

BRISTOL COMPLETES 2011 MILLE MIGLIA

BY ADRIAN BERRY

The Bristol 400 Farina cabriolet of Adrian Berry and Hannah Goodman, both longstanding Bristol Owners Club members from the South East (*and of course, Connoisseurs*), has just successfully completed this year's Mille Miglia.

Their entry 112 suffered a puncture late on the Friday and the time they lost in swapping the spare tyre and then getting the punctured tyre repaired, pulled their ranking down to a finish place of 211th.

375 cars started at Brescia and 291 completed the arduous 1,000 miles. This was the couple's first ever attempt at any sort of Reliability Race.

As is the Bristol owners way, the couple jumped in their car and drove it from East Sussex down to Brescia, completed the race, and then drove back again. All without any other assistance from support cars, trailers, etc !

The first problem was encountered on Thursday morning when starting out to drive to the signing on, when a puncture was detected and the wheel swapped for the spare. On arriving and completing the signing on process, the hunt was then on to find a garage who could inspect and repair the flat tyre. After much driving around Brescia, this was finally accomplished and a mad dash made for the centre of Brescia to have the car 'sealed' in time to be officially registered for the race.



Speaking with other, more experienced, drivers, they all told the same story that on Thursday evening/night, you cannot get lost as the complete route from Brescia to Bologna is lined with well wishers. The BBC 2 film of the celebrity cook, James Martin (who failed to finish the first day) did not do justice to just how many people and the atmosphere that they create which was just overwhelming. This, coupled with the propensity of the Italian motorcycle Police to barge a way through the traffic for the race cars, had us driving up to red traffic lights between two lanes of cars (stationary on our right and coming towards us on our left), and then being waved frantically across. The same happened at the roundabouts where all entrances were barred as we sped around looking for the only exit that was not barred !

Arriving in Bologna at around 01:00 in the morning, it was time to find the shuttle bus to our hotel for a quick forty winks before being up at 06:00 to see us back and ready for the start at 08:30. Because it is necessary to start each leg in the correct order, you have to leave at least an hour to allow for all of the to-ing and fro-ing to get everyone in the correct order. Friday was another mad dash, up hills and down dales. Driving right into the historic centres of so many ancient towns, and being showered with gifts from each municipality.

Late on Friday afternoon another puncture made itself known. It just had to be on the most treacherous down hill winding part of the day ! Sliding to a halt by the side of the road, it was time to get the jack out again. Only to find that we had ended up on a nice area of sand, and jacking up the car only succeeded in planting the jack further into the sand ! Judicious, very slow driving got us to a more firmer area, all the time having to dodge all of the cars that we had overtaken during the day who were

now glad to get their own back ! Wheel replaced we then set off again, now worried about what would happen if we suffered another puncture. Having a support crew now started to sound a very sensible idea. As luck would have it at our next petrol stop, the filling station also had a tyre repair section and a new inner tube was soon fitted and the spare wheel fully pumped up. We were back in the race again.

Unfortunately we never fully recovered from the time that we lost, so giving us our eventual placing. That night in Rome we arrived over 1 hour past our time, well into the early hours. Which meant that we had even less sleep once we had found our hotel ! The navigator then took a management decision whilst the driver was comatose to bring forward the alarm by one hour. Bleary eyed, the driver just got up when he was told and stumbled his way to the shuttle, then into the garage, and from there to the start, only to find that they were the first of the cars to start lining up ! All was forgotten by 07:00 when we were officially flagged away.

Saturday was some of the most glorious motoring that we have ever experienced. The route took us off the beaten track, into quite unspoilt parts of central Italy. More time trials, checkpoints, and perfect driving until approaching midnight we entered the outskirts of Brescia again.

Everything that people say about the race is all true and then you need to add some more. The presentation ceremony on the Sunday morning was a magnificent, glittering affair culminating in the presentation to car 49 of the overall winner's prize.

Not knowing what to expect, only taking a stopwatch and a biro to assist with the navigating, now seems a little mad in retrospect. But we entered in a spirit of pioneering motorists. Unlike the very professional teams that had pantechicons parked around the route complete with fully fitted out workshops, together with their following support cars. We felt that we had participated more in the spirit of the original race in 1927. Perusing the final scores I see that we came 54th in Class (out of 106) and 10 ahead of the other Bristol 400.

So not too dusty for a first timer !



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