

## The 8<sup>th</sup> Pre-war Minor Network Annual Rally - Rutland Rocks to the sound of 847 cc engines!



*Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June 9:00 AM The Nevill Arms, Medbourne Leicestershire (Kate Martin)*

Despite being named *The Rutland Rally*, the eighth annual Network gathering was set in the county of Leicestershire based upon the picturesque village of Medbourne. However, Rutland is not too far distant and the rally tours frequently criss-crossed the boundaries of both counties, so the poetic licence used in the rally's title could just about be justified!

These weekends are eagerly anticipated for those of us who enthuse about the pre-war Minor and 23 cars and their crews were booked to attend the rally. Unfortunately, two entrants failed to make an appearance, so just 21 cars gathered on the evening of Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June in the car park of The Nevill Inn, Medbourne, an area specifically designated and exclusively reserved for our use over the weekend by the Inn's management. These Friday evening rally gatherings are usually boisterous affairs and it's here that friendships and acquaintances are renewed while rally packs are distributed and rally plates attached to Minors. Two rally debutants in Peter Elliott and Charles Crisp were welcomed to the throng while the tills in the Inn's main bar played a rapid tune all evening, which justifiably pleased Jane, the Nevill's landlady.

A feature of these rallies is that they are not static and use differing locations as their base each June. As a result, other club members gain an opportunity to play host or hostess which entails a lot of organisation and effort for very little reward, save that of knowing that those taking part invariably have a very good time. This year Janie Maeers carried that torch and was very ably assisted by Martin and Jean Gregory who spent a considerable part of their spring-time travelling between Northampton and Rutland evaluating and planning the tour routes. That they did an excellent job was proven by the comments heard in the bar of The Nevill on Sunday evening at the rally's close.



*Mike & Sue Jones - Negotiating the traffic. (Kate Martin)*

The gathering of cars and crews at the start of the long Saturday tour has of late become the time and venue for the taking of the official rally photograph and this Saturday was not to be an exception. The mantle of Official Rally Photographer has been foisted upon Kate Martin for two very good reasons, the first being that she is a top-notch photographer (see 'awards' later in this piece) while the second relates to the sloping shoulders of other potential candidates. The result of Kate's 'ORP' efforts can be seen above.

In the week preceding the rally the weather across the East Midlands had been glorious with temperatures reaching the low thirties Celsius. There came a point earlier that week when serious concern was expressed that the heat wave would test the cars and crews to the limit. We needn't have worried, as on cue, by Friday evening the mercury had fallen by 15 degrees C and for Saturday morning jackets and jumpers were the order of the day; at least for those of us using the open cars. A little early sun would have been welcome but it did deign to shine later that morning and into Saturday afternoon.



*John Paternoster frightening the natives*

By 9:30 AM most cars had left Medbourne to start the 80-mile-long Saturday tour. Despite our best efforts to avoid convoys, they invariably occur as the quicker tourists catch-up with those intent on a more leisurely progress. These groups of cars represent great photo opportunities as a number of the photographs in the rally gallery testify (<http://prewarminor.com/2017-rutland-rally-gallery>)

Unfortunately, just six miles out of Medbourne Peter and Tilly Yates had to retire their 1933 Saloon as the car's clutch expired at the top of a particularly steep hill. It subsequently transpired that a rivet holding the friction material in place had ceased doing its job at a very inconvenient moment. Although Peter's car was recovered to his

home, both Peter and Tilly returned later in the day to complete the tour as passengers in other cars.

Throughout the morning there was much to see and hazards, such as gated roads and cattle grids, to negotiate. The sight of Launde Abbey will last long in the memory. It really is a beautiful gem hidden away in the Leicestershire countryside. Other than our Minors, traffic throughout the morning was light to non-existent, thanks largely to the routes selected.

Our first stop was for coffee at *Gates Garden Centre* in Cold Overton where the Tea Rooms had been allocated for our use. Here the coffee was excellent as was the lemon drizzle cake. This garden centre is the largest I have ever visited and has unusual toilets, the men's urinals all being shaped and coloured as flowers. Apart from the exotic toilets, large tea rooms, a separate restaurant, three-acre car park and a host of clothes outlets, they also sell plants somewhere within that huge complex. Having enjoyed the drizzle cake I then realised that our lunch stop was only another 12 miles further along the road at Market Overton. However, there were other places to call-in and visit en-route, including two ancient churches at Whissendine and Edmundthorpe. The coffee stop resolved the convoy issue and cars were now spread out across the intervening countryside with crews spotted in lay-bys, taking in the views or photographing their co-rallyists as they passed by.



*An interesting comparison was made possible at one such stop by viewing two 847 cc, OHC powered and almost contemporary Coupes parked alongside one another. The first of these was built by MG from late 1929 and labelled **Sportsman's Coupe** while the second was not launched until September 1931 by Morris Motors and named **Sports Coupe**. They sold in similar numbers and were aimed at identical niches but in different market sectors. One of these models is recognised as a successful adjunct to the range while the second struggled to make any kind of impact and is considered something of an anachronism. Abingdon's marketing activity was always better focused than that from their compatriots at Cowley.*

Our lunch stop was taken just outside of Market Overton at the *Country Cottage Kitchen* a small café adjacent to a large open recreational area with benches and tables a plenty for those of us eating our packed lunches al fresco. Despite the writer forgetting to bring along the packed lunch vouchers to hand out to those who had ordered them, the café staff had carefully name tagged each bag thus avoiding a monumental mess-up.



