

Mobile Rally Memories

By Dick Whittering G3URA

Reading John G0VEH's 'Memories' in recent editions, the old grey matter spluttered into life and recalled an early trip to a Mobile Rally.

Way back in the mists of time, 1966 I think, when we still used proper money, I had been licensed for a few months and like many of us at the time, used to attend 'Mobile Rallies'. I ran a very old, circa 1958, VW Transporter back then, but it was the 6 Volt version so any mobile operation was through a mechanical inverter to 220 volts, then through a power supply to feed the rig which was a 'Chinese Copy' of the old Codar AT5 rig, built by Andy, G3UEQ and the aerial was a 160m 'G' whip, which was fixed in the centre of the roof. The van was held together by rust and hope, but was the best 'passion wagon' I've ever owned!

So, the plan was to attend the Pegwell Bay Mobile Rally near Ramsgate. I lived near Hailsham in Sussex at the time, and on the day of the rally, I collected a SWL friend (now G4KAR) and set off to collect Andy, G3UEQ. As is the case this was in completely the opposite direction to the rally, but it was only a few miles. When Andy fitted the rig in the van – nuttin'. Dead. Hmm...

We returned to my QTH and that's when the second thing happened. I reversed into our 'garage', or modified barn, and forgot about the aerial. Needless to say, that there was a horrible grinding sound, the aerial was laid flat, and a large tear put in the centre of the roof. It then started raining.

Despite these setbacks, the rig was kicked into life, another hole was drilled in the roof, and we set off in high spirits about an hour later. The journey was uneventful until, just after passing Dover, an odd smell came from the back of the van and a warning light appeared on the dashboard. The fan belt had broken.

We were now about 15 miles from the rally and so called the talk-in station on 160m. Despite being so far away, several of the other mobile stations offered to help and while we waited, a local pub was found and the time passed away partaking of the odd brew.

A while later, several cars appeared and there was lots of um-ing and ah-ing as no-one had any ideas about where to obtain a fan belt for an aging VW Transporter. Of course, the AA or RAC could have been called, but we did not belong to them! Too expensive – even then. After about 45 minutes, a lady suggested that a temporary fan belt could be made by using a pair of stockings. And so, with no further discussion, she removed hers and handed them to me – still warm!

The stockings were twisted together and tied round in place of the fan belt. The engine was started and there were no warning lights. We continued our journey, albeit rather gingerly and arrived at the rally just as it closed.

The return journey was started, again in a very leisurely fashion as we nursed the 'new' fan belt. Stops were made every few miles to check and it was found that the bearings on the dynamo (no alternators in those days!) were getting very hot.

What to do? We parked up just outside Folkestone and Andy played on the key for a bit while we let everything cool down. A couple of hours later, we set off again but when we got to Dymchurch, the bearings started to screech and then the stocking fan belt broke. So there we were, stuck in the middle of nowhere, with very little cash, and not sure what to do.

A phone call was made to home and my cousin pleaded with to come and collect us. While waiting for him to arrive in Dads old Morris Minor van, we arranged to leave our wreck with a pub landlord who would get the local garage to fix it in the morning and we would collect it later in the week. So far so good.

My cousin arrived after midnight to find us sitting in a freezing van, and now totally skint, having spent the last of our cash on a few bottles of Double Diamond. We piled in the old Morris and set off. There being only a driver's seat in the Morris we all sat in the back as best we could.



It was while driving back through Rye at about 2.30 in the morning that it happened. A rather large car drove out of a small side road and hit us amidships and took most of the nearside of the van off.

We all piled out to find a rather stunned elderly gentleman and a very pretty young blonde lady passenger. It would appear that the blonde lady, wearing nothing but a fur coat, was not the gentleman's wife. 'Tut tut' we thought.

At this point, the word 'Jackpot' comes to mind. The gentleman did not want to give us his insurance details but would rather pay cash for the repairs to our van. I wonder why? Anyway, details were exchanged.

First thing the following morning, Dad was told the story and an inflated estimate given for the repairs, which the gentleman paid up within days. We collected the repaired VW the following weekend and attending other Mobile Rallies was put on the back burner for a while.

I mean, how could you put up with all that every weekend?

73

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