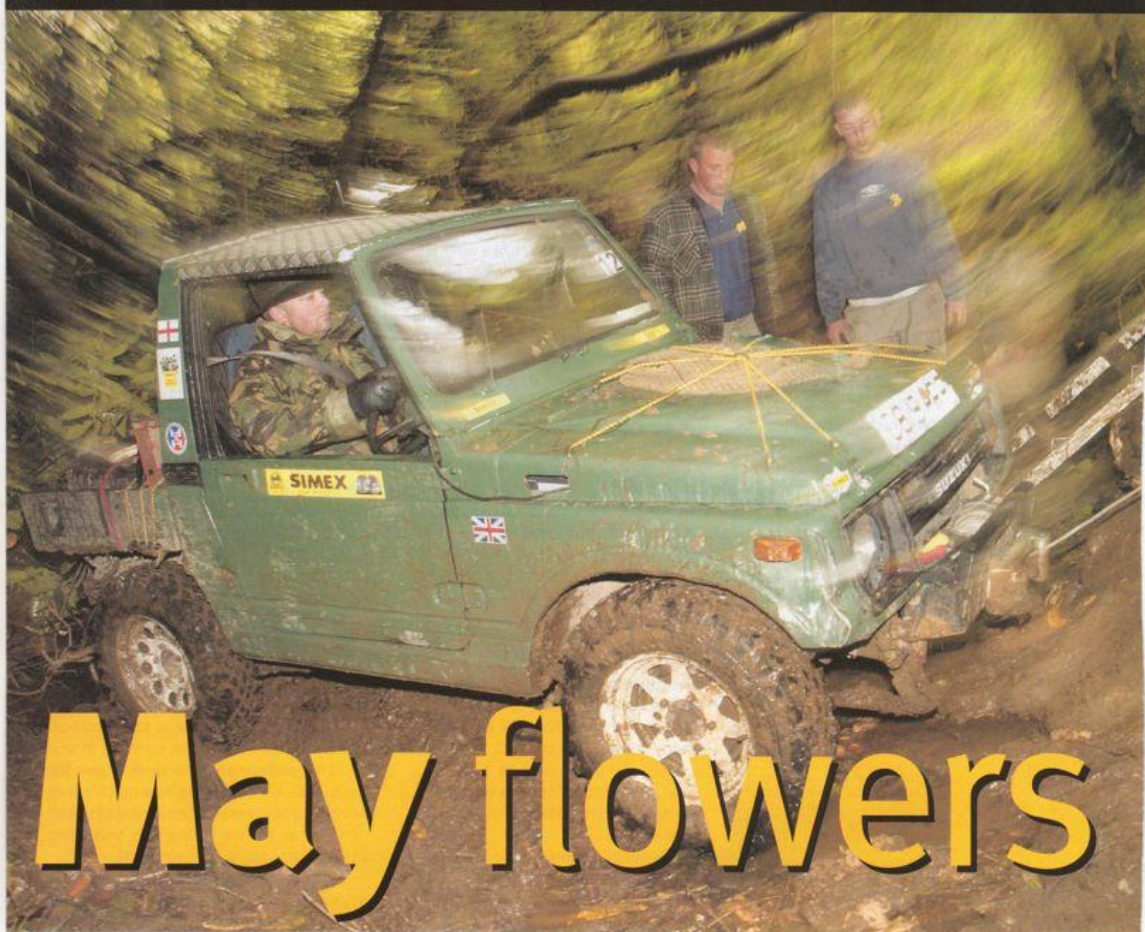




May flowers



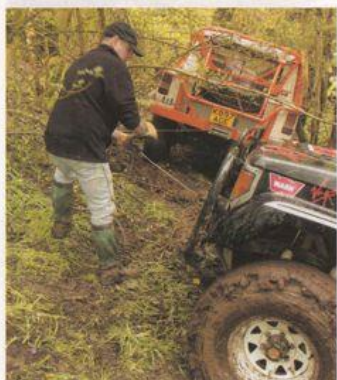
The Ras-y-Dafftodil is about serious competition... though only against the terrain. Even so, this year's event brought some late April showers to make sure it was anything but a fair fight

When an event with a reputation for being the toughest in Britain suddenly gets tougher than ever, it's time to watch out. That's what happened on the 2003 Ras-y-Dafftodil, a two-day fiesta of extreme terrain, serious winching and precision teamwork.

