



SETTING STANDARDS

The Muddy Truckers Trophy is one of the most popular events in the UK off-road calendar

THE MUDDY Truckers Trophy 2006 promised to become one of the most talked about events in the UK this year. The entry-list filled up within days of the becoming available and there were even a few more teams than originally planned allowed onto the event.

The Trophy's reputation brought teams, marshals and spectators from all over the UK and Ireland as well as the Netherlands. Event details had been sent out to the competitors well before the date and in the details, without giving anything away, they had all been warned to expect anything and everything but come prepared with a compass and GPS.

This year the Muddy Truckers

by
Fiona Richardson

Above: The tennis ball has to touch the wind-screen as demonstrated by James Geldard for the points to count on this section.

Below: RP and Remco light up the track as they enter the speed section on the Friday night prologue section.

was held in the Scottish borders based in Duns, Berwickshire. The threat of dreadful snow and freezing temperatures didn't stop people making the journey, and all but one of the 23 teams were present for the Friday evening briefing and prologue. Getting their vehicles started had been the teams first challenge before leaving home.

The aim of the organisers, James Feeney, Patrick Smart and Neil Redpath, was to fill as much time as possible with tough off-roading, and no waiting around, queues or briefings to interrupt the Saturday and Sunday challenges.

The atmosphere was fantastic and full of anticipation as all the

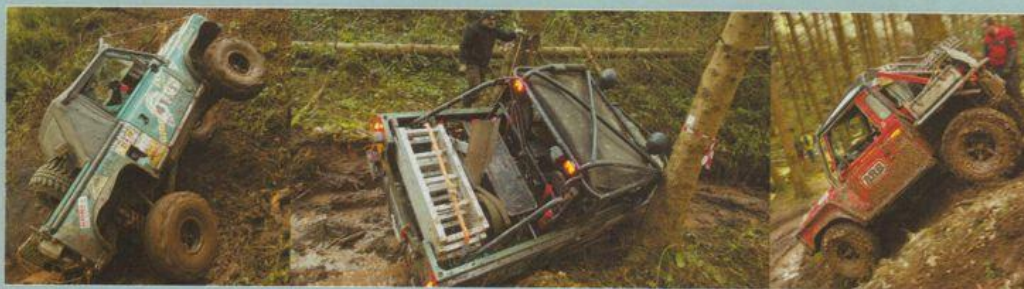
teams gathered in the dusk on Friday evening. At the briefing it was made clear that the prologue evening sections would run late into the night. Each team of two vehicles was separated between the two groups and away they were led to the prologue. The prologue was two tulip diagrammed speed stages, one for each group, on tracks through the woods, one run for each vehicle. The combined times of the two vehicles would designate the groupings for the weekend, fastest being in group one, second fastest in group two and so on. With four groups and up to six teams in each group, this way ensured it kept them completely random.

With the temperature dropping quickly and the first section of track becoming an ice run, it was interesting to watch the vehicles enter the section, and surprising how many of the co-drivers had never worked from tulip diagrams before. A speed section on tracks might sound like a dangerous thing to be doing in the woods in the dark, but with the stages being only a little more than a mile long each and the terrain as it was, the average time was over four minutes, so the



Mark and James are the first vehicle to tackle driving the length of the burn on SS6 at the Blackburn site.





speeds weren't excessive.

The late finish kept most competitors away from the pubs, so it was with clear heads that they arrived for the start of the Saturday. To ensure that road speeds were kept well down and that vehicles arrived at the right challenge site, the four groups were conveyed to their start points. Still with no idea what was in store for them, they only knew that wherever they were led to would be where they were to stay until the lunch-break and they would then be conveyed to their next site. Two sites for each group each day.

no speed limits

On site there were no speed limits put in place, but once again the terrain would be its own speed restrictor. At the briefing everyone had been told that the whole event would have very little road mileage, no site being more than about ten miles away from the event base. Looking at an overall view of the variety of terrain and challenges that would face the teams within such a small area was a huge testament to the organisers' vision of what would make such an excellent event.