*Minor Convoy*

The sun shone for much of the afternoon run. Once again there were recommended stops, the first of these near Castle Bytham, where a 200 years-old example of yew tree topiary on a grand scale could be viewed. The second such stop was at Tickencote just off the Great North Road. Here a small Norman church with a unique and beautifully decorated chancel arch provided the subject for many digital images.

After leaving Tickencote a fast, largely downhill run took us to the *Noel Inn at Whitwell* for the last of our afternoon stops, this time for cream teas. The Noel Inn car park was largely empty when we arrived except for a beautiful mid-thirties Rolls Royce with a coachbuilt sedanca body. *(Throughout the course of the weekend we encountered a surprising number of Rolls Royce cars. It was clear that one of that marques owner's clubs were also holding a rally in the area.)* The Rolls Royce dwarfed our Minors and made for another interesting comparison when examining the fittings employed in its construction alongside those same components in a Minor. While no doubt impressed by the presence of such motoring royalty parked alongside their Minors, the rallyists had other things on their mind. Almost without exception cream teas were taken in the Noel's 'tea garden' and although dinner was just a few hours distant, scones, cream and strawberry jam disappeared from tables with amazing alacrity.



*Colourful car park*

The final leg of the tour was to be a 20-mile meander back to Medbourne, but that route didn't legislate for two unforeseen road closures along the way. While diversion signs were in place, attempting to establish precisely where the diversion ended proved taxing for some, including the writer and his navigator. The route instructions did mention a level crossing in the town of Oakham and this was eventually found, but having approached it unknowingly from the opposite direction the resultant conversation between the car's two occupants became a little spikey. Eventually Medbourne was reached via the A47 and Uppingham, this entailed ascending a two mile, second gear incline. After reaching the summit a period of total deafness ensued due to the cacophony created by the straight cut gears.



*An army of rallyists come to the aid of Peter & Tilly Yates after LV's clutch failure*

Our rally dinner on Saturday evening was held in The Nevill Inn's restaurant with a record number of attendees. Joining us for dinner were guests Tony & Christine Gamble, Roger & Kath Lucke, Kenneth & Liz Allen and Andy Brown. All are long-term Minor owners who for one reason or another couldn't make the driving section of the rally. Feeding fifty people at approximately the same time is quite a

logistical headache, a challenge met and achieved by the Nevill's staff. Rally dinners are noisy affairs and the general atmosphere throughout the evening was light hearted and good natured.

Formality plays a very small part in the weekend's proceedings and its singular occurrence takes place over coffee. This is the spot chosen for the presentation of the club's awards, which as always was hosted by Ken Martin. The Network's prime award is the **Harry Edwards Trophy**. For 2017 this went to **David Baldock** for his work in saving and restoring the **White Minor Skinner Special**. David has owned the car for thirty years and during this time has built a replica of the supercharged engine that powered the car in its heyday as well as returning the cars appearance from that of a fifties homebuilt special to almost precisely how it looked upon its debut at Shelsley Walsh in June 1934, driven by Barbara Skinner.



*Martin Gregory receives the Brian Maeers Jug from Janie Maeers (Kate Martin)*

The second such award is the **Brian Maeers Jug**. This is presented to an individual, who in the opinion of the adjudicators, exemplifies enthusiasm for the model. For 2017 it was awarded to **Martin Gregory** for his doggedness at resolving the issues related to the running of his 1931 Coachbuilt Saloon and for the route mapping work he undertook at short notice for the 2017 rally.

The final award is the **LAT Plate** which is presented to the winner of the prior year's Photograph of the Year competition. For 2016 the entries were judged by a panel from LAT Images Ltd., (the award's sponsors) who selected a **Kate Martin** photo 'Wonderful Wells'.

Rally dinners are extending later into the evenings as the dusk journeys back to B&B's now entail using headlights. My wife commented that the LED light on the end of the rally pack pen would have been more effective than the dim glow emitted by the 12 watt bulbs in the Semi-Sports headlights.



*The Welland Valley Viaduct and a trio of Minors (Ken Martin)*

The Sunday tour was significantly shorter than the Saturday version with its destination being Normanton Church, on, or should that be 'in', Rutland Water. Despite its proximity, just 28 miles distant from Medbourne, Martin Gregory had selected a fabulous route which included the skirting of Eyebrook Reservoir and views of the Welland Valley Viaduct. Eyebrook Reservoir had been used by 617 Squadron for test runs for their Dambuster raids while the brick built railway viaduct is a testament to Victorian civil engineering on a grand scale and the navvies who constructed it. Another interesting stopping point was a miniature mediaeval maze located in the village of Wing. Having parked-up to view this unusual, perhaps even unique spectacle the child in me was disappointed. The maze might puzzle an elf or perhaps the Seven Dwarves, but even a hedgehog standing on its rear legs could have seen over the top of the miniature hedges.

Although the sight of Normanton Church is made memorable by its situation, located offshore of dry land, our real destination was the jetty adjacent to the church. It's here that *The Rutland Belle* docks to pick-up passengers for her cruises around Rutland Water and many rallyists opted to spend part of their afternoon viewing the reservoir's vast shoreline from onboard this vessel. Others elected to explore Rutland's county town of Oakham with its castle and museum and some went *off-piste* and continued to explore the lanes and by-ways of the two adjoining counties.

There was a time when few made it to the Sunday evening farewell pub meet as most rallyists elected to travel home on that day. These days the reverse is true and the bar in The Nevill Inn was awash with Minorists exchanging rally tales and speculating about the location of the 2018 event. Currently that is a closely guarded secret but it will have to be somewhere very special to match this year's event, plus of course it will have to double-up as a celebration of the Minors 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Could we assemble 90 Minors together in one place? Now that would be something to anticipate!



*Peter Elliott - cornering*