FULL CHAT November 2026

It's been another busy month with lots going on, quite q few members out on the stages and road rallies. We start off with Dale Glover and David Smalley who competed on the Cambrian Rally on 24th October, a report from David follows below.

Lewis & Hunter Cambrian Rally 2026

We left Kings Lynn on Friday morning and headed for Llandudno for the penultimate round of the 2026 BTRDA Gravel Championship. The squad for the weekend consisted of Dale Glover (Driver), David Smalley (Navigator), Rob Dominy (Chief Spanner Operative), Steve Tilburn (Team Comedian and Performance Coach), and Ed Glover (Vehicle Enhancement Specialist and General Procurement Manager). The journey across was a lengthy one at approximately 240 miles. Fortunately, with the recent Longmarsh Data Centre and Solar Farm proposals dominating local discussion, there was plenty to talk about to help pass the time.

As we reached the North Wales coast road, it was clear a storm was approaching. The sea was rough, with large waves and significant swell. By the time we arrived at the trailer park, strong winds were sweeping in from the Atlantic, forcing us to find some shelter to avoid any risk of damage to the trailer. Once we made our way into the town centre and found some protection from the weather, we could focus on the task at hand. Scrutineering was held in a multi-storey car park, which was a first for me. However, it proved to be an excellent venue given the deteriorating weather outside.

As always, the scrutineers were particularly fond of the Alfa. They seemed to spend almost as much time admiring the car as they did carrying out the mandatory safety checks, meaning we were once again in scrutineering considerably longer than most of the other competitors. Following scrutineering, we headed to the refuel zone. With an atrocious weather forecast for the following day, we installed absorbent pads in strategic locations throughout the car. The aim was to minimise moisture turning into steam on the warm sections of the floor, helping to prevent the visibility issues that often come with Welsh rallying. With preparations complete, we headed to the hotel. Unfortunately, upon arrival we discovered that the hotel had somehow decided that five names only required three rooms and had sold two of ours. After a brief but ultimately unsuccessful discussion, we decided to move elsewhere and checked into The Imperial. It cost a little more, but they had rooms available and, given the circumstances, we had no desire to give the original hotel any of our money. Friday evening was spent enjoying a meal in town. It was refreshing to see a thriving town centre actively supporting small independent businesses. Compared with many places closer to home, there were very few empty shops, and plenty of people enjoying themselves. There are certainly lessons that could be learned from the business model being used there.

Saturday Morning

We were fourth car on the road, so we knew conditions would be slippery. Before leaving, we thoroughly checked the intercom system to ensure everything was working correctly. On the way to the first stage, I missed a slot that would have taken us into the stage entrance. This resulted in something resembling a 20-point turn on what felt like the smallest road in Wales. I'll blame the road book distances being slightly out, although it's entirely possible I forgot to reset the trip at the correct point after some confusion at a previous junction.

Stage 1 - Crafnant

The opening stage went reasonably well, although we were perhaps slightly cautious in places. It was an incredibly busy stage with little opportunity to pause between pace notes. We made it through without any major drama but were only sixth quickest in class.

Stage 2 - Gwydyr

Things improved on the second stage. We recorded the fourth fastest time in the 1400cc class, and our confidence was growing. It remained a very busy stage, but it flowed much better than Crafnant and suited our rhythm.

Stage 3 - Brenig

Brenig, the famous reservoir stage that previously featured as a Wales Rally GB Power Stage, attracted large numbers of spectators. Approximately three-quarters of the way through the stage, a sequence of corners arrived much quicker than expected, ending in a sharp right-hand bend through a gate. I was slightly late with the notes, something I made a mental note to improve for the second pass. Unfortunately, standing water was causing the car to steam up badly. Late in the stage we backed off slightly to clear the windscreen rather than risk an accident. The result was only fifth fastest in the 1400 class.

Stage 4 - Clocaenog

A sizeable cut through one corner resulted in us striking a substantial rock. I genuinely thought our rally might be over, but the Alfa simply shrugged it off and carried on. By now the rain and wind were intensifying. We experienced a significant slide downhill into a square right, collecting one of the route arrows and its stake in the process. The mud was similar to driving on ice, with grip levels changing constantly and making confidence difficult to build.

