagher armed with his rojigualda.

Many of the crews had also risen early, despite the darkness and the chill in the air, for they were as keen as anyone to see how the day would go. At 8.01am therefore Gavin and Diana Henderson's Bentley throbbed its way onto page one of the route book and straight through downtown Santander into the campo where we enjoyed miles of traffic free wooded roads, passed through dozens of sleepy villages and crossed scores of stone bridges over as many little rios.

The timing was sensible, so no one was in any real hurry, but soon enough, the first Regularity at Puerto de Alises arrived on the trip meter. This section covered almost 12km of a looping tarmac hill climb to a summit at 674m. The views were beautiful, and there was time to enjoy them along with a delicious coffee at the first Passage Control in the cafe at Ambagas where Jamie Turner and Jack Amies had set up shop.



Photos: gearathome.co.uk

Gavin and Diana Henderson 1922 Bentley 3-4 1/2



Jim Gately and Tony Brooks, 1947 Kurtis Comet

Another short road section to the second Passage Control in Saratxo took the rally past the occasional vineyard and acres of freshly ploughed fields, veiled with a light autumn mist. There was an impressive climb to 900m over the Puerto de Orduna and a short motorway blast which delivered us to an excellent tapas lunch at the parador Argomaniz.

Once the plates had been cleared away and the crews had settled back into their cars, then the afternoon's fun and games began with the second Regularity at Areatza. This, a narrow and scrubby hill climb under full sun and a blue sky was accompanied by the sound of countless, full throated Spanish crickets, giving it perhaps their last gasp for the year.

And, as we neared the night halt in Rioja, the dense and well tended olive groves swapped places with a reassuring amount of well fruited vineyards, but before we could even think about a glass or two of the region's most famous liquid, there was a the Cir-cuito de Navarra to negotiate.

Two laps of this most excellent track gave the eager crews a chance to make amends for any penalties they'd accrued in the two preceding Regularities. At almost 4km long and with stunning views across the surrounding countryside, this was indeed a popular Test and the ever feisty Manuel Dubs made sure he saw it from every possible angle with a 360° back straight pirouette worthy of Nureyev.

As a way of rounding off the day, topping this high octane adrenaline fix was going to be hard to beat. But there was another surprise in store on the way to the night halt, by way of a visit to the Bodega Vina Real. Here we were welcomed with an exquisite wine tasting tour, tapas and a guided walk through the ancient and modern production facility and storage caves.



Wilfried and Sandra Schaefer, 1973 Porsche 911S



Anthony and Lee-Ann Strelzow, 1936 Bentley Derby Drophead Coupe



Mick and Grace de Haas, 1966 Mercedes-Benz 230SL

Finally, over dinner this evening, nestled in the rolling rolling vineyards, we got to taste some of the local produce along with excellent steak and fine postre.

As for the examination grade, we're delighted to report that the student achieved a well deserved distinction.

Tomorrow, the journey continues and we move on to a different wine region.

*Gerardus Mercator*

Gerardus Mercator, *Dispatch* reporter