

RALLYING AROUND

THE twin headlights cut long cones of white light into the blackness ahead. Snow piles up on the windscreen turning the wipers into snow-ploughs. The powerful car slides around country lanes at 60 m.p.h., snarling viciously as it changes down to climb a steep gradient. Away it goes over the Welsh mountains and one can see long searchlights swinging up into the air as it roars towards the coast.

A doctor, surely, you must think, hurrying in a race against death to see a serious case, or a business-man making a dash to catch the boat from Holyhead, or perhaps even a police car.

But no—it's only a game!

A very adult game though, with lots of skill involved, and not a little danger! It's a member of the local motor-club engaged in the popular sport of rallying; just one of many people in this country who think it great fun to spend the night, wet and cold, dashing from point to point over iced roads and through lashing storms!

What is a Rally? Well it isn't a race; that's the first thing to remember, though of course it *sometimes* involves some fast travelling, and so, like racing, it requires an ability to drive well.

Briefly, rallying is a movement from place to place (denoted by map references, and usually in the middle of nowhere!) at a set average speed. Now this average speed is

not high. It may be about 30 m.p.h.—but just you try doing it over the Lake District, or on the Welsh mountain ranges, and you'll find it's very difficult indeed to maintain.

To make sure that the 'average' is kept by the competitors, 'time' check-points are set up and manned by officials who stamp the route-card of a car, as it passes through. Then, to make sure that nobody 'short cuts' the route, 'passage controls' are established between the time controls.

Then just to make the game even more difficult a spy-system of secret observers is spread out on the course, to note the speeds and times of various cars and to see that no one exceeds the permitted maximum speed!

Then (and this is where rallying differs from racing too), penalty marks are awarded for arriving at a time check-point either late or early. And more black marks can be added for exceeding the speed limit, or for deviating from the route.

So you see, it's not as simple as it sounds. It requires *steady* driving ability, which includes skill at cornering 'blind' on country lanes; and complete control of the vehicle on icy or wet roads. All the road surfaces will be bad—the officials make sure of that when they set out the route!

In fact many racing drivers who have had one or two cracks at rallying have retired,

But the driver is not the only person who has to work hard on a rally. There's his partner, the navigator (don't call him a 'passenger' whatever you do!) who has the nightmare job of map-reading (by a small torch, on the night section) and who is responsible for seeing that the average speeds are correctly maintained—for this you have to be a mathematical wizard—and for ensuring that the vacuum-flask is topped up with tea! In his spare time he must be

angry farmers, shooing off wandering cows, and a hundred and one other tasks. No, he's certainly *not* a passenger!

But let's conjure up a rally of our own, the 'Eagle' Rally. It's scheduled to start at 10.30 p.m., on a bleak January night, from an unknown country lane near Chester.

10.25 p.m.

Here we are then, waiting outside the 'start' control. The control itself is a large



First stop, just outside Minera, and officials sprint around the car in their haste to keep out of the sleet!



A short, unrehearsed night stop to correct a small fault in the engine of this 3.4 litre Jaguar.

station wagon full of warm, comfortable club officials—but we don't envy them—we're off on a wonderful new adventure in the night. Several cars have already started ahead of us, at one minute intervals, and now it's our turn to receive the secret map-reference which will tell us (when we've worked it out on the map) where we will find the first time-control.

10.30 p.m.

We're off! Into the night we dash, heading westwards. Our first stop will be outside the

little village of Minera, so the map tells us. And what a road we must take! Here it is, turn left now, off the main road, winding ourselves up the mountain-side. This road is unfenced, almost unsurfaced, turning back on itself so often that it seems as if it doesn't *want* to go anywhere. The rain is turning to sleet but so far, luckily, the stuff is too wet to remain on the ground.

There they are, just two, wet, sad-looking people huddled over a brazier on this bare mountain-top, waiting with rubber-stamp poised. Not much fun for the officials, this!

11.15 p.m.

Off we go again. We were dead on time at the first control, so our sheet is still clean. This leg of the journey will take us over the Egwyseg Mountain (the snow is thicker now as well!), and down into Llangollen. A main road does this trip too, but we dare not take it, in case a 'spy' sees us. We must speed up here—it's rather a long way to the check-point.

11.45 p.m.

Good, this is the speed. A steady 45 m.p.h. over the little 'B' road should get us there just in time, if our arithmetic is correct. At this pace, we must approach the bends

fairly quickly and slide the car around. Like this . . .

Would you kindly get the shovel out of the boot, and dig our wheels out of the bank? I'll try not to take a corner like that again! I'm afraid we 'lost' the car for a moment as we went around the bend—and suddenly we were pointing back towards the last control again!

12.45 a.m.

Llangollen lies behind us now as we dip down into a wooded valley on (thank goodness), a decent road. We must resist the temptation to eat up the miles here though, as it's just the place for a secret time-check



Another night 'time check-point'. This shot was taken at 3.30 a.m., but still the rally enthusiasts are on the spot to take their pictures! Here, the log-book is being stamped by the club officials.