Stage 5 - Hiraethog

The final stage before service was going well and the conditions felt more predictable. Towards the end, however, the windows began steaming up again. While trying to operate the squeegee and keep up with the pace notes, I struggled to understand what Dale was saying. It turned out the alternator had stopped charging and, in an effort to preserve battery power, he had switched off the heated screen. We reached the finish as second quickest in the 1400 class, although still 20 seconds behind Dylan and Dan in the Micra, who were setting an incredible pace. They were running 16th overall, while we had climbed to 27th overall and third in class. We limped into the regroup area, where we discovered the alternator belt had snapped. In torrential rain we managed to replace it before returning to service. However, upon arrival, the car had developed an unusual whining noise, and it definitely wasn't the usual whining coming from the passenger seat. Rob and Steve sprang into action. While Rob carried out his usual inspections, Steve investigated the noise. It transpired that a protective guard designed to shield the alternator from flying stones had become bent into the pulley. A combination of Steve, a long bar and a lump hammer quickly resolved the issue. With the problem fixed, we restocked our windscreen-clearing towels and replaced the absorbent pads.

Afternoon Loop

Following a lengthy road section and refuel, we returned to Brenig for the second pass. We fancied a proper push through this stage, but the standing water had become enormous. Halfway through, the alternator stopped charging once again. Predictably, the car rapidly steamed up and we lost valuable time simply trying to reach the finish. At the stage end we stopped to investigate and found that the trigger wire had detached from the rear of the alternator. While removing the bonnet, a gust of wind caught it and promptly launched it into my face. After some roadside engineering, involving clamping the wire between two washers, we had a solution and continued to the next stages.

Stages 7, 8 and 9

Dale drove superbly during the final stages. We were fully committed, the grip levels had become more consistent, and everything was working perfectly between driver and navigator. Our pace improved significantly, bringing us much closer to Dylan's stage times. By the end of the day, we had secured an excellent second in class and 22nd overall.

Back to Llandudno
After the final road section, we crossed the finish podium in driving rain and strong winds. The organisers wisely decided against holding a formal presentation. We collected our trophies and headed straight off to load the car onto the trailer. I was then handed the highly stressful responsibility of choosing an Indian restaurant for the journey home. After considerable pressure and much uncertainty, I selected a restaurant in Frodsham, a small town between Chester and Warrington. We found parking outside and enjoyed an excellent meal. If you're ever passing through the area, I can thoroughly recommend The Exotic Lounge. Despite sounding slightly questionable, it was genuinely fantastic and conveniently located just off the M56.

The Journey Home
The return journey was less straightforward. Road closures on both the M6 and A14 forced Google Maps to send us on the scenic route, taking us through Melton Mowbray before eventually rejoining the A1(M) near Peterborough. I would certainly have struggled to drive that final leg, but Steve smashed through the miles while the rest of us attempted to keep him company. We finally arrived back in West Dereham at around 1:00am.

Looking Ahead
It was another fantastic weekend away with a great team. The result leaves us heading to the final round of the season, the Grizedale Stages on 5 December in the Lake District, with Dale sitting third in the Bronze Star Drivers' Championship, just 23 points off the lead with 30 points still available.
As for me, I currently sit second in the Bronze Star Co-Drivers' Championship and will need to outscore Matt Rogers by 24 points in the final round if I'm to have any chance of taking the title. Whatever happens at Grizedale, it's set to be an exciting finish to the season.






On 4th November was the 5th round of the Norfolk 12 Car Series organized by Paul and David Smalley. A very good turn out with 10 teams starting from Great Massingham village hall, and a lot of marshals out helping to run a very successful evening, which was won by Rob Kitchen with Jonathan Stimpson on the maps with no fails plus 12 minutes. A very nice report follows from Competitors Ray Crowther and Paul Hermanman.

Doesn't seem like two years ago I was in Great Massingham on the 2024 version of this tricky navigational event. With Jim Bowie, my brain was in a vacuum on three novel route cards when it just didn't click on where I was supposed to go. That night resulted in 5 fails and much self-flagellation. How I wish I'd studied my 2024 report in preparation for the 3036 offering, because on the night the same style route cards were extracted from the envelopes and I grasped in horror at my lack of the solution recall. But back to the beginning.

I started getting the ''absence-of-rally-competition'' shakes about a month ago. Nothing with Paul Hernaman since the HERO Summer Trial in July and nothing at all since the Gremlin with David Mann in August. Marshalling on the Dengie 100 Targa and a 'Foot rally'' on the Londinium Pedo in September, plus the devotion of time to organising the HRCR Table-Top Rally Championship didn't satisfy the in-car navigation need. Paul had been distracted but suddenly surfaced with a desire to tackle two 12 cars, this being the first in his GR Yaris.

