

## Osian's Border Counties Rally blog

Jedburgh's got to be getting on for 300 miles from home for me. At times, the start of this year's British Rally Championship seemed like it might even be a bit further away than that...

Winning last year's Drive DMACK Fiesta Trophy title was fantastic, but trying to get things in place for this year wasn't straightforward. Even with two world championship rounds paid for (our two DMACK prize drives), the financial commitment for another five rounds to make up a full WRC2 couldn't be met – despite our best efforts.

Plan B was a return to the BRC, dovetailed with Poland, Finland and Wales Rally GB. A great plan b would offer us plenty of seat time and mileage to get used to the Ford Fiesta R5 – a car I've only ever done two rallies in before.

For a while, it looked like we might have to be considering a plan c, but, thanks to Hills Ford, Alpera and a few others, we got to Scotland and the start of BRC. And we got there in pretty good shape as well.

Like I said, I've done a couple of events in the Fiesta R5 before. The first was Wales Rally GB in 2014, when we were up the front and fighting. The second was the same event last year, which just didn't really go our way and we retired with a water leak.

Last year's Rally GB taught me you can't cut corners – either in the woods or in your preparation. The team was great, but everything was so last minute, I promised myself I wouldn't do that again. There were times when it looked like this season was going the same way. But in the end, it worked out really well with Hills Ford and Alpera backing the programme and Spencer Sport running the car.

The first time I drove it was at a test in Scotland just before the start of the Border Counties last week. I didn't do a huge amount of miles, but what I did was make a lot of changes to the car and the set-up. I really got the chance to play with the car and feel what could be done. I've never had this before, normally it's always been a real rush to get the car finished, quick lap of shakedown and then sort anything else out on the first day of the rally.

I know that, in terms of experience of the car, I'm up against it a bit. I'm competing against guys who have at least a full season in R5 cars and they know them very well. For me, it's about leveling the learning curve as quickly as possible.

To that end, round one went very well. Craik in the dark on Friday night was an eye-opener in more ways than one! But the first time through went well. I was careful and drove with plenty in reserve. Getting a puncture after just a few corners on the second run was really annoying and cost us between 30 and 40 seconds.

We got another couple of punctures on Saturday, but it was the first one that really cost us the time.

Saturday was a very good day for us. Dale and I picked up the pace as we went through the stages and the times were getting better and better. We hit the same rock in stage six as David Bogie – that caused a puncture and broke a TCA. To be honest, no tyre or TCA could have withstood that impact. It was one of those football-sized rocks, right on the line. Committed to the corner, we rode over it with one heck of a bang!

Our first fastest time of the season came two stages later and we were chuffed with that – as we were with third at the end of the event.

Like I said, we'd had a bit of a bumpy ride coming into the season, so bagging good points and laying some solid foundations for the year ahead was the priority in Jedburgh.

We did that and we discovered some pretty stunning countryside in the Tweed Valley at the same time!

It's back up the M6 for the next one – and the one after that, come to think of it – but Kielder and the Pirelli are looming large for us now.

Knowing we have a fantastic car, a great team and incredible support from Hills and Alpera, we make that trip north with confidence high. And getting higher.