



The TT that very nearly didn't happen

I apologise for the lateness of our TT 2014 campaign but by notes for the fortnight had been misplaced never to be found I blame "Oscar" he's probably put them in the bin. So having a blonde brain some things are a bit fuzzy but here goes.

Main characters in this story who were there for us every day of TT and let us do what we do and we love so dearly we thank them for their commitment to the team are Tim Andrews, Stig, Mike Preston, Jan Jones, Sue Schofield, Cara Boalch, Gail Corr & Dad.

Without the following people this story would never have been written and I'd once again like to express our thanks straightaway sponsors, (Rex Physiotherapy, A Special Lady, Andy & Kay Brown, Swift Motors, Evomotors, Kaneens Petrol Station (Colin & Peter & Mum), "The Stig", Dale & Colvin, Old Market Inn, CPOGS (Helen & Diccen Sargent), Castlecuts, Railway Inn Sector 1 Marshals, Heather & Carla Boalch, Karl & Sue Schofield, Kevin & Elizabeth Moggridge, Mugs 4U.com, Henry & Kath Cubbon, Ian & Mrytle Harrison, Steve & Jools Anderson (Who made the fabulous magnets), Aiden & Glenn, Di & Roy Killey, Ken, Ann Redner, Ship shape & Bristol Fashion (Debbie & Graham Blight & Trudi & Charlie Day), Hair Fusion (Jane & Ian Kirk). Not forgetting the gentleman who donated the hot water urn, Denyse & John Hill for the gas BBQ and everyone who delivered food parcels and supplies throughout the fortnight

The winter season was spent between the garage and the fitness regime with the very famous physiotherapist Cathy Davies who had me exercising at silly o'clock morning and that included Sundays. Oh and drinking the super food Weatgrass supplement...ugh..... Having had off from early March as no longer required as a swimming pool manager, however fully fit for the season the body was however Oscar wasn't as he spat his dummy out at the first race meeting with the newly refurbish suspension units. Which by the second meeting left us with no suspension collapsed units and having had no backup support in TT 2013 with the rear suspension it was time to invest in new "Nitrons". Fortunately sponsors came forward Shipshape and Bristol Fashion along with a special lady whom purchased the new sets. It took some time to set up but was done with the wonderful help of Wal Saunders and in TT Mark Jefferies and we were ready for the plunge over Bray Hill on the Saturday night. But it was not to be as the weather had other ideas yet again.

Saturday:

After preparing for technical inspection with five minutes to go before leaving camp having grabbed a hold of a team Oscar fan Kevin Evans to help us with carrying everything up to the pits the heavens opened and Practice was abandoned for the evening.

Horrendous bad storms and low cloud force the team to the Watering Hole for Debs first alcoholic drink in 6 months and to ensure the lottery ticks have been put on. Meeting and talking to new and old friends and fans. As well as a Sunday off time to relax. However the nerves kept on tangling and getting knots in the stomach. Time for the team to get up to full strength with the arrival of Mike Preston whom became Team gofer and 2014 apprentice for the year.

Monday:

So Monday it was, a year of thoughts and memories crammed into the grey matter with a start number of 48 and all the troubles of the past few months far from my mind. Karlos and Oscar and I set off with the support of many Team Oscar Fans and the inspiration to many to live their dreams whatever they may be. Tim Andrews (Mechanic), Stig and Mike in the pits. Two steady controlled laps done and under our belt. (Base camp established)

Tuesday Practice:

Having made plans for a rapid lap in the morning in the car to just get a few rusty areas ironed out in our brains before the mountain was to surely close before RTC's of the day and a complete lap not possible. Home in camp back before the morning commuters and breakfast prepared by Sue and the boys already working on "Oscar".