Bit of a haul to the event; me from Tiptree to Bury St Edmunds, then Paul and I to Great Massingham village hall to join 9 other competitors.

Start to TC1

A series of single and double-digit numbers which didn't take too long to suss as the sum of grid line crossing. What delayed me was plotting then as they seemed to tightly criss-cross the lines and lanes through the village of Harpley. What did become apparent as we zig-zagged was the frequency of roadside reflective3-digit code boards to check our route.in total on the night there were a staggering 35 code boards and PCs. Early damage done here with 3 minutes dropped at TC1.

TC1 to TC2

The cerebral pressures continued on our way via Houghton, West Rudham and Pockthorpe. A handout that looked familiar but failed to be matched by my memory cells. I instructed Paul to go the first junction ahile I deliberated. That was a mistake. At the junction a couple of cars appeared from the right ! Why ? We had been forewarned that one grassy white would be used and looking closely at the route card it was tagged AR (All Roads). So, a backtrack to the track we had driven past. Knowing that the first route card instruction had to be a turn into the white, it was a doh! Moment as I realised 20 18, 20 12, 19 15 etc. was obviously an alphabetic encoding of TR, TL, SO etc. Five minutes late at TC2 and our prospects were grim.

TC2 to TC3

The navigational nightmare continued via West Rudham Common to TC3. Déjà vu of a series of squares and triangles with numbers inside. I guessed the route before remembered the straightforward interpretation of clockwise counts of roads at crossroads or three-way junctions. And Wow, on time at TC3.

TC3 to TC4

This skirted Helhoughton and Tatterford before stopping short of the A1065. Another revisit to the 2024 navigation: a nest of 3-sided grid squares to indicate the N, S, E or W exit; easy to understand but orientationally tricky to plot. A small hesitation here and another minute dropped.

TC4 to TC5

Back to basics and a series and a series of map features took us through East and West Raynham and a timely arrival at TC5.

TC5 to TC6

Now more head banging with a circular herringbone, made doable since it contained three crossroads. Fiddly bits through Weasenham St Peter and Weasenham All Staints and then a blast to TC6 so I'm not sure why we dropped another couple of minutes.

TC6 to TC7

This section via Rougham was indicated by distances to be travelled on the B1145 and A1065. A novel idea (for me) but hesitation before we got going led to another brace of minutes lost.

TC7 to Finish

Using a grid of words and numbers the route was determined by coordinates into grid to spell out where to go. There was a few decoys therein to catch the unwary but passing through nine red diamonds got us cleanly back to the finish from whence we started.

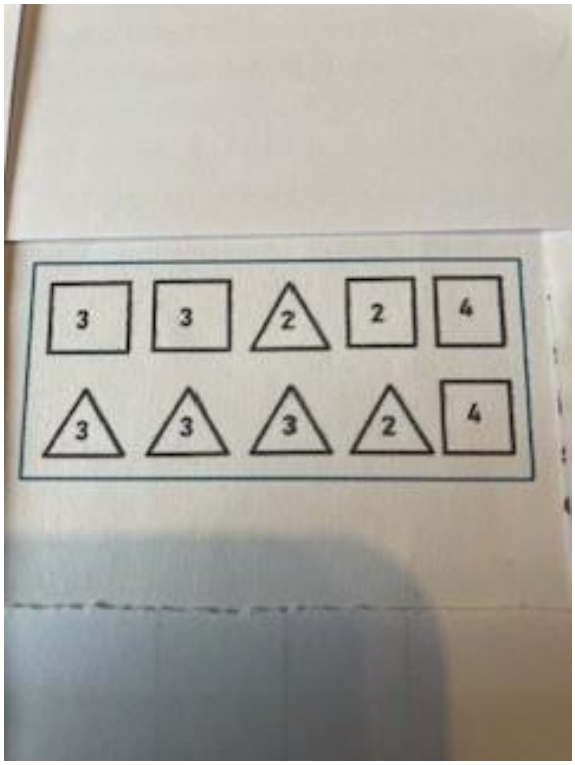
We indulged in chip butties while we waited for results for this excellently run 12 car. I loved the navigation, assuming I'd solved correctly and got all the code boards and PCs; and I loved the route, but anywhere to remined me of 70s roads in Norfolk ticks a box. Amongst a group of Experts who would be more practised than me, and having dropped an unlucky bundle of 13 minutes, I feared we

