

## All Quiet Until.....

*by Brian Carter*

As many of you know, the London to Brighton Commercial Vehicle Run is one of the oldest organised runs in the UK. This was its 48<sup>th</sup> year. The run was on a glorious Sunday which was lovely but also brings out the seaside traffic. Not a problem for the old Scammells plodding along on diesel but it can be a major problem for the petrol driven vehicles.

In the original days of the run, the route pretty much followed the A23 all the way from London to Brighton but when the decision was taken to make major improvements to the road, a “diversionary route” was put into place. This route has been kept as the standard route ever since, mainly due to the average speed of vehicles on the improved A23. The “new” route has a rather long and difficult hill



just north of Brighton at Pyecombe, which was a concern to the traffic authorities when planning this popular event. They asked the organisers to arrange recovery support for this part of the route. This is where we come in. We’ve arranged to have a

Scammell and Land Rover at the bottom of the hill ever since. This year was no exception and my Pioneer recovery was pressed into service once again.

The road layout is such that we can park in a side road to watch all the vehicles approach and keep an eye on the traffic up the hill. Generally, most people who have a problem only need a bit of time to sort themselves out so the majority of time, we just guide the traffic around them or quickly pull them out of the way with the Land Rover.

This year everything was going fine, we passed one of the Steam Lorries on our way from home to our parking place and everything seemed fine. The weather was fine, we parked up, made a brew and settled to watch the vehicles coming through. They seemed to be late this year and we subsequently found out that an accident coupled with traffic for a car boot sale caused a major traffic hold up of about 1 hour and because of this, quite a few exhibits ignored the route and travelled straight down the A23.

One of the first vehicles we saw was a Leyland Hippo owned by Committee Member Parry Davis which motored on past us at a good rate of knots and was the first of the heavies to make it to Brighton.

We watched and waved as the majority of vehicles passed us and made over the hill, if a little slow at times. Basically, all the time the traffic is moving we do not panic. Then along came a motorcycle to tell us a vehicle had caught fire on the hill and that our services were needed so we quickly packed up and went to investigate. A rather nice panel van weighing about 5 tons had indeed caught light in the engine bay but it had been extinguished without too much damage. However, the HT leads had all melted. The owners had already put a rope on so we backed onto it, explained how slow and careful we would be and set off to tow the vehicle.



“BANG” the rope was not up to the job so out came one of our ropes (the ones we sell on the display lorry). I doubled the rope up as I like a short rope when towing with the Scammell and off we went. Being as it is a steep incline with no chance of changing up a gear, we started in 3<sup>rd</sup> gear and had a nice slow climb up the hill and over the other side. We pulled in to the side of the road to find the steam engine we had passed earlier in the day also on the side of the road with the firebox in pieces.

Our casualty tried to re-wire the ignition but could not get it started but had also called their own load loader so we made them safe and left them to it. At the same time, investigation of the steamer confirmed that they had dropped a plug. Fortunately the support vehicle had the equipment to reflow the plug and their only problem was to get water into the boiler before lighting up again. They were also low on water so we helped out by supplying a couple of cans of water.

Whilst all this was going on, a smaller van had a problem on the hill so off went the Land Rover to sort that one out. News also filtered back that another steamer had dropped a plug in Brighton but was being towed in by the steamer that was following it. To make matters worse, a Sentinel steam wagon pulled in and asked “Where can I get some water as we are close to dropping a plug”. I knew there was a hydrant on the A23 but they were not willing to risk this and eventually found a hydrant by the local pub so were able to refresh man and machine.



In amongst all of this, Boadicea, a very nice R100 Gun Tractor, stopped by for a chat and a discussion on the rarity of 14.00x20 tyres at the moment. We also had a discussion on how you can give the clutch a new lease of life by following the instructions in the manual and reversing

four spacers.

Eventually, everything quietened down, the R100 plodded off to the finish line, the Sentinel set off again fully refreshed, our casualty disappeared on its low loader and the steam lorry assured us they were OK but would we please ask the organisers at Brighton to wait for them!

We then set off into the traffic which was queued for several miles north of Brighton. Having manoeuvred our way in to the correct lane we saw one of the Ford vans being pushed to the side of the road. Investigation found that it was overheating and worse, the other van that stopped to help also stalled so we ended up with both of them stuck on the side of the road. A little local knowledge is dangerous so I gave them some details of how to avoid the worst of the traffic and get into the city centre. This is not strictly correct but was the only way they could avoid the overheating problem. We then had a problem as there was no way we could back into the correct lane to get into Brighton so cheated and went east on the A27 for one junction and came into Brighton that way. This was a lovely drive without any traffic problems and we re-joined the official route near Brighton Level and proceeded to the finish point.



For the last couple of years we have parked in with the exhibits at Brighton and did the same again this year. It gives us chance to actually feel part of the run as well as getting us into the helpers' area to get a brew and a bite to eat. After a few hours chat it was time to wendle our

way back home. Again, using local knowledge we led Parry away from the traffic and back to our house.

It was a good day again but a little disappointing on the number of Scammells in the run. Other than our vehicle and the R100 we only saw a superbly restored Routeman tipper and that was it. Gyles Carpenter kindly supplied the photo of the Routeman pictured next to another superbly restored vehicle, the Alan Firmin AEC. He says the Routeman is owned by John Mould and was on its first event.