Three sidecars flew over Ballaugh Bridge in very close proximity with Nev Jones and Nalim Lerov shooting past then Mark Saunders with Kevin Jones and myself and Karlos in the braking zone. Positions remained the same and could only be split by a few feet, my vision of the unfortunate incident at Kerrowmoar 3 was a white flash of a body flying through the air going from right to left leaving a unit hit the hedge and the poor Nalim coming back out striking Marks sidecar on the passenger side fairing and wheel and then lying spread eagled right in front of us. Avoiding action resulted in a bump and thud and chair wheel rise and fall. That awful sickening feeling I've just ran over someone, not knowing if it was his arm shoulder or head. Nev Jones had pulled his unit over a little further down the road and Mark & Kevin and Karl and myself proceed to Ramsey expecting a red flag to be honest but I have no idea or remember the track up to Ramsey. But on exiting Parliament Square it was a moment of clarity my winter project was learn the mountain and it was practice so use it as such. On approaching Governors Bridge it was like having two characters on my shoulders having a full scale argument (Do another lap – No don't – Go in to the pits and calm down , have a drink- No its practice laps are so valuable – Wonder if Karlos wants to go on) Oh thank goodness red flag pull into the pits. Regroup and get ready for a restart which didn't happen. Thank you to Wyn Evans rider's welfare office for getting word to me that Nalim didn't have life threatening injuries and would be ok. Nev Jones also popped in late at night to let us know all was well. (Camp 1 completed but a huge reminder of how thin the line is between success and failure)

Wednesday:

Preparations in camp for the Luck of the Irish coming into camp in the next few hours (Our one and only Gail Corr from Loughshinny along with huge suitcase, just how long was she going to stay)

No Laps

Thursday:

Thursday Two Laps completed still struggling with the suspension set up and heavier spring still required and front end handling issues still miles away from where we want to be with lap times. Fans photos and videos and good luck messages pouring in. Loads of homework. However (Camp 2 confirmed with the amount of laps completed allowing Friday night to go for a really quick time.)

Friday:

And so it was the dream lived on 2 laps completed. Then a quick tea and Oscar striped apart top to toe and hours of work commenced with sponsors piling in cleaning and polishing faring's, wheels, petrol tank and all still not knowing if qualified or not. Team member's constantly popping back to the race office for eager news and wait for the print out of a 40th qualifying position on grid (96.781mph) a start for tomorrow's race. (Final Assault Camp established)

Saturday Race: RACE 1

Awoken by Michael Flatleys Seagull cousin stamping up and down on the van roof at a silly o'clock Stig banging his head and fists on the roof – sleep shattered. Home for shower and change with the collection of Fuel for sponsors Kaneens filling station. Plus just an hour to myself collecting my thoughts. Granny placed strategically on board for the bash down brayhill and her quickest lap around the circuit. We never saw another sidecar unit the entire 3 laps. I found myself relaxing and really trying to use all the road listening to the voices of experiences words, "keep your head down- When in a straight line open that throttle give it what you got – drift it don't be afraid – Suspension works) 29th from 46 starters and 32 finishers with an average of 97.701 for the three laps and 97.210 top lap speed and race time of 01.09.56.235 for three laps. Fans cheering and shouting and celebrating all around the course. Off to the beer tent where "Oscar" discovered a new supporter and fan of Keith Flint pop star and who has his own race team!! (Summit reached and decent back to camp – Successful)

Mad Sunday:

Work on Oscar completed with about 30 mins to go the entire team hopped on to motor bikes and mopeds (Karlos and Sue) and lined upon on the start line like thousands of other in support of the Simon Andrews lap. So pleased we did this the course was lined with folks young and old and everywhere. Up lamp posts, bus shelters, in hedges lined along pavements in towns. Absolutely magical lap. The moments that will last with myself are going through Kirk Michael fans on both sides of the road shouting "Oscar" which I was so busy waving with both hands when stig blipped the throttle I nearly fell off backwards. The second moment was going up into Gutheries memorial overtaking three bears on three pit bikes ... surreal in the thick mist.