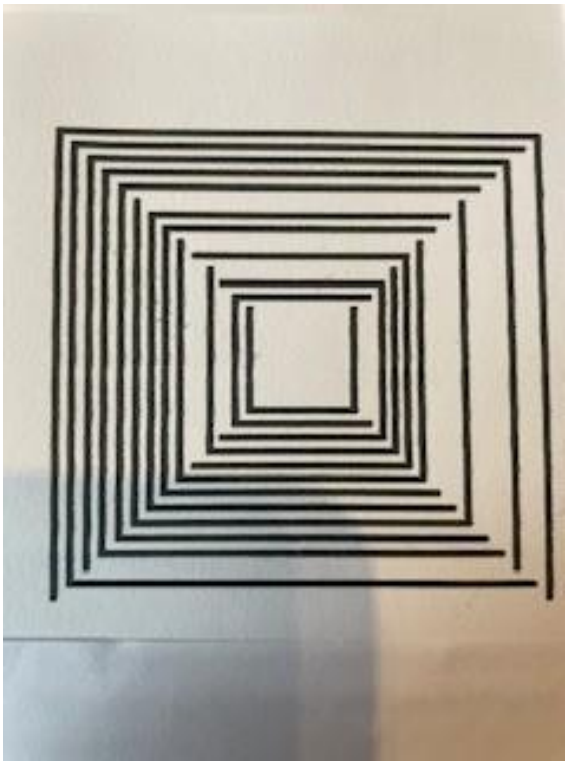
would be the first half of the results as they were read out in reverse order. But no. Seems like we weren't the only ones to suffer navigational numbness, so we were pretty chuffed to score a second overall only a minute behind the winners.

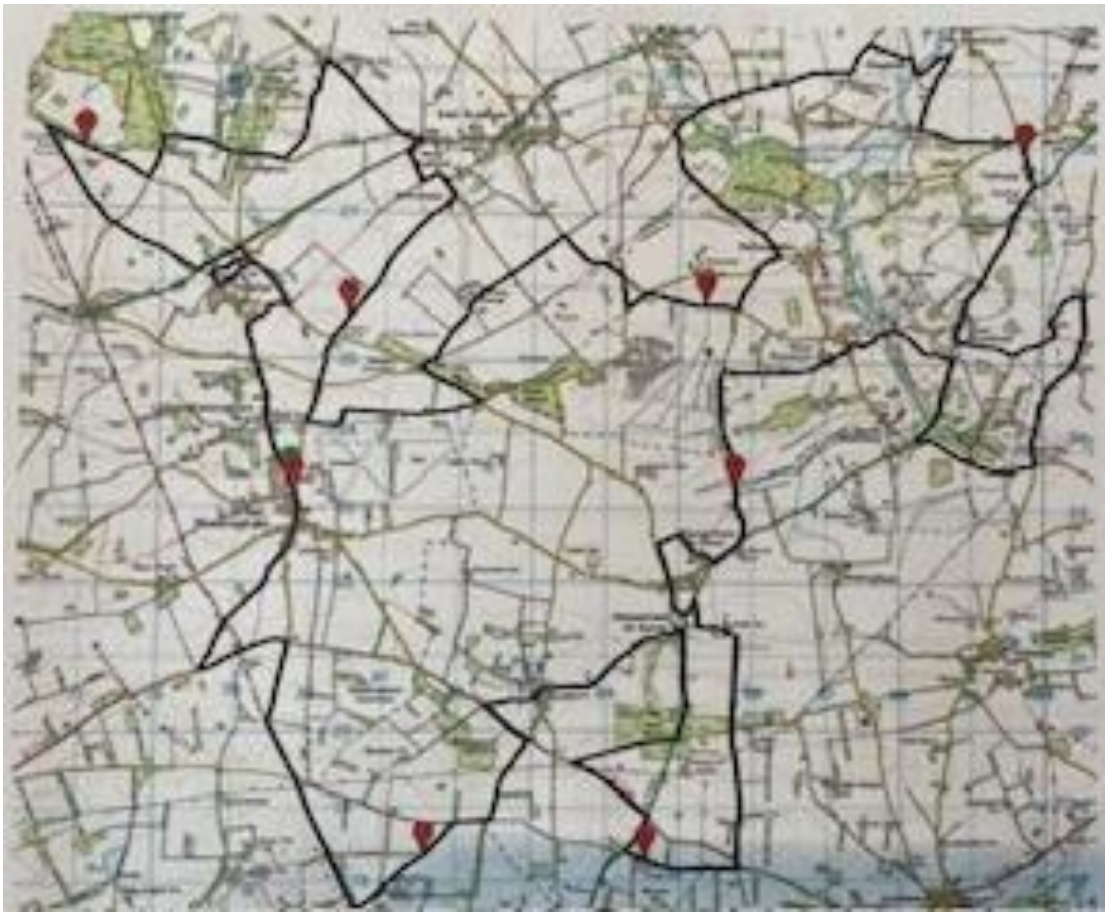
If only I'd done some revision for this examination, we might passed with an A Grade.*

