



Optima Challenge



famous...

it's even mentioned in the Doomsday Book, the venue not the event, you understand

Photography
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Mitchelson

The approaches to the orienteering punches which form a major portion of the weekends scoring were quite driveable in the blue and green zones and Simon Buck and Matthew Cooke, initially using their lockers front and rear and having no problems in reaching the first two punches in these zones, were unknowingly wrong footed as they approached the red section in record time. Expecting the same driving conditions, to their cost, they would find a totally different driving scenario.

The red zone had been laid out with the usual cunning of organisers, Adventure Journeys, to catch the unwary. Here in the red zone, a gash of a ravine runs from one end of the forest to the other. The steep densely wooded westerly-facing bank forming the eastern boundary of the site runs on an average up a sixty degree slope. A sweet water stream has permeated the ravine removing clay and other porous materials exposing the natural coarse sandstone rock in many places, but leaving a greasy clay-bound access and exit. This relentless erosion has been going on since this abandoned royal deer

park was mentioned in the Doomsday Book and the stream was rerouted by royal decree.

The erosion has created a deep, almost impenetrable ravine at the high south end of the site and deposited the spoil at the lower north exit, where the hills gently lose their steep attitude as they enter the suburbs of Sheffield. Plunging headlong into the ravine with copious amounts of throttle pedal movement relayed to a well breathed on 300 Tdi, that will show a clean pair of heels to most V8s, a sickening metallic thud confirmed that all was not well somewhere deep within the front axle casing. Wheels finding no grip on wet clay began spinning and then found purchase on underlying sandstone. Recovering themselves with their rear winch and limping back to firm ground, it was found that the short shaft and CV had let go, a twenty minute repair job and the Devon 4x4 crew were back into the competition at a steadier pace.

tuff stuff

The Optima is accepted as the toughest and most gruelling off-road challenge trophy series of events held in Europe. Event formats are evolving event

Above:
Bryn Hemming
and John
Grisley, men
with a plan



by event, normally with the participation and input of regular competitors and it never has been for the faint hearted. With the launch of an integrated European non-championship series of events planned for the year 2001, it can only grow in stature amongst true off-roaders.

With this in mind, trials and imaginative winching tasks are an integral part of each round of the series. Imagine being confronted with two 'garages' marked by four steel poles with red and white tape strung between them. The two garages are sixty feet apart, separated by a large tree and sitting within the confines of one of the garages, is a large beech log weighing 100kg. You have thirty minutes or less to complete the task, the instructions for which are; the vehicle must be parked inside that garage and one team member must remain inside the garage with it. The task is to lift that log five feet off the ground and both team members must be at least ten feet away from the log when it is these five feet off the ground, and the only time you may touch the log with your hands is when you attach a soft line to it. When you have lifted the log in the air it must be

returned to the garage it started in.

Bryn Hemming and John Grisley soon had a plan and equipment ready. They attacked the task with great alacrity and with Bryn safely tucked up inside the garage, John was unable to cause any damage to Bryn's person (apologies to readers who have not been following the series in **LRM**, but John is known for his ability to injure Bryn). A snatch block was slung from a bough on the tree after an initial risk assessment was carried out and they decided that the bough would hold 100kg. The winch bond already slung through the snatch block was hooked onto a shackle connected to a noose sling placed around the Log. Within four minutes the log was aloft and certified as five feet high. Now the sling and snatch block were re-rigged beyond the garage where the log lived, using a military style ground anchor and the log returned home. All in fewer than ten minutes.

