

Weston-Super-Mare Rally Sprint

31st January 2010

The nova reshelling was finished and MSA log booked, and now a suitable shakedown event was required. After a short search on the internet the ideal looking candidate was found. <http://www.weston-super-maremotorclub.com/> Weston-super-mare MC was putting on a Rally Sprint, to replace the usual rally that they run at Brean Leisure Park. This seemed ideal, as it was local, cheap and clubman friendly. But best of all you could double run, meaning that Amy and I could drive as well (as we have both done very little competitive driving since becoming parents).

The only small snag was that it was on the same weekend as the first ever Autosolo that DDMC was running. The deciding factor was that we needed to be able to drive the car to the Autosolo, which meant Insurance and Tax.

So after much thought, we decided it had to be the Rally sprint, and not the Autosolo (as much as we wanted to support our club in its first Autosolo).

So the car was duly prepared and strapped onto the trailer and towed down to W-s-M. It passed scrutineering without any problems.

So off we went to the drivers briefing, then off out for the familiarisation lap at slow speed in convoy.

It was decided that as Amy had not even driven the car since it had been built (and i had changed the brake system from the traditional standard servo assisted master cylinder to a bias peddle box without servo assistance (making the brakes harder to press). That she would drive the parade lap.

It was a good thing to, as it was the only mileage she was to get in the car for the event.

After the parade lap, Amy hops out and I strap myself in for the first competitive speed but not timed practise lap. All was going well to start with (yes the brakes did take a bit of getting used to, but they did work), and i was beginning to get relaxed with the car and starting to build some confidence and speed up. I came out of one of the corners, and the car started to misfire, shortly after cutting out altogether, so i had to coast to the side and try and get out of the way.

Luckily i broke down near a marshalls post. So with me out of the car and the bonnet up, they soon came over to offer assistance.

Well i could see that the coil was covered in a brown coloured water from the expansion tank. Not enough to worry about, but if that was putting the sparks out it would soon dry out as it was hot in the engine bay. After much wire wiggling for the ignition coil and the rev limiter, still no joy. Eventually gave up and had to wait for the stage to close so that i could be rescued. At least back in service John Witt had a chance of getting the problem sorted and getting me and Amy back out for a days motorsport.

Whilst waiting for the stage to close and be recovered, i heard over the radio that Amy was enquiring where i was and why was i not back into service, as she was due to be getting in the car for her first run.

When back in service we tried all sorts of things to get the car going again, we had no spark, or a very poor spark. But nothing would encourage the rally nova into coughing into action, no matter how much we dragged it on the back of the service barge up and down the service area. In the end we gave it and retired. But to make a bad day worse, after loading the rally car onto the trailer, we realised that the trailer had picked up a puncture. So we had to change a wheel on the trailer before starting the drive home.

A few days later and when i got the chance to look at the Nova to figure out why it had broke down on the rally sprint, it did not take long to find the problem. After taking out one of the sparkplugs and a quantity of water escaped out it was obvious that the head gasket had gone.

W-s-M Rally Sprint - 31st Jan 2010

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It turns out that the head gasket had gone, pressurised the coolant system, and spat some of the coolant onto the coil, and killing the coil in the process, and possibly saving the engine from even greater damage from overheating.