Monday Practice:

This session didn't go to plan what so ever and coming out of Lambfell I felt that the chair wheel was not correct, so pulled over in kirk Michael and checked with Karlos and looked and finger tried the wheel nuts all was well and set off with caution once again finishing 35th. Dash to the presentation evening for our finishers awards.

Tuesday:

Was promised a practise session which we grasped with both hands but once again just as about to sit astride Oscar in the holding area to be given a shake of the head by a Race official opposite. Bad weather coming in.

Wednesday:

Will we won't we day. Eventually "Ping Pong" - NO RACING

Thursday: RACE 2

A good start for sure feeling really good, then that horrendous feeling once again getting flags on the approach to Black Dub (The Birchill Boys) - one on a stretcher and one walking thank goodness. Race head back on coming through Union mill and our pit board fans thumbs down at the start of lap 2 meaning NO 100mph. So come on Oscar head down bum up like the wind. Oscar still down on start of lap three but sideways so to me that looked like we were nearly there so this was the flyer. Having had a finish in race 1 it was no longer about preserving the engine and listening for bits going wrong it was about Karlos and myself working in harmony with Oscar. Best laid plans go wrong two further incidents on this lap and slowed down to a crawl through the sites with the final one being on the exit of the waterworks not getting the green flag till the gooseneck was absolutely the kick up the proverbial I needed. Praying that granny helped us over the mountain and having no time to sing my usual up that stretch of road (She'll be coming round the mountain) Oscar whipped himself into a frenzy down the mountain getting carried away at Kepple far too hot with me shouting in my helmet to stick his arse out and him shouting in his more gas driver, we missed or we thought we did a rock sticking up by 4 inch and looming out at my front wheel on the right hand side. Phew survived and to be honest I did take it relatively easy and told myself off all the way home. Crossing that finish line felt like we'd been in that arena again and given everything we could. Total elation and happiness we'd live the dream again. Finishing. 24th from 46 starters and 28 finishers with a race time of 01.08.56.143 – Average lap time of 98.518 Fastest lap 99.472 (Two positions away from a bronze replica) what goes on on the circuit stays on the circuit we thought. Oh no we got found out by Tim and Stig when they collected Oscar from the parc femme. Like a tin can opener the rock had torn through the under tray below my right knee and gear change. Inches away from disaster. A few celebratory drinks with Team, Fans, Sponsors and Friends with who we just could not have done it. (Push for the summit without oxygen – reached the summit but returned safely without the record)

Friday:

The morning was spent with everyone ripping down camp and packing everything away dry before the predicted bad weather was to return late on Saturday. Karl's caravan very kindly stored at Julie Canipa's until S100 as Karl doesn't receive any funding from the race organisation with the steam packet as he has a Manx driver! We did get it all done in time to get to watch the big race of the day and see the presentation of the trophy. Then wash and dash to the presentation to find we had the wrong time, so chippy for tea. The presentation was outside at the Villa Marina gardens with the weather turning all the time but wonderful to see the fans who turned up. Finisher's replicas placed safely with myself and Sue the boys went to play on the dodgems at the fairground letting off steam and being racers. This is where Karlos got most of his bruises.

Saturday:

Washing, cleaning, unpacking, shopping, opening post, sleep and eating.

Sunday:

Sue and Karl eventually at 6.00pm finally got on the ferry to go home having been at the docks on and off since Friday am.

A traditional tour for stig and myself on the electric tram from Laxey to the summit of Snaefell was this year with new sponsors and friends "Ship Shape and Bristol Fashion "(Debbie and Graham Blight & Trudi and Charlie Day). Time for me to cast an eye on my birth place and reflect on what the mountain had given us and be thankful and grateful to the Manx Gods whilst seeing TT fans whizzing around the veranda the end of TT 2014. Back down to earth about two hours latter running out of petrol in the car and having the sponsors get out a push. Guess everyone gets involved in the madness of sidecar racing in this team.

In Memory of My Gran

(Margaret Musker 1917 -2014)

And

Karl's Uncle