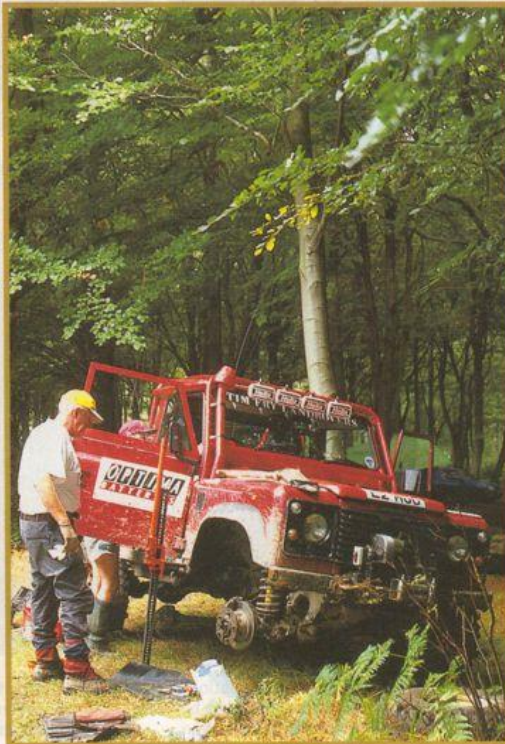
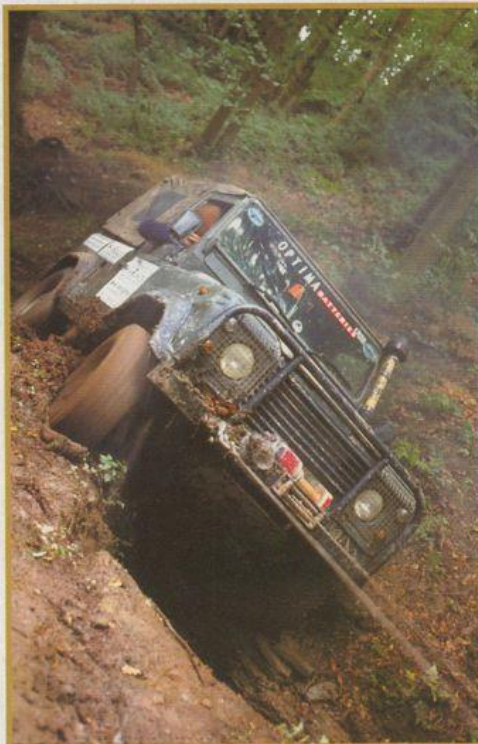
mounting...

By early afternoon scores were starting to mount and each competitor was trying to keep a tally of his peers scores. Paul Church and

Above:
Karl and Dale
Frost at speed



Optima Challenge



Clockwise from top right: Bryn Hemming and John Grisley on their way to first in the Expert class; Barry Pluckrose and Robert Phillipson 'normally' always finish; Is the Hi Range sponsored vehicle really at this angle?

Shaun Chamberlain are two west countrymen and they were locked in battle with clubmen rivals Tim Cane and Rob Storr. Their accumulated championship points put Paul and Shaun in the lead by some twenty points and Tim and Robb are keen to redress the balance to their advantage. In a hurried effort to gain punch number nineteen in the blue section before Tim and Robb, Paul made a miscalculation and cross axled the Range Rover, lifting a front wheel high in the air. In an effort at self-extraction the ship slipped, the wheel touched down, gripped, and then, oh dear, something broke with an awesome metallic grinding sound. Neither Shaun nor Paul has a background in mechanical knowledge when it comes to Range Rovers, they just drive them. In fact Shaun is a carpenter.

