

I co-drove FRW 303C in the 1968 Monte Carlo Rally!

Dr Beatty Crawford, Hillsborough, Northern Ireland

It all began in 1967 when I received a phone call from Robin Eyre-Maunsell asking me if I would like to navigate for him in a Hillman Imp. My initial reaction was to jump at the chance although Robin's fearsome reputation for putting cars over the edge was a bit off-putting. Robin is a chip of the old block. His father Charles was a charming and debonair gentleman always seemed to be smiling at life. He raced and rallied with great aplomb but the adrenaline and red mist often seemed to get the better of him. He once spun off into the infield at Fisherman's Bend at Kirkistown and knocked down my brother Esler, who was photographing at close quarters. In those days there wasn't even a guard rail, only a few straw bales for protection from wayward cars. Fortunately neither suffered any real injury. I once navigated for Charles on a night navigation event in a Sunbeam Rapier and it was most frustrating because we had to stop every half hour so that he could have a pee because his prostate was giving him trouble! But he was such a charming man that I couldn't complain.

Robin inherited those genes and more. Full of enthusiasm and still competing regularly, he has never taken his driving ability too seriously. He too has the knack of getting himself into all sorts of trouble. Last year when I visited him he was cutting the lawn on a sit-on mower. He somehow managed to mow his wife's leather shoes which didn't do them any good at all! She was not amused but Robin's good humour won the day. I wish I had that ability and knack with women!

Despite my misgivings I jumped at the chance and then Robin had the temerity to ask if me if I would go out for a test drive with *me* driving. I told you that he was a risk taker. So he came down in an Imp to my parents' house in Whitehead and we went for a thrash on Islandmagee one Sunday evening in December. There just happened to be some snow and ice on the ground and I found the Imp quite forgiving, compared to the VW which I normally drove. I must have passed since we arranged to meet in Nice in early January to do a recce of the common route.

At that time I was training as a radiologist in the Royal Victoria Hospital and had limited time off, so I flew to Nice while Robin picked up a rally prepared Imp at the factory in Coventry and drove down through France. We were supposed to rendezvous at Nice Airport around lunchtime, so by the time 5 pm arrived, and no sign of Robin, I was starting to get a bit frantic. (There were no mobile phones in those days.) Eventually he arrived with tales of all sorts of woes. Have you ever known a rally car to be ready in time?

The first thing we did was find a *pension* in the mountains just outside Nice and as soon as we were ensconced we headed back down to Nice for a bite to eat and a glass of wine. We didn't drink much... honestly. We had a very nice meal and we set off for the *pension*.

We were tootling up the serpentine road when suddenly Robin decided to "have a mow" up through the hairpins with the big drops, you know the sort of place! But he forgot two things... studded tyres and dry tarmac. He was going great guns and slid around a tight hairpin left with the tail out. I could see a hairpin right looming up. Unfortunately the red mist blinded Robin and by the time he saw the hairpin we were over the edge. Studded tyres + dry tarmac = no grip!

I had no idea how far the drop was since it was pitch black and we had gone straight through a low concrete parapet wall, smashing all our lights. Fortunately it was only ten feet or so and even more fortunately we were both wearing full-harness seatbelts. But that didn't stop my glasses taking off on their own trajectory and I am blind without glasses. Apart from that I was uninjured.

Robin wasn't so fortunate. The steering wheel had been pushed back and something had to give and it was Robin's wrist. Now Robin has definitely a stiff upper lip and is certainly not a complainer but he was decidedly in pain. So there we were in pitch blackness, I was blind so couldn't search for my glasses and I didn't know if it was fresh air for hundreds of feet below should I decide to get out the door. Eventually the one-armed, barely conscious Robin, found my glasses and they were unbroken. It was late at night, there was no traffic so what does one do? Shout for help of course, so we yelled "*Au secours!*" and eventually someone arrived and helped us climb back up to the road. Then they found a phone box and called for an ambulance. That is when we fell in with local mafia, unbeknownst to us. We later found out that the ambulance was delayed because the road below was blocked with the chunks of concrete from the parapet wall which we had demolished as we launched into space. It was a bad accident and could have been a lot worse since the spare wheel, which had been lying in the back, flew out the driver's door which had burst opened upon impact. The door was bent in two against the stone wall. The wheel must have narrowly missed Robin, who had been violently thrust forward upon impact.

As the ambulance arrived so did a tow-truck. The tow-truck crew were very nice and helpful and said they would look after the car but they would need our insurance Green Card and registration documents. We were most grateful and in no fit state even to think or question how they knew where we were and so we gave them the documents. I accompanied Robin to the hospital where he was admitted overnight.

