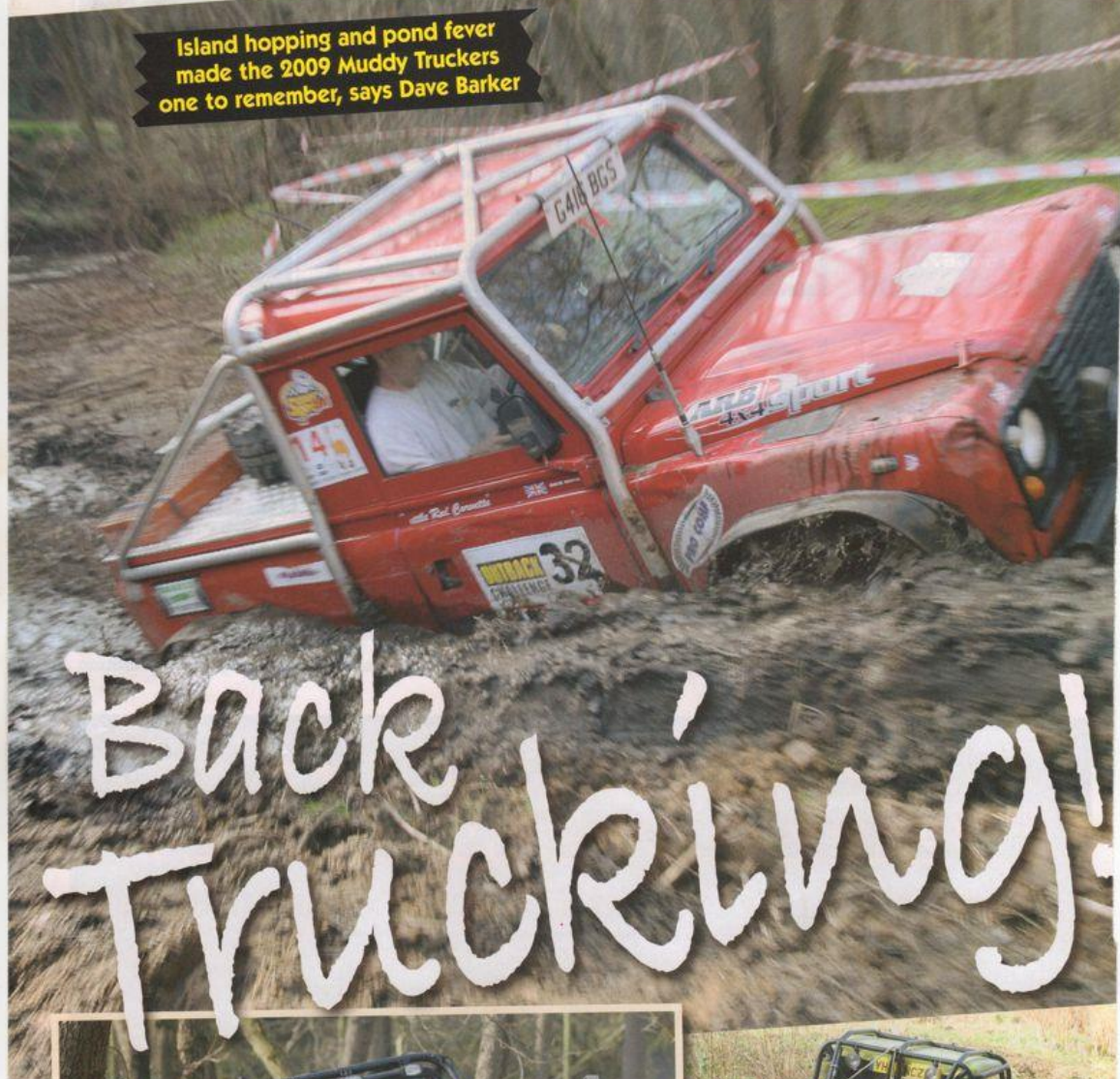
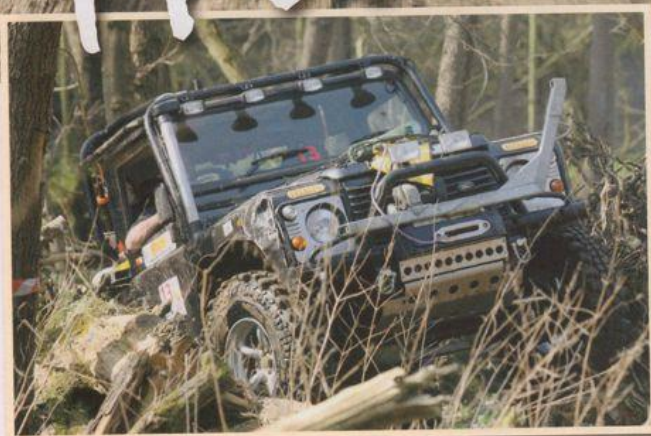


2009 MUDDY TRUCKERS

Island hopping and pond fever made the 2009 Muddy Truckers one to remember, says Dave Barker



Back Trucking!