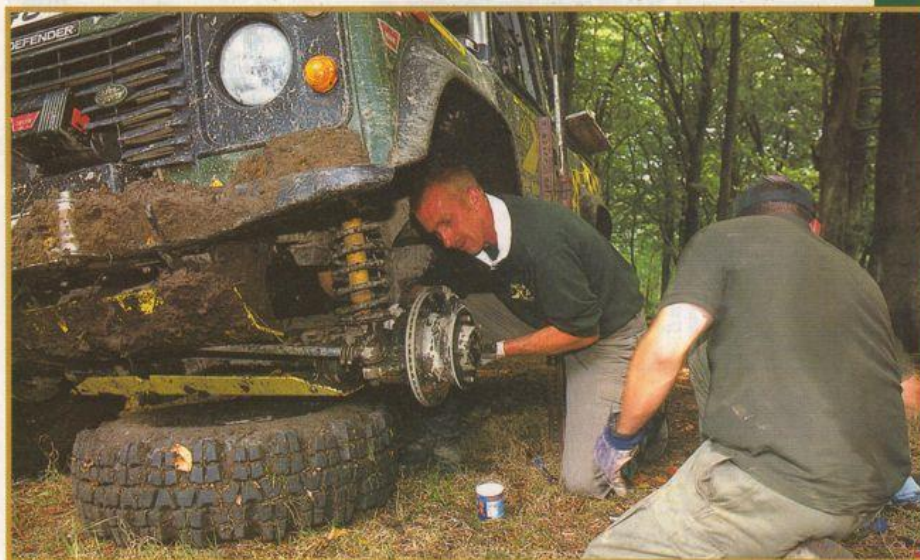
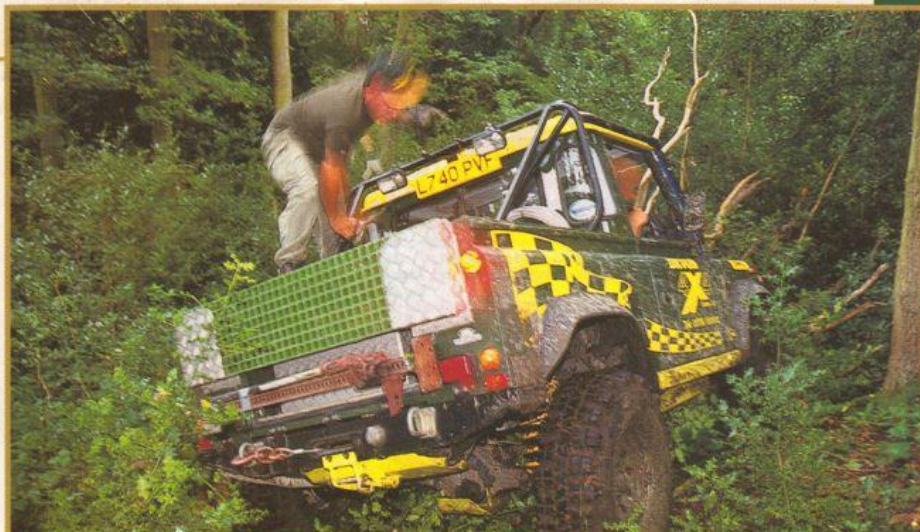
With the goodwill of Karl Frost, who provided a spare diff at short notice, and a little pointing from Paul Peet, the event organiser, the vehicle was back

in the competition two and a half hours later. Shaun did have a bandaged hand and Paul was wearing an eye patch for most of the evening, but luckily it didn't affect his aim too much as the duo made up some of their lost time by virtue of the fact that by this late stage in the day, all the orienteering punches had been found and visited by several competitors.

gently does it

Anthony and Geoffrey Brearley are both keen off-roaders and, after marshaling at the Dark Peak Trophy in August 1999, they have been planning to do a round of the Optima in their 88 inch coiler. Both these guys are asthmatic and for obvious reasons have to do all physical things in moderation. They gently felt their way into the competition with ambitions only to collect a few points and to soak up the ambience of being there.

Saturday saw a slow beginning and not much



progress was seen through the day, but on Sunday they both must have had one more Shredded Wheat than Superman eats for his breakfast, because they picked up a full set of ten punches over the green route and the team spirit award into the bargain.

It's seems to be part of the tradition at these Optima events that it rains on the Saturday night making the Sunday an incredible struggle. Not so on this occasion and competitors were dispatched from control at 0900hrs to drive sections that would take a couple of hours. Simon Buck and his co-driver were back at control in sixty-five minutes after a good run through the green section. The drying winds overnight had worked against the organisers, leaving previously undriveable sections relatively easy with the awesome power and lockers available to some of the expert class competitors.

With the time approaching 1500hrs all competitors were winding their way back to control when

Helen Aldsworth, a lady teacher not known for rash decisions, convinced Ian her partner that they had time to collect another punch. After driving impeccably over the two days, Helen took a chance that left them stranded wheels free in the ravine with a now defunct winch. Helen said "oh bother, that was bad luck, wasn't it? And Ian replied, "yes."

Sponsor of this round, Andrew Harrison-Smith (Harry) of Nene Overland, was on hand to present all competitors with Nene Overland caps, and trophies and as follows; Expert class, 1st Bryn Hemming and John Grisley, 2nd Karl and Dale Frost; Clubman class, 1st Tim Cane and Rob Storr, 2nd Helen Aldsworth and Ian Harding. Optima battery service kits went to Paul Church and Shaun Chamberlain. The team spirit award went to the brothers Brearley. Simon Buck won the set of General tyres presented by Southam Tyres. Two sets of **LRM** T-shirts will be crossing the water to Holland.

Top:
Simon Buck and Matthew Cooke from Devon 4x4, 'wrong footed'

Above:
A twenty minute repair job and it was back into the competition at a steadier pace for Simon Buck and Matthew Cooke from Devon 4x4

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