The Blackburn site held six special sections (SS). All six sections could be seen in one 180° sweep of your head, this small area was a dip in the hillside with a burn (stream) twisting its way along the bottom. Each section had its own rules and a marshal for each section. The terrain here was marshland and once the hard crust of the mornings frost had been broken through, the ground steadily became boggy and therefore softer. All the sections would be worth a maximum of 100 points and all had a number of gates involved they also had a time limit on each of them of half an hour. 15 minutes between each special section would give time for the section to be cleared if a vehicle didn't finish and sufficient time for the competitors to get to, read and query the instructions for the next section.

SS1 involved ten gates and the two vehicles had to start at opposite ends of the sections and work towards on another, it was a self-recovery stage other than the one point in the section where they met. This was where the teams that took the time to look at the section would

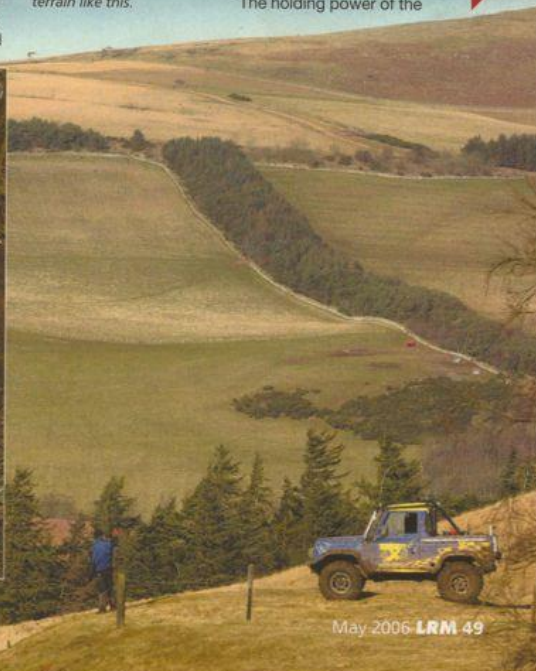
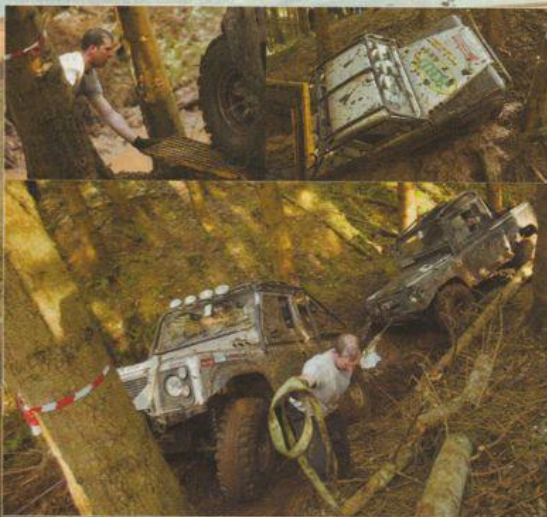
Above, left to right: Jim Marsden looks set to take a very interesting route up the hillside; co-driver Remco makes good use of the third winch on RP's 90 to avoid the trees in the Dean sections; Bob Seaman goes freefall down the slippery slope towards the mud bath at the bottom.

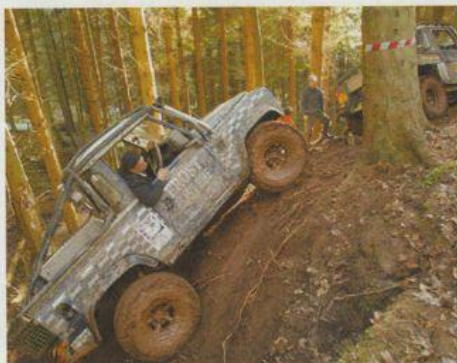
Below left: Daniel looks like he's made an offering to Stefan's wheel as they carefully make their way into the descent through the trees; JJ Kealy gratefully points the 90 towards the gates on higher, dryer ground in the Dean section; the only way is forward and getting their winch set up ready means that neither team mate is left far behind which saves a huge amount of time on terrain like this.

gain the advantage, as there was one area within this section that the other vehicle would be invaluable for assistance. Again the results speak for themselves with only one team during the weekend completing this section to get maximum points.