Top: Mud! Dave White uses the 410 bhp of his 5.7-litre Corvette V8 to power through the bog
Above: Simon Buck and Matt Cook cross the river to Pond Fever
Left: Drift wood, tree stumps and rocks didn't stop Simon Hooper and Andy Bradley finding a way through



Top: Can't see the wood for the trees! Team 10 hunt for the missing punch
 Centre: Jim Marsden and Chris Abel set fastest time on the night section
 Above: Kristian Nicholson and Rod Ellwoods find the Aqua Surprise in a deep section in the river

The Muddy Truckers Trophy Challenge event made a welcome return to the calendar this year, after taking a gap year in 2008, when many of the event's organisers went off to compete in the Outback Challenge in Australia.

Sixteen teams entered this year's challenge, which for the first time ran under the auspices of the MSA and the Yorkshire Off Road Club. The event started after dark on the Friday night with a short section on a private farm estate near Topcliffe, North Yorkshire. But first the crews and vehicles would undergo scrutineering; a few minor problems were identified with a handful of vehicles, but after some work all passed. With one team pulling out a few days earlier and two not making the start, only 13 teams of two motors made the start, the majority being Land Rovers or Land Rover-based hybrids.

Day Two

The night section was a quick run across fields and then into a tight technical area through woods along a riverbank. As well as avoiding a time penalty, the crews needed to identify 10 letters on code boards as they drove through the woods. At the finish each crew would have just seconds to make a word ("beadlocker") out of the letters they had found, with extra points being awarded for those that completed the word. Around half the teams got it.

That night the competitors and marshals all camped in parkland by a large bonfire with a feeling of camaraderie in the air. More than one team was feeling some trepidation about the two days to come. The Muddy Truckers has a reputation – well founded on past experience – as being one of the most demanding challenge events around.

On Saturday morning, all the crews needed to be at the Duncombe Park estate at Helmsley by 8.30 am for a briefing before heading off into five areas within the estate, each with a number of sections and punches plus special tasks. All had names reflecting the terrain and the tasks.

Each team was sent to their first sections of the day, and after that it was up to them to choose where they would go next. Team 10, Simon Buck and Matt Cook, and Jim Marsden and Chris Abel were pre-event favourites, and found themselves at Pond Fever, a long section crossing a recently felled woodland area with three punches to find along the way. They were then faced with a steep drop to a river crossing and on to an island, then into a bog with 15 punches to get. By the sounds of Warn/Gigglepin 8274s and engines straining in the bog, Pond Fever was proving difficult! An hour later both motors emerged after missing just 1 punch, with 1450 points scored out of a possible 1500.

On the rest of the sections, other teams were having a mixed start. There were problems on the Aqua Surprise sections for Team 11; the bobtailed Discovery of Jimmy Smith and Andrew Smith had starter problems and found itself stuck, losing

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over 90 minutes.

Phillip Holmes and Tim Wilkinson in Team 11 suffered overheating problems and then at the Island Hopping sections blew a front CV joint, spending an hour or so replacing it. Elsewhere, some blitzed their sections and quickly moved on to the next. On the special task at the Aqua Surprise, a figure of eight course in the river round an island with three punches to get was the most spectacular to watch and, I suspect, most enjoyed by the competitors.

The water on Aqua Surprise did seem to worry some competitors, especially those with a V8. The Rover V8's reputation for disliking water meant they took the figure of eight route with great care. Diesel drivers tended to go for it, but V8 driver Dave White with his wife Pam as navigator had no such worries as he took his Defender into the river. His 5.7-litre, 410 bhp Corvette V8 is obviously less of a worry in water than a Rover V8!

Team 7, Gordon Law and Darren McGuinness, and Mark England and Justin Deegan were enjoying themselves and working well as a team. They took on the Island Hopping section with some style. The section took the team over a host of fallen trees, logs and rocks on several islands along the river, all technical with some difficult winching required to get the motors up to the punch. One punch was set across the river; most teams chose not to drive in, reversing across the four-foot deep river to reach the punch. Team 7 had no worries, both motors reversed across the river to take the punch for 500 extra points each. The cost? A very wet seat to sit in for the rest of the day!

By 5 pm all teams had to be off the sections and ready to head to the overnight campsite, pitch their tents and have a meal before the night navigation task. This entailed following bearings on foot through the woods. Seeing lights along the tree-lined ridges of the estate was eerie, as the teams searched for the waypoints. All the teams arrived back safely, some more tired and wetter than others!

Day Three

For Sunday, many teams headed back to tasks they had not got to, or to get punches they had failed to find the day before.

The MT is different from many of the other challenge events as not every section or task requires winching. Some tasks are about the team working together to achieve a goal, and the Mill Bridge section included just such a task. Firstly the team had to build a bridge over a ditch, using just three logs. Most teams winched the logs into place and then chose to winch their motors over on the axles rather than driving them over on the tyres, reasoning they would not fall off the axle while tyres might slip off the logs and lose them time!

The quick teams decided that carrying the logs to the ditch and then "tossing the caber" over the



Top: Mike Robertson loses a wing

Centre: Mike Mills and Lauren Mills find the going difficult on their own as their team-mate suffers suspension problems

Above: Mark England and Justin Deegan power their way out of the section while Island Hopping

Right: Phillip Holmes and Tim Wilkinson suffered overheating problems and then blew a CV joint