Held in the Welsh countryside around Newcastle Emlyn, the Dafftodil is a peculiar form of challenge event in that it's entirely non-competitive. Every year, a limited entry list is divided up into teams of five and sent out to play – with the accent firmly on getting each other through rather than striving for a win.

The brainchild of Iwan Jenkins, owner of a seriously tricked-up Jeep Wrangler and fount of knowledge on the terrain in the area, the event is now in its sixth year. Many of the teams taking part have been there from the word go, with the result that there's a waiting list to enter – and it's usually full by the time the previous year's entrants have set off to go home.

The attraction of attacking some of the most challenging terrain you'll ever drive, in the company of some of the best and most experienced off-roaders in the country, is one that draws entries from far and wide. This year's field

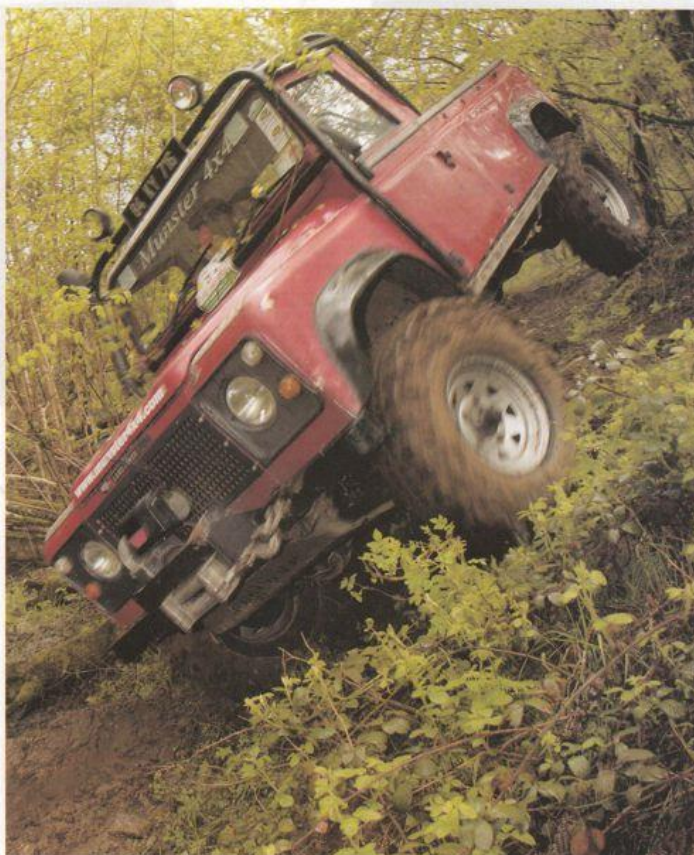


Left: Rainforest veteran Chris Daniell, in the only SJ in the event

Above: trick winch work from Steve Cooper's team-mate Shaun Briggs

Right: it's a serious event – this was on one of the transit sections

Below: a familiar sight – Simon and Liz Buck's battle-hardened 90



included Malaysian Rainforest Challenge veterans Bob Webster, Chris Daniell and current title holder Simon Buck, as well as reigning Optima Challenge champion Tony Baskill and winner of the 2002 Bulldog Trophy, Nick Pym. Taking part alongside them were teams from around Britain and the Republic of Ireland, as well as Craig Stunbough, who travelled from the USA to navigate for Andy Clayford in a Chevy-engined Jeep CJ7.

These two didn't have long to wait before the true nature of the Dafftodil presented itself to them. A long, open section suddenly turned itself into a savage drop-off, and it all went downhill from there... in every sense of the word. As the others were slipping and sliding their way down to the road at the bottom of a long and moderately terrifying drop, Andy was underneath his vehicle with a bowsaw, attempting to remove a large branch which had somehow managed to get itself wedged on top of his back axle

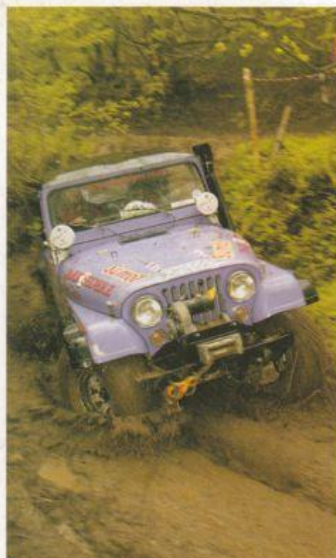
and act as an enormous tyre lever, pushing his nearside rear rubber off its rim and leaving the Jeep perched on a saturated side-slope with no hope of going anywhere.

