

12th Annual John O'Groats to Lands End (JOGLE)

Contributed by Joy Rainey
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Excitement filled the air as the 3 minute sign was held up – just 3 minutes to 11a.m. 21st June and the start of the 12th Annual JOGLE – John O'Groats to Land's End Endurance Run, organised by the Barnsley Morris Minor Owners' Club.

Sixteen Morris Minors lined up in the rain-soaked car park at John O'Groats waiting for the Union flag to be dropped. The organisers had emphasised that the event was not a race; to qualify for a certificate and trophy, participants had to arrive at Land's End within 24 hours; road rules were not to be broken and there must be two licensed drivers in each crew.

My co-driver from the London to Sydney Marathon, Trevor Hulks decided that the Minor needed exercising again after its epic journey last year, but the thought of driving 855 miles in a day seemed more than challenging.

Once the flag was dropped I was amazed at the free for all while sixteen Morris Minors jostled for the first out of the car park's slot. Rather than hang about I managed to scramble into third position as the entire entry sped up the slope out of John O'Groats. Following a 1969 four door driven by father and son, David and Mark Fisher, I tried to convince myself that we weren't racing but my competitive urge couldn't be stifled for long and at the first opportunity we overtook the brown Minor and pressed on in pursuit of the 1,295 c.c. engined 1968 grey saloon that had disappeared into the distance.

Driving up to John O'Groats the previous day our Minor seemed to be down on power as it climbed up steep ascents. My fears were confirmed as I tried to overtake the many lorries, vans and caravans that were travelling the scenic A9 coastal road from the start to Inverness. Before attempting any overtaking manoeuvre I had to wait until there was more road space ahead than normal. And all the time, I kept envisaging the grey Minor, entered by Steven Reeves and Richard Clayton, increasing their lead by a greater margin.

After an unscheduled stop to check under the bonnet, my co-driver came to the conclusion that a head gasket had probably blown between two cylinders but we decided to press on regardless.

The fuel consumption increased somewhat from normal and instead of our first scheduled fuel stop south of Glasgow, the fuel gauge had dropped to empty forcing the first stop at Perth just 224 miles, 4 hours and 35 minutes from the start.

Now in the co-driver's seat I started to wonder how the other participants were faring. Perhaps some had overtaken us during our rather long unscheduled stop or they might be taking a more leisurely drive and enjoying the spectacular scenery, which is the main rationale of the event.

Near Glasgow due to roadworks on the new A80 trunk road, traffic came to an abrupt standstill. It was difficult to relax and I kept craning my head in both directions in vain looking for other Morris Minors.

On the move again, near Carlisle and the traffic became lighter. It was 5.13 p.m. and we had covered 304 miles. My back was starting to ache and when I calculated that there was still another 552 miles to drive – not even half distance yet - I agonised about spending another 9 hours in the car. I started to admire the stamina of the other participants as most regularly enter the annual JOGLE. Bob Beavers, the Barnsley Club chairman is on his eighth JOGLE, although he missed last year's event because he was undergoing a heart by-pass operation.

Just before 8 p.m. the time had arrived for my second driving stint. A few minutes running around at the Service Centre, near junction 22 on the M6 revived the driver; the adrenalin had started to pump again and with 490 miles covered we were more than half way to Land's End but still no sighting of any other Morris Minors. At 9.36 p.m. and with only 264 miles to the end, my co-driver started to question his sanity on being persuaded to participate - we were within 10 miles from home and a comfortable bed. To compensate for the expected lack of sleep he decided to use the new equipment purchased for the event – a travel kettle – and within 19 minutes he was enjoying a strong caffeine fix of freshly brewed coffee.

Traffic was light down the M5, mostly large lorries. I was experiencing a second wind and could have continued my driving stint but it was easier to swap drivers at the re-fuelling stop, this time at junction 26 at 11.25 p.m. and a mere 168 miles from the finish.

Fog near Bodmin and Penzance slowed our progress and then eventually the first road sign to Land's End signalled 16 miles. The final miles seemed to last forever, the road became curvier, the fog thicker, then at 2 ½ minutes

to 2 a.m. we pulled up in the Land’s End car park to be met by the welcoming committee of the Barnsley Morris Minor Owners Club. The trip had taken us 14 hours, 57 ½ minutes.

Three hours passed before the next Morris Minor arrived and by 11 a.m. all sixteen had reached their destination, however the grey Minor we had been chasing at the start arrived a whole 60 minutes before us.

The event is aptly titled – it was indeed an endurance run and a wonderful sense of camaraderie and jollity prevailed at the start and finish, but I’m not sure if I would enter again. We now have a ‘certificate of completion’ to put on the wall and on the negative side – an engine rebuild to carry out.