

HERO LE JOG 2010

# A question of survival

4-7 December. Land's End, Cornwall, to John o'Groats, Scotland

Photography: Francesco Rastrelli



Left and below Citroën Traction Avant proved the worth of FWD, MGA survived cold-water torture, while Amazon tackled sheep avoidance.



'HEAVY SNOW FALL, strong winds, dense fog and rain showers.' That was the weather forecast for early December, and they weren't kidding. Once the teams left Newcastle and ventured into Scotland, they were presented with the most challenging weather possible – and at times it looked like some of the entrants weren't going to make it at all. 'It was definitely a question of survival,' as Robert McLean, winner of the HERO Cup, summed up.

Two days earlier, at the Land's End start, the teams were bracing themselves for a tough drive. For the 16th running of LeJog, 54 participants from ten countries – including more than 12 first-timers – gathered for what they knew would be a gruelling challenge in navigation and regularity. But that's exactly what they had signed up for: HERO's LeJog has a reputation for being the UK's toughest endurance event.

Having left the windy cliffs of Land's End at the break of dawn, the teams were immediately thrown into navigating through the labyrinth of Cornwall's narrow lanes in horizontal rain, with the occasional sheep wandering into view round blind bends.

Day two took the participants into Wales and some severe weather, as the blanket of snow became thicker and the ice slicker. The entourage moved steadily northwards as the organisers revised the route to avoid closed roads, recalculating mileage, timings, moving the check points and relocating the 'Jogularity' sections overnight. But that was nothing compared with what was about to come.

The final leg was a full-on 24-hour non-stop-drive, leaving Newcastle in the face of worsening extreme weather with no respite until the next



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morning at John o'Groats. 'These were definitely the worst conditions I've ever driven in,' said Robert McLean, veteran of ten LeJogs, all campaigned in his Rover P4 100 (above). 'It was unfortunate for the organisers, as they cut a lot of the route – but they did an excellent job in really tough circumstances.'

Several sections of the route had to be cancelled, causing disruption to regularities and tests, and the freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall led to recovery teams having to free-up crews stuck in drifts.

'The most worrying part of this for us was near Edinburgh, when we got stuck in traffic on the M8

motorway. But we were lucky and spotted a bank of snow, and dug a pathway through it to escape the gridlock.' This was on the day that hundreds of hapless motorists found themselves stuck on the motorway all night.

Despite the conditions, at no point did the organisers consider stopping the rally – as the rally cars and crews had proved themselves capable of overcoming everything thrown at them. And the snow made the spectacular Scottish scenery even more beautiful than normal.

'Running alongside Rannoch Moor in the dark was stunningly beautiful; it was so cold, and everything was frozen and sparkling in moonlight,' said Robert.

The first cars arrived at John o'Groats at sunrise after a night's navigation through the Highlands and sleeping villages of Scotland. The extreme difficulties en route ensured an even greater sense of team spirit and camaraderie than ever, with a sense of pride from the crews mixed with admiration for the reliability of their cars.

Christian Ruter and Stephan Huber (1971 BMW 2800) took first place; Kevin Haselden and David Kirkham (1967 Mini-Cooper) took second; and Tony Sheach and Richard Lambley (1964 Triumph TR4, above) finished third. Gold Medals went to Haselden and Kirkham, Sheach and Lambley, Jean-Marie Schmit and Thierry Hilger (1969 Sunbeam Chamois); and Igino Angelini and Francesco Moccagatta (1970 Triumph TR6).

Event organiser Mathias Doutréleau summed-up after the event: 'LeJog confirmed its tough reputation, and also underlined the hardy spirit of the competitors. That they made it to John o'Groats at all was an amazing achievement.'