Craig cheerfully pointed out that this isn't a problem they normally get when Andy travels across to America and they all go wheelin' in Moab. Chances are they don't find themselves sliding sideways down soaking wet hillsides, either, but that's exactly what kept on happening thanks to the swamp-pattern tyres with which the vehicle was fitted.

Elsewhere, Simex was largely the order of the day, with most vehicles wearing what's become the standard fitment for challenge-style off-roading. Cain Poulton, in another Jeep, didn't go that far for fear of over-stressing his axles, and with an even bigger engine than Andy's 5.7-litre Chevy in his distinctively violet CJ7, that's probably just as well.

Not that there was much opportunity to gain too much grip for your drivetrain, thanks to the rain that started early in the event and poured down pretty much non-stop until the end of the first day. Last year's Dafftodil was blessed with benign weather, but this time the Mayday bank holiday was less kind, and drivers and co-drivers alike had to contend with the sort of wet, blustery conditions which meant that, in the words of Ibex driver Barry Pluckrose, 'everything gets ten times worse.'

One of three Ibexes in the field, Barry's was placed in a group with four other challenge scene heavyweights, in the shape of Alan Wormald's Jeep Wrangler (featured in the April issue of **TOR**), Tony Baskill's Mercedes G-Wagen (February issue), Simon and Liz Buck's Land Rover 90 and the deceptive 100-inch hybrid of Nick Pym and Steve Gaunt. Sporting his usual shorts, Steve seemed to be suffering a bit when we



Above: Cain Poulton reminds his huge CY7 what mud tastes like

Above right: Steve Gaunt keeps watch as Nick Pym winches his hybrid uphill

Below right: Nick Field's bobtailed Discovery clings on in the woods

saw him in action on the last section of day one, but the team was still working well as a unit and getting their Land Rover round the course with the same sort of efficiency as everyone else.

Tony was taking it all in his stride as usual, too, aided by a fine display of co-driving from Dave Needham. Universally acknowledged as one of the best in the business, the man behind much of the modification work on the team's G-Wagen spent most of his time out of the vehicle as he placed waffle boards, ran out winch cables and issued instructions from his position as a spotter. This is a co-driver who expects much from his driver, and who pushes hard to get it – Tony got pulled up for wasting a whole inch of space on the approach to a tight gully.

As it was, the G-Wagen's famous electric-hydraulic hybrid Warn 8274 winch saw a certain amount of action during the course of the event, thanks to its counterpart at the rear of the vehicle being put out of action when its cable took early retirement. Another challenge regular, Darren McGuinness, suffered similar problems when a broken keyway put his front-mounted mechanical winch



out of action – he temporarily pulled his Land Rover 90 out of the running to go and fix it.

Elsewhere in Darren's group were Chris Daniell and Bob Webster, who had crewed together in Malaysia in the latter's Land Rover (featured in the January issue of *TOR*). This time, they were using Chris' Suzuki SJ, which had the ignominy of getting stuck on its way over the crest of a hill of no return. A certain amount of shoving by a couple of onlookers did the trick, but John Norton showed everyone how it should be done by driving most of this section in reverse.

The bobtailed Discovery of Nick Field and Ray Harvey coped well, too, though it displaced a rear coil spring in the process. Even so, the vehicle's rear suspension is now a lot more reliable

than it was at last year's Extreme Winch Challenge, when it took out three trailing links in short succession; the introduction of 110 links, rather than the standard Discovery units, means the back axle now stays in place, even when the combination of maximum droop and full V8 power are trying to rip it out from underneath the vehicle.

Nick's navigator on the Extreme Winch Challenge, Steve Cooper, has now fitted coil springs to the rear of his Hi-Lux and was back in the driver's seat, with Tom Gaskell doing the hard work as co-driver. This was one of two Toyotas in the event, the other being the 70-Series Land Cruiser of Martin Green and Shaun Briggs – whose own Suzuki SJ, complete with coil-sprung conversion, was featured in the October issue of *TOR*.