Early next morning I went to see Robin and he was on his way for an X-ray, so being a radiologist I accompanied him out of professional interest. The first thing I noticed was that they were taking X-rays in a big open room with no lead-lined walls or lead aprons for protection. I hid around a corner every time they took a film and all the radiographers laughed at me.

I looked at Robin's X-ray; he had badly broken his wrist (a Smith fracture for any doctors reading). An orthopaedic surgeon looked at it, said something in French and produced a long thin metal rod (K wire). Robin looked at me aghast and asked me what this was for but I lied and said I wasn't sure. He soon found out. The surgeon injected local anaesthetic into his wrist, reduced the fracture, pushed the K wire through the broken pieces to stabilise them and when they re-X-rayed the position was perfect. I was impressed! Robin was soon allowed out of hospital and then the fun began.

Now we had to get the car back to the UK. In the meantime it was obvious that Robin couldn't drive in the Monte so I suggested that we ask Adrian Boyd to drive. Adrian jumped at the chance. We found the garage where the Imp was located and Robin was presented with a huge bill for 'recovery and storage'. If we didn't pay they told us that they wouldn't release the car and they had all the documents. This was the local Mafia scam – they monitored the emergency radios and when they heard of an accident they made sure they were first on the spot with a tow-truck.

Robin, who speaks excellent French, told them he was going to the police and after a lot of haggling they released the car and the RAC took it back to Belfast on a truck since it was virtually a total wreck. RAC insurance sure made a loss on that deal!

FRW 303C in the 1968 Monte Carlo Rally. Driver: Adrian Boyd, Co-driver Dr Beatty Crawford

Photo: Foster and Skeffington, supplied by Dr Beatty Crawford





The Rallye

Driving FRW 303C, we started the 3,300 kilometre (2,000 mile) route in Dover, one of eight different starting points in Europe. After 1,200 kms non-stop we joined up in Monte Carlo with the other 242 competitors and had a night's sleep before we set out on another 1,500 kms loop back to Monte Carlo. The top 50 crews then got one more night's sleep before setting off on a 620 kms route which included the infamous *Col de Turini* special stage.

We left Dover at 2.02 am on Sunday morning, 20th January, last of the 32 entrants who started in the UK. We went straight on to the ferry to Calais. The first time control was in the centre of Brussels and it should have been an easy drive. I then made a mistake which has troubled me ever since. We soon ran into thick fog and I didn't push Adrian hard enough to drive faster. We were on main roads and I didn't think there would be any problem being on time. We hadn't done a reece of this part of the route so it was all new to me and I hadn't reckoned on the rush-hour traffic jams in Brussels. To my chagrin we were eight minutes late. In retrospect I'm not so sure Adrian could have gone much faster because once again we were on studded tyres on dry tarmac.

We plodded on all next day, the Imp was only 998cc so it certainly didn't set the road on fire. Then in the early evening we suddenly smelled oil. Adrian immediately turned off the engine and upon opening the engine lid discovered oil everywhere. We now had a bit of luck. We were at the edge of a village and on a hill so were able to freewheel to where we saw a small garage which was still open. We quickly got the car up on a hoist and discovered that the oil cooler had burst. We had no service crew but we were able to bypass the cooler but this all took a long time

since we had to remove the sumpguard. When we checked the oil level – it was just touching the bottom of the dipstick. Normally this would be no problem and easily topped up but we were running on synthetic oil, which was a relatively new innovation at the time. We didn't have a spare can and there was no such oil to be found in rural France. We had been told by the Rootes mechanics not to mix normal oil with the synthetic version so we had no option but to drive on and hope we wouldn't run out of oil. We had lost 16 more minutes.

What should have been a relatively easy run to Monte Carlo now turned into a nightmare. We were running last on the road and because we were 24 minutes late many of the time control marshals were in the midst of packing up when we arrived. We couldn't make up time because if we did we would have penalised for every minute. Most controls were in the centre of towns and all the crowds of spectators and *gendarmes* had gone home, so there was no one to wave us in the right direction. We couldn't team up with other crews and share navigation so Adrian had to drive with no sleep for two days and nights. It isn't funny when your driver tells you at 4 am, while driving down an alpine pass with huge drops, that he is seeing rocks and people in the middle of the road, particularly when the road is perfectly clear!

