

The Clee Hills Trial 2026 by Tony Branson

So much for dry January. There were a few good days, I marshalled on 2 sections on the Exeter without getting damp and we had a dry trip down on the Saturday.

The Marlin's outing on the Exeter in the hands of my son Hal left me with a list of repairs before the Clee. The main problem was that the hydraulic handbrake lever had fractured and this allowed the piston to come partly out of the cylinder. However, it was fixed and the system bled.

Sunday dawned, not too cold and at that time dry. Scrutineering, sign on and breakfast dealt with we were on our way to section one Harton Wood. I did this in 2nd rather than 3rd which I inadvertently selected last year. The result was the same with a successful climb.

Last year we missed the turn to the Coats, and we had a bit of a crisis of confidence but had not overshot and were soon at the timed test. Unfortunately, what I thought was reverse gear selected when astride line B turned out to be second gear and we failed the test.

The Coats Farm section was very slippery by the time we got there. The marshal told us that the first few cars had it easy. Perhaps they were very good drivers in very good cars, who knows.

We made it about halfway up the field before running out of grip to score 5. We had been told to reverse into the field and come down forwards. However, whichever way I turned the wheel we continued straight down and no, I was not using the footbrake. In the lower reaches we were able to turn.

Easthope 1 was very muddy and the ruts were deep. I think I probably let the tyres down too much as we bottomed out about halfway up for a score of 7.

The corner on Ippikins Rock can easily catch you out. Last year we got round with a 'wall of death' excursion up the bank, this year our execution was perfect, so satisfying.

And so, to Harley Bank. I had felt in the past that if you got past the 10 the rest of the section was quite easy. Last year this was the case and we cleaned the section. Perhaps I was complacent this time as we shot past the 10 but the bit above was still very slippery and we ran out of grip at 5.

There was a big queue in the holding control for Meadowley. At this point the sky began to leak and the umbrella came out. The rain had stopped by the time out turn came, the start marshal was helpful and efficient and wearing quite a bit of Meadowley plastered all over his front, what a star. We got a long way up, over the 2nd hump but then ran out of grip for 4. The ruts at the first hump threw the car around a lot and the offside mud guard show the scars, fortunately I have a spare.

The weather had taken its toll on the Hillside sections. Number 1 was cancelled and the other 2 sections were used by classes 7 and 8 only. They looked insurmountable but despite this we got up both of them. It took a lot of work but was one of the highlights of the day.

I may have been too aggressive with tyre pressures at Abdon Liberty. We were going well when a combination of a deep rut and rocky middle bit stopped us dead for 10.

Oak Dingle was definitely the high point of our day. We had to wait nearly an hour for our attempt. The first part up to the restart was a bit difficult but we made it that far. We got off the restart and steadily bounced our way to section ends. Turning was challenging. At the bottom we were told the final 2 sections had been cancelled.

This was a relief as it was getting late and dark. The thought of driving 27 miles to do 2 sections on one of which last year we had enormous difficulty in getting out of having failed was not too appealing. So, a drive back to the Squirrel and signing off was most welcome.

We had a great day. Our performance may not be trophy winning but set against our expectations we called it success.

Our thanks go out to the organisers and particularly the marshals who braved the mud to give us an excellent day's sport.