The start of the early morning tests. This competitor, in a car which bears the battle-scars of the night is about to shoot away on a braking test.

to catch us out! The map-reference that the last control gave us takes us to Llansantffraid-ym-mechain, and we must consider ourselves lucky that no marks can be lost for mispronunciation.

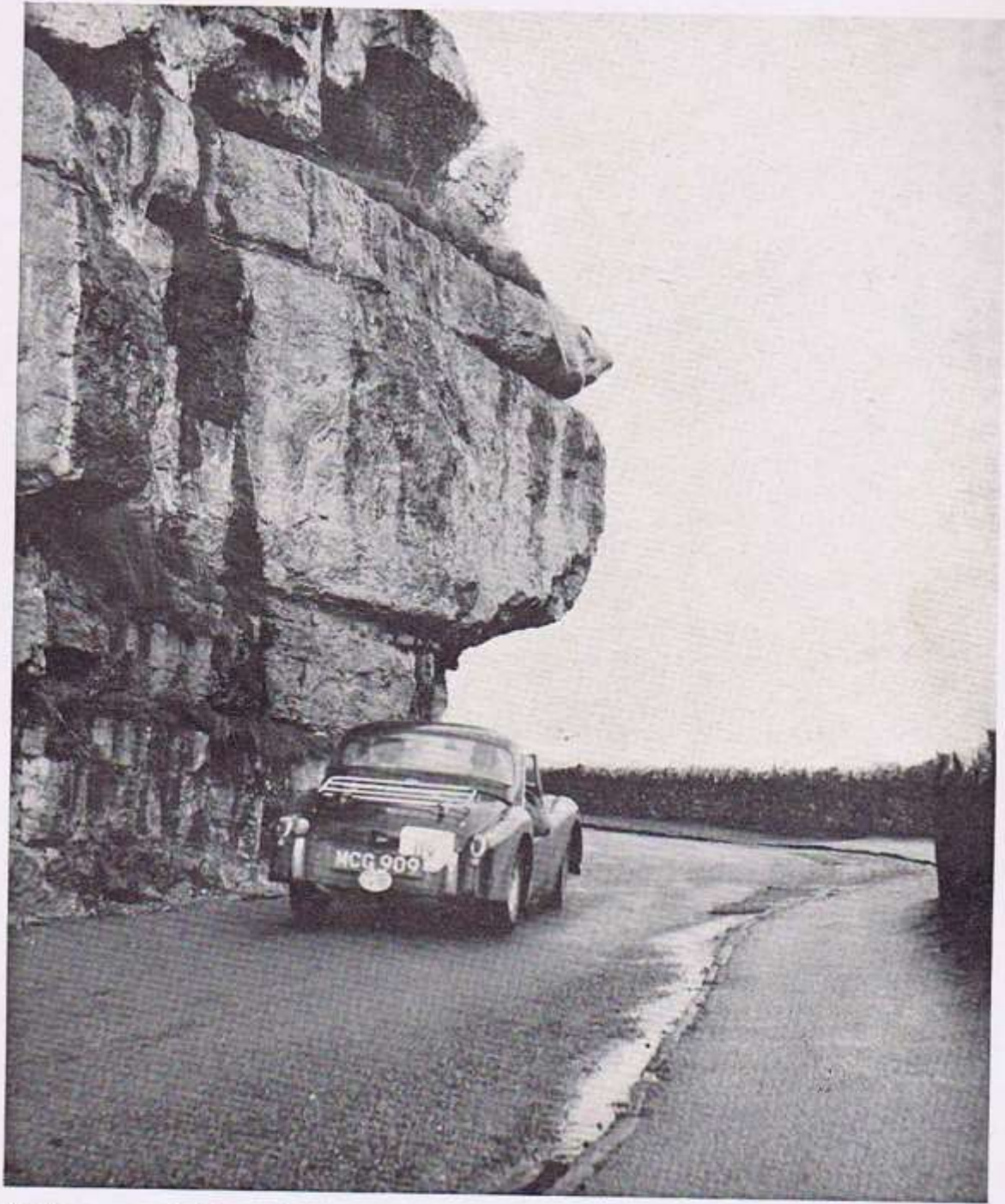
Hey, wake up! You're still supposed to be map-reading! Yes, this is the time of night that all rallyists begin to feel the strain. Driving reactions become slower, navigators become drowsy, efficiency and speeds go down, and of course, marks are lost. So let's stop for a few minutes and have a cup of tea and a bite to eat. . . .

Brrrr! Let's go—it soon gets cold in the

car if one stops too long without the engine running. We were wise to bring these thick clothes with us even if we do look like a couple of Eskimoes! Too few warm clothes, causing loss of vitality, have lost many competitors a good position in a rally—the correct body temperature is a great aid to alertness at this time of night.

2.30 a.m.

There, just ahead of us—can you see it through the snow?—is Bala Lake. Just over to the right is our next control. We're a few minutes late but it can't be helped. Those



Another car goes whistling round the blind corner at the Great Orme's Head into a 'mystery' test, just around the bend.





◀ Dawn acceleration test. This is what the sea-front looks like early on a winter's morning as J. Shand in his T.R.3 prepares to 'give it the gun'.