I was so glad and relieved to arrive in the warm sunshine of Monte Carlo and get a night's sleep. We did take part in the next section without any more drama but didn't make the final 50 since we had lost too much time. Our team mates Andrew Cowan/Brian Coyle finished a creditable 22nd, not bad for such an underpowered car.

Vic Elford/David Stone won in a Porsche 911T. Pauli Toivonen (father of Henri) and Martti Tiukkanen took second in a Porsche 911S. Rauno Aaltonen/Henry Liddon were third, Tony Fall/Mike Wood finished 4th and Paddy Hopkirk/Ron Crellin in 5th position, all three in the once all conquering Mini Coopers. This, however, was to be the Miniswansong of the 1293cc Minis since they were no match for the two-litre Porsches.

I wonder if FRW 303C still exists. I would love to know what became of it. I still have the rally plate that was attached to the car on the 1968 Monte Carlo Rallye. I would consider selling the this plate if anyone is interested. E-mail me on dbeatty5@hotmail.com.



What follows is something of a Rally Curriculum Vitae. Having co-driven for five world rally champions this may be of interest as an accompaniment to my Imp story.

I started rallying in Northern Ireland in the late 'fifties before I had a driving licence. I sat in the back seat of my father's Ford Zephyr 6 while my brother Esler navigated for Robert Woodside. My father didn't even know we were rallying his car, he thought that we were on a treasure hunt! Later I navigated for Esler in a Ford 10 van that was 'tuned' by fitting a Ford 8 cylinder head.

I began serious rallying in the early 'sixties with Derek Boyd in a Mini Cooper and won the Novice Award at our first attempt at the Circuit of Ireland in 1964. In 1965 Adrian Boyd asked me to co-drive and our first event was in an ex-works Humber Super Snipe. We were easily leading the Circuit of Ireland in this ex-Raymond Baxter-driven car when we got bogged down in a *sheugh* outside Killarney and lost a lot of time. Next year we joined the Alan Fraser Rally Team and competed in the last ever Spa-Sofia-Liege but our Humber Sceptre lost all its gearbox oil on the route through Germany so we never even got as far as Sofia.

In the late 'sixties and early 'seventies Adrian and myself finished second twice and third twice in the Circuit of Ireland. We were only beaten either by Paddy Hopkirk or Roger Clark. In 1971 Adrian and I won the Circuit of Ireland in an Escort Twin Cam. We also finished second in the British Rally Championship and were second in the Manx Rally.

I co-drove for Adrian in an ex-works BDA Escort in 1972 and '73 and our best results were 1st in the Circuit of Galway and Texaco rallies, 2nd in the Donegal Rally and 4th in Scottish and Austrian Alpine. We also competed in the Monte Carlo, Swedish, Welsh and numerous RAC rallies and Irish rallies. Adrian and I were elected 'Ulster Motorsport Personalities of the Year'.

In 1973 I emigrated to the USA and effectively stopped rallying until 1990 when Adrian asked me to navigate for him on the Pirelli Classic Marathon in a Daimler SP250. I enjoyed it so much that I bought my own Mini Cooper and the following year won the Pirelli Classic with the late great Ronnie McCartney driving. We beat Timo Makinen, Stirling Moss, Roger Clark and Le Mans winner Gils Van Lennep.



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Works Imp fuel tank. Note wooden 'dipstick'! This is FRW 308C (beautifully restored by Clark Dawson in 2002). Dr Crawford asks if FRW 303C survives. Unlikely, though 306C, 307C and 308C do and are in superb condition, as the photos on the previous pages show

Photos: FRW 306C and 307C from Google Images, FRW 308C by Grahame Pearson

Stig Blomqvist drove my Mini Cooper 'S' into 4th on the Britannia Rally in 1991 but it was obvious that the Porsche 911 was impossible to beat... So I bought one. In the next seven years I won the RAC Historic Rally twice with Jimmy McRae, won the Ypres 24 Historic twice, once with Bjorn Waldegard and once with Jimmy. I twice won the Rally of the Lakes in Killarney with Billy Coleman and Bjorn respectively and finished second in the Boucles de Spa and 1000 Lakes Historic in Finland, also with Bjorn. I also co-drive for Rauno Aaltonen in a Mini event in Northern Ireland in 1999.

Walter Rorhl and Sandro Munari have also driven for me, as did Louise Aitken-Walker so I have co-driven for five world rally champions.



Works Imp 'office'. This is FRW 308C but all the 'FRW' Imps were similar. Seats were lifted 'in-house' from the Sunbeam Tiger

Photo: Grahame Pearson