

Flower power

The Ras-y-Dafftodil has a reputation for being one of the toughest and most over-subscribed off-road events in Europe - yet there is no scoring system and the only reward is the feeling of having surmounted some very rigorous terrain. Oh, and you get a free T-shirt...

There are few challenge events to rival the popularity of the annual Ras-y-Dafftodil, nor, it would seem, to compete with it in terms of toughness. You may be somewhat surprised, then, to learn that the event is entirely non-competitive. There are no losers, and the only winners are the various charities that are supported through the funds it raises. Yet people travel from miles around to participate, and organiser Iwan Jenkins has been forced to limit the number of entries in order to avoid being over-run.

For the 2004 event, thirty entrants were challenged to cover a total of twelve sections over two days. As it turned out, even the very best drivers and vehicles struggled with the hardcore terrain, and the most anyone completed on the second day was four. This didn't detract from their enjoyment however, since the Ras-y-Dafftodil is not so much about stacking up miles as testing man and machine to their absolute limits... and then going a little further still.

Many of the most respected names in UK challenge competition were present to

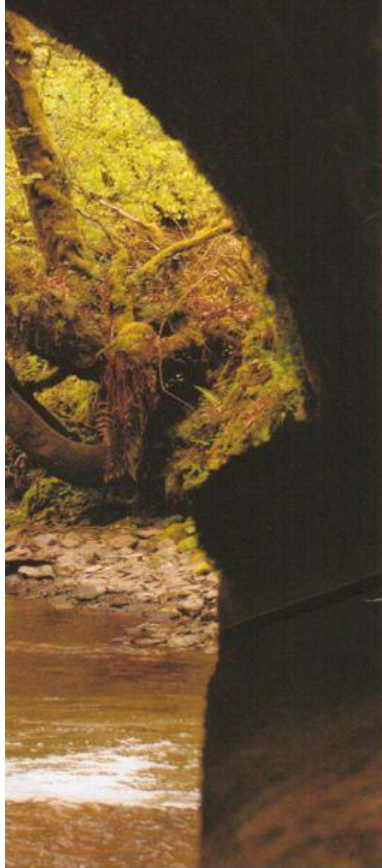
put their wits against the course Iwan had laid out. He is renowned for having access to the sort of land that makes your average off-road enthusiast whoop with delight, and a total of twenty landowners granted access to the convoy of vehicles. That meant the likes of Tony Baskill and Simon Buck had more than enough on their hands to test their formidable talents.

Because the event is so popular among UK off-roaders, many feel extremely privileged to be invited to participate. Steve Lloyd was there for the first time this year, and he was clearly chuffed to be involved. His 90 was featured in the April issue of *TOR*, but on this occasion he was driving his mate Lee Bond's hybrid (which in turn appeared in last month's issue). This truck makes light work of most terrain, and although it was clearly tested by the course, it more than proved its credentials as one of the most capable vehicles currently in action.

Even though the weather had been mercifully dry in the run-up to the event, and the ground was on the whole pretty good underfoot, there were a few watery moments to entertain the entrants. Iwan

distributes punches around the course, even though there is no scoring, largely because it is a good way of slowing the convoys of vehicles and ensuring the land is protected as much as possible. He positioned one in the middle of a particularly deep water hole and some drivers - including Tony Baskill - refused the obstacle on the grounds that it would drown their petrol engines. This is understandable when you consider that it was early on the first day and the water came well over bonnet-level. Alan Wormald was braver, though, and decided to hold his front end up on a winch in order to keep the engine out of the water. He was partially successful... partially, in that although he did manage to keep the engine dry, the Jeep's rear load bay was inundated and all his kit got soaked.

With spring very much in the air, there was a preponderance of wild flowers along the routes, and these caused many drivers to misjudge the ground; among the more notable casualties was a Suzuki which ended up on its side after its driver decided not to take the advice of an official. With almost as many marshals as there were



Above: when nature presents you with so much water, it would be rude not to...

Below: Land Rover 90s are dominant, though not exclusively so



Above: off-roading Ras-y-Daffodil style: it's as much about what happens out of the vehicle as what the driver does...

Below: ...even if from some angles, the competitors look as if they've been strewn randomly across the ground



competitors, though, safety was always a high priority, and there was little to concern drivers and their crews on this front in spite of the harsh terrain.

If you wonder why the big hitters of UK off-roading are so keen to participate in an event that does not bring them the thrill of competition or the chance of a winner's trophy, consider Simon Buck's comments to Iwan during the weekend. 'Simon remarked that he likes the fact nobody is looking over your shoulder on the Ras-y-Daffodil,' Iwan reported. 'You don't have to worry about clocks and stopwatches, and have the time to rig things up properly.' Besides, there is plenty of kudos simply in entering the event, and many people will wear their free emblazoned T-shirts with pride over the coming years.

Moreover, as Iwan is always eager to point out, the Ras-y-Daffodil is now regarded as one of the toughest off-road events in Europe, and the challenge of making it round is enough to entice people on the yearly pilgrimage to Wales. Next year's entry list is already full; indeed, a waiting list was in operation before the 2004 competition had even finished.

This is not only a positive thing for UK off-roading in general, and the challenge community in particular, but also for the various charities which benefit from the money raised by the Ras-y-Daffodil. The cancer charity Marie Curie donated the daffodils that have become the event's trademark, and have been beneficiaries of its profits for a long time. Money raised by this year's event will also be donated to the new cancer ward in West Wales General Hospital.

Unlike most challenge events, then, there were no results to record or awards to distribute at the end. Chris Daniell drove impressively, and people like Simon Buck and Nick Pym demonstrated the skills that so often give them the edge when it comes to winning or losing elsewhere. But the Ras-y-Daffodil isn't about all that. Instead, it's an opportunity for like-minded drivers to exercise their formidable off-roading skills on the sort of ground that is usually beyond their reach, and see how far their world-class vehicles can get. And when you put it like that, it's hardly surprising that so many people want to get involved.