Next up the WSMC'c own Gunpowder Rally. Having had a geocaching walking mishap and a visit to the hospital today, I'm not sure my suspect cracked rib(s) will unpainfully resist a Suffolk outing so soon, even with the Yaris's suspension smoothing the ride over the bumps.









November 7th was round one of the Circuit Rally Championship, with some of our members taking part. Jon Bray with Will Bray on the maps started car 60, but had a bit of a troubled day. Then the fog came down very thick after stage 6, so stages 7&8 were then cancelled so the finished 66th O/A and 6th in class.





Also competing on the first round was Chris Cockrell driving the Mini, starting car 99 and finished 86th and 16th in class, a report for Chris follows. Well, done to both teams for competing on a tricky day.

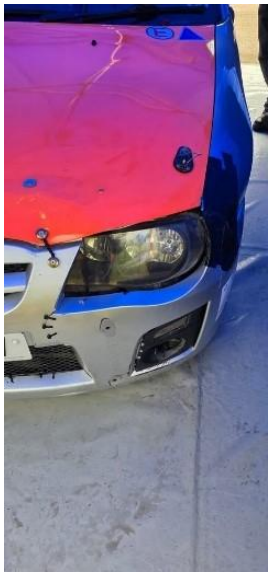
Having waited patiently to get back out in a rally car again my time came when I competed in the Neil Howard Oulton park stages on Sat 7th November with Jamtech motorsport in a mini R50. Having got the car scrutineered and all okay I thought let's have a good first round of the circuit championship so all psyched up ready to go . The fog was horrendous and you couldn't see at all, however my viewing was worsened by the wiper motor packing up as I was a about to start stage 1 so I was Captain slow on stage 1 and 2 , fog lifted a bit so built the pace up until stage 7 and 8 where it was cancelled due to fog for safety reasons. Despite this I got a finish all be it 86th out of 105 so not best result but hey ho! I lost a lot of time on stages 1 and 2 but I came away with circuit championship points and also awarded The Spirit of the rally award so happy days. Now on and up for Cadwell on the 22nd November and Donnington on the 6th December. Hope to see some of you soon.
Best wishes
Chris Cockrell





14-15 November Jon Bray was out competing on the Challenger Stages at Bovington Training Area. This time with Darren Styles on the maps. With 12 Stages over the weekend, 5 stages on Saturday in the dry they were in 52nd and leading class 9, Then starting on a wet Sunday morning with a further 7 stages to go, a slight misshape with some concrete on stage one lead to a bit of backwoods engineering !! the MG was back out with a FAT LIP to finished the event, with 11 fastest times in class. Fishing 45th overall and 1st in class 9. Many laughs, a few expletives and rallying just as it should be, with a smile!! None of which would be possible without our ace service tech Jonny B!! Well done boys.





FUTURE EVENTS

- **20th November**: Norfolk 12 Car Series organised by Peter Riddle starting form Wendling Village Hall, this is our last 12 car for this year so get your entries in. marshals and competitors contact Peter at:- treasurer@sccon.co.uk
- **28th November**: Brum Brum Stages Rally at Santa Pod, this is a new rally so if you want something a bit different get your entries in. Open for entries and marshals at: https://brumbrumstages.co.uk
- **9th December:** Christmas Social and Quiz – Families Banham and Smalley will be hosting our annual quiz, teams of four with banter and food – look out for poster in near future.
- **12th – 13th December**: Preston Rally: Marshals and Competitors contact :- https://chelmsfordmc.co.uk/preston
- **30th December**: Rixy Stages-Stanta: Competitors and Marshals contact:- https://rixystages.co.uk

That's all for now. Hope to see you at some of the coming events.

Dave

Dave Ottoway

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