Braking, acceleration, and reversing tests are carried out here. The competitor must 'garage' his car in between the straw bales as quickly as he can!



Nearly hit them! The Zodiac of J. J. Blackburn just manages to pull up in time!

other cars in front are holding us up—it's quite impossible to pass them on the unpredictable narrow roads.

Ah, this is just what we've been looking for, an all-night garage. The petrol gauge has been near zero for some time, so we'll take on a few gallons. Look at the proprietor—he's wide-eyed with astonishment at the brisk business he's doing on this stormy night. We're not the first competitors to call here, obviously!

3.45 a.m.

Now we must turn north for Betws-y-Coed in the Snowden district. This would be a beautiful run if we could only see the scenery! Ouch! Did you see that on the side of the road? It was No. 73, a little Volkswagen, it's wheels pointing skywards—it must have somersaulted a few times by the look of the bodywork. Let's slow down a little, shall we?

4.15 a.m.

Here's Betws and our control point. We seem to be one of the few survivors of the rally. Out of 120 starters, only 32 are left in the competition. Apparently some are buried in the snow, others up to their axles in mud and ice—and some people have just 'packed in' for the night. So on to the finish we go, like heroes!

5 a.m.

The sea at last, and with it, daylight. This is Llandudno, our destination. But don't relax yet, we've more to do! First of all let's go to the Hydro Hotel on the sea-front, where breakfast has been laid on by the club.

What a wonderful feeling after a night of strain and storm. A wash and then a feast of ham and eggs, toast and marmalade, and steaming hot coffee! We'd better make the most of it, too, for the 'tests' are still to come!

6 a.m.

As a pale sun rises over the sea we are on our way to complete the last stage of this rally.

The first test of our (now rather woolly) driving ability consists of 'garaging' our car, in four different places, and in quick succession! Four sets of straw bales are set out on the sea-front fairly close to each other, and we must place the car neatly in between each without touching a wisp of straw. This is a 'time' test so let's forget our strained nerves and drooping eyelids and get moving.

Phew! I've no idea how long that took but we braked so hard in reverse that the car nearly stood on its tail!

Now we go to the Great Orme's Head for a mystery test. At a signal from an official we must make a quick dash around a blind bend on the Headland—and find out what is waiting for us the other side!

Round we go—45, 50, 55 m.p.h.—and there's another official! He's holding a notice 'BRAKE HERE'. We brake, and scream to a standstill, our noses touching the windscreen! Well that's another test completed—what now?

Back to the sea front again it seems, for an acceleration test. Oil drums have been placed along the front to mark the run (remember, it is still very early on a Sunday morning, so we are not likely to interfere with other traffic) and we take our place in the short queue.

Now it's our turn. Rev up—and away! Through the gears—crash them—it doesn't matter, so long as it makes the car go faster—second, third, top—steady, we're at the end of the promenade!

And now for the final test. In this one we must 'figure eight' between a straight line of posts placed about a car's length apart, and then back again. . . .

Left, swing right, swing left, right again (on two wheels that time!) now around the end post (oh, that breakfast!) and right,

left, right! OK, you can get up off the floor now, we've finished, it's all over at last!

And, after a night like the one we've endured who cares whether we have won the first prize (a brand new car) or the wooden spoon—let's just stop here at the roadside and go to sleep!

When we have recovered though, I have an interesting question to ask you. . . .

Next January, as you know, the 'Toughest of Them All' takes place—the famous 'Rally Automobile Monte-Carlo'. What a run that is, too! Two thousand miles over some of the worst terrain in Europe, and in the roughest month. Grand fun if one can get a few days off so soon after Christmas.

Then February brings us the R.A.C. Rally of Great Britain. Up and down the whole length of the country, with the racing circuits at Brands Hatch, Mallory Park, and Silverstone thrown in for good measure. This one is a real thriller!

Or if you'd like to go abroad in April, there's the Dutch Tulip Rally, which, despite its pleasant name, is certainly *not* roses all the way!

There are many more international rallies to choose from, as well as about a thousand British R.A.C. recognized rallies in this country, every year.

Well, which is our next one to be?

Now for a short quiz ...

Which event was this ?

Who won ?

What did the winning crew go on to achieve that same year ?

(answers on next page, so don't cheat by looking first!)

The event was Bolton-le-Moors Car Club's Bolton Rally held on 22/23 February 1958.

Competitors started from E Bulloughs Ltd, Manchester Road, Bolton and Tom Byatt Ltd, Stoke-on-Trent from 9pm on Saturday 22nd, and met at a central point near Chester to commence the night navigation section of some 200 miles in Wales.

Cars were due to arrive at the finishing control at Llandudno on Sunday morning for breakfast at the Hydro Hotel, Llandudno, followed by driving tests around the Great Orme Road.

Prizes were given out after lunch, with the first prize of an Austin A35 being presented by the Lord Mayor of Llandudno.

120 entries were accepted, also there were 10 reserves, with several of the Monte Carlo crews taking part.

The RAC at Manchester had received so many requests from spectators that they had to apply to the organisers for information!

Winners were Ron Gouldbrough and Stuart Turner in a Triumph TR, and they went on to become the first-ever British Rally Champions.