SS2 had only one vehicle allowed to move under its own engine power whilst the other vehicle had to be winched through the gates. The other sections of this site involved much more dirt and water as the burn had to be traversed or driven along at many points between gates. The soft marsh next to this burn caught many vehicles out as they all approached these areas at very different speeds trying to decide on the best approach. Many stories will be told for some time of seeing Suzuki's sink up to their bellies in this bog as a 110 crawled successfully along within feet of it as if driving along a metal road. Reading the ground was the timesaving factor in this bog, that and the perseverance of the co-drivers with the winches.

The holding power of the





► bog and the enthusiasm of some people with heavy right feet soon saw vehicles having difficulties, a broken steering box, half shafts and CV joints being among the problems here.

Castlemains was a site of huge contrast in the nature of the challenge. This site was set-aside as a navigational section. A full four hours was allowed but the vehicles had to be back at the start marshal at the end of their time. Each team was given a starting co-ordinate to their first punch and at this punch they would pick up the co-ordinates to the next and so on until they had collected ten punches, keeping the reference for the eleventh one.

After ten punches the marshal would give them a camera and a card with ten reference points and pictures on. At each of these points they would have to place their vehicles in



Above: Consistent teamwork saw Karl and Doug win the event.

Inset: Dave White's approach to the boulders is to try to flatten out the surface with the waffle boards.

Below: Matthew Sykes performs with the 110 on the boulders in the Quarry.

THE MUDDY Truckers Trophy was set up as a charitable event and this is kept in mind throughout the weekend. The marshals are all volunteers, giving their time for free and remaining enthusiastic and fair while staying in one cold and often damp location for many hours across two days. Events could not run without these dedicated people, therefore they all deserve thanks and respect. The auction and meal arranged for the Saturday night this year helped to raise money and everyone involved in this

also receives many thanks.

Primarily I believe that all the competitors would like to pass on their appreciation to the event organisers. As fellow competitors on other events, James, Patrick and Neil have the knowledge and experience to know what makes a good event but to put this knowledge into practice and create a challenge such as this demonstrates real skill. They also never lost sight of the goal and this was achieved as they handed over a cheque for £7,000 to Macmillan Cancer Relief on Sunday evening.

the same positions as they appeared on the pictures and take their own picture to match. Once all ten of these were completed and returned to the marshal they then make their way out to collect the final ten punches starting at the last reference collected from the first outing. The co-ordinates were given in an even mix of OS grid and degrees and minutes. 300 points would have been the maximum available in this four hours, no team achieved this, although one was only 30 points away from it. Both vehicles had to collect the punches for the points to count.

heavily wooded

Cockburn Dean is an area that Muddy Trucker entrants from previous years would have seen before. It's a heavily wooded area and, as the name suggests, also has a burn running through the bottom of it. This area is maybe what most

people associate with the challenges in the UK, winning through, around and over trees and mud, up and down hills through gates.

The Dean held six, half-hour special sections again and, as before, each section was worth 100 points. Both vehicles had to complete a gate for the ten points at each gate to count. Listening to the competitors they seem to think of this section as the most technical challenge so far.

Watching the visiting Dutch 90s through these sections, they impressed me with the use of their third winch. Mounted behind the cab, it was a handy way to hold bodywork away from getting caught up on the trees. Although they are used to this kind of off-roading, the navigational areas were their weaker point throughout this event, but they still finished in a very respectable fourth place.

As with the entire event so far, there's always a twist in the tale to make the whole thing not necessarily quite so straightforward as it appears. One of the sections in the Dean meant that the vehicles were not required at

