

CLUTCHING AT STRAWS and gearboxes – Phil & George Jennings – BMW Compact 2.8

It's been a while since i did one of these but it may be a while before i do another so here it is

This year has been eventful for the BMW and the team of myself & Phil

We started off with our usual trip to Garstang to continue our support for the Legend Fires North West Stages Rally, now surpassing 20 years and despite the raising of the profile to the premier British Rally Championship we went for it knowing it would be a totally different event for us.

The weather was not good making tyre choice unpredictable, but we set of in a heavy hail shower to the trough of Bowland as car 118. We knew it would be a challenge after the recce the week before knowing it would be a bit of a mud bath running at the back of the event. The recce was eventful with me being ill which was a worry, but all was OK luckily before the start

We got to Beacon Fell to find a cancelled stage and were told to reroute to Chipping for SS2. We then spent 2 hours in the local Church Hall car park before being sent back to Myerscough College after the first leg was abandoned due to the front runners crashing out and blocking the stages

Sadly, our event then consisted of the second and final leg of stages which were enjoyable but looking back we only started a competitive stage at 3.30pm arriving at Garstang to a small crowd of people on the finish ramp at 7.30pm. Not great considering the outlay well in excess of £1K for 30 odd stage miles

A bittersweet end to what might be our last North West Stages due to the high entry fees



Beacon Fell 2

Off to 3 sisters with our Sponsor now applied for the North West Stages we went to their local venue, which is in the hometown of Unibro Grass Machinery, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Phils employer who kindly helped with some of the costs

Sadly, a very short event

SS1 – off we went from the start, the car immediately stepped out which was very uncharacteristic of the BMW. We continued but soon realised all was not well with the gear changes and drive making horrendous noises. We got to the end and tried to finish SS2, which we did but the car was clearly not going any further, so we packed up and drove the car the 3 miles back home

Thinking it was the gearbox which has broken i got another gearbox later that day

Little did i realise this would be last thing i did to the car until September!

Thanks to the help of Craig Kennedy and his facilities we finally got around to putting the car back on the road. Up on the ramp to remove the dreaded gearbox, nicely positioned to gain good balance in the car but with BMW in their wisdom doing so push the bell housing right up the transmission tunnel making bolt access very difficult, This includes multiple extension bars on a socket set wrench about 4 ft long playing hook the duck trying to get the socket drive into the head of the starter motor bolt. Definitely needs a you tube video on this

Once removed the gearbox the annoying sight that i bought wrong, when the clutch pressure plate fell to pieces. This in turn destroyed the paddle clutch.

Not having a spare, we decided on building it back up with an old clutch. Bad mistake! Once back together and 6 hours later we had a juddery creaky car

3 weeks later after dealing with a lot of inept and pretty useless clutch specialists i went back to CG motorsport in Leeds who provided a new kit. We were attempting to do the October 3 Sisters event organised by Wigan MC but time ran out, or so we thought.

The Saturday before the event Unibro Grass Machinery stepped in again with the help of the use of their 2-poster ramp. Very little room to work but with help from the unibro team managed to strip it down and rebuild it with the new clutch in double quick time. The new M3 gearbox went on so all was good, so i thought!

At 2pm a quick call was made to Helen Fox and we were in.

The Adgespeed Stages

A nice dry day with mild conditions was a welcome relief after all the rain of recent weeks. The event went pretty well with little to do to the car between the stages and the car feeling as good as it was on the North West Stages. All was good with the world until the last two stages. We reversed the car of the ground sheet to start SS11. A big mass of green liquid on there ended up being the gearbox had emptied its contents of oil!

Undeterred we completed the event with a respectable finish in the top 20. However, driving the car home with a very sticky and notchy gearchange meant only one thing!

Back to our hero helper, Craig Kennedy. With one week to go before the Neil Howard Stages we knew it was make or break for us.

Another 6 hours later we were back up and running again with the old faithful gearbox we used prior to the clutch failure. Full circle or what. We are somewhat experts at BMW gearbox changes. The work included a centre bearing on the prop being changed as it was damaged, and we thought was the cause of some banging and clunking under the car. Something we were about to find out would be ominous



Adgespeed Stages – Thanks to UK Motorsport Photography

Off to Oulton Park. A first dry event for a few years. Parked next to Craig Kennedy who saved us a spot we got ready for the start. A tricky slippery test across the infield but no dramas and despite cars spinning in front of us we were going OK. I started thinking this would be a good day for once without issues, Then into the watersplash for two runs. No misfires so good there. Through the gravel section for the last time heading past the pit lane the car started feeling odd, over a rise and a clunk from the rear and then loud scraping noises over the gravel. Hoping it was just the tank guard we were just yards from the finish. Onto the track and it was clear something was very badly amiss. Trundled out into the paddock with the scraping noises. Parked up to see the back wheels at odd angles. Jacking up the car was our worst fears. The rear beam carrying the suspension arms and diff had ripped out of the floor of the car with a large section wrapped under the rear arm.

Not wanting to end like this I went on the search around the paddock. Thankfully Will Owen, the whizz with the welder came to our rescue. Driving the car around to the garage and despite his limited time he spared it to getting the beam welded back onto the car. Not perfect but good enough for the last two stages of 3 fast laps of the circuit in the dark

Phil went for it overtaking several cars, unleashing his inner circuit racer to get us to the end in one piece. More than what can be said for the car

I have not had the courage to look at the damage yet but it will be beyond my repair skills and after 13 years of use it might be time to retire the shell

Hopefully we will be back in some form with a good welder we may end up in 4WD machinery. Lets see what 2025 brings. Hopefully less gearbox changes!



Neil Howard Memorial Stages - Thanks to Phil James for the image