

# Rally the Troops

Once a year, a select group of men and women set out on a 500-mile journey through the Scottish Highlands in pristine pre-war cars. *Gentleman's Journal* joins the 2017 Flying Scotsman Rally, the most exclusive of its kind, to find out more

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Three, two, one, GO!" shouts the marshal as he drops the flag on the first stage of the 2017 Flying Scotsman Rally. A cacophony of grinding engine parts growl as I'm thrown back in my seat, gripping with all the power in my left hand just to stay stable. I look down at the navigational book flailing in my right hand, which displays a rough outline of the timed course we're careering around.

"Left of cone A," I bellow, "90 degrees right."

The 1929 Bentley 4½ that I'm the passenger in moves at a rate I hardly thought possible. As my driver, Britain's premier vintage Bentley restorer, William Medcalf, hauls the steering wheel to the right, the wheels begin to slide. We're now travelling sideways in a £750,000, 88-year-old Bentley, with the delicate sound of thunder erupting from the exhausts, and a steady wave of mud and gravel rising from the wheels. Suddenly my door

flies open and I brace to remain in the car.

"Left of B, slalom," I howl as I force the door closed.

"What?" cries Medcalf.

"Left of B, slalom!"

Medcalf hammers on the brakes and weaves the two-tonne hulk of metal through a tight section. When I call to stop, Medcalf stomps on the throttle and then pulls hard on the handbrake, making the Bentley slide wildly along the asphalt before stopping perfectly astride the finish line. A gentle plume of singed rubber drifts into the air as Med-

And it's true. It is an event that amalgamates all that is great in the world of vintage cars. There are those who would own these vehicles and keep them in concourse condition, primed and ready in a showroom somewhere. And then there are those who will push them to the limits, and sometimes beyond. These are the men and women who inspire. From CEOs and businessmen to former rock stars and mechanics, the Flying Scotsman brings together people from all walks of life, and puts them on the same playing field. One competitor is even rally-

of it) we make our way through the wilds at an altogether gentlemanly pace.

"So what's vintage rallying all about?" I call to Medcalf as the wind pummels my ears.

"Well you've got to drive hard and play hard," he says with a wink. "But also help your fellow competitors when they're in trouble. It's all about looking out for one another as you take on the world."

So it's only appropriate that a brand like dunhill London should sponsor an event of this magnitude. As a propagator of tradi-

however good the mechanics, something's bound to go wrong at some point. And as we roll along the roads, we pass numerous fallen comrades, and stop each time to lend a helping hand. It is in this vein that the gentlemanly nature of the Flying Scotsman is further personified. As Medcalf attests: "Of course you want to win. But you want to win well and in favourable eyes of your opponents."

Medcalf himself, proprietor of William Medcalf Vintage Bentley in Surrey, is one such gentleman who breathes the vintage

distances and landmarks. Medcalf tells me that the top competitors are so accurate that they'll likely only be two or three seconds out over the entire three-day rally. Naturally, we're not here to be competitive, and once the basics have been understood, I'm soon in the swing of it and loving every minute.

When we do finally stop, after upwards of eight hours in the car, it's to trays of beer, radiant laughter, and copious amounts of oil and engine parts; and it's entirely brilliant. "This event is a cauldron of like-minded, adventurous, determined, stubborn drivers,"

*MAIN: A view from above as the 1929 Bentley 4½ meanders through a pine forest*

*BOTTOM: A typical road block when driving through the Scottish Highlands*



calf releases a hearty chuckle.

"What?!" I exclaim. "I didn't know you could drive a vintage car like that."

"Oh, you haven't seen anything yet."

And so I was plunged into the throes of vintage car rallying, a world inundated with the gentlemanly racers of old. Now in its ninth year, The Flying Scotsman is the pinnacle of British vintage car rallying. "It is Britain's toughest vintage rally, bringing together over 100 pre-war cars," says Medcalf. "The camaraderie is electric."

ing in an original 1937 Le Mans-winning Lagonda, worth a cool £6 million – and he threw it around like a go-cart, mud sprayed over every exquisite panel, and the occasional waft of burning clutch drifting from its hand-formed hood.

Originally following a similar route as its locomotive namesake, the journey we've embarked upon sees us drive through the majesty of the Scottish Highlands. As I get to grips with the concept of navigating (I have never done it before, and I'm achingly aware

tional gentlemanly garments, fuelled heavily by the heritage of motor racing, dunhill relishes the opportunity to back motoring events that evoke the charm of the past; events that draw together gentlemen, historic vehicles, and fine clothing. Needless to say, the rich shearling dunhill Hamilton overcoats that Medcalf and I have on do a spectacular job at keeping the howling Scottish wind well at bay.

I quickly come to realise that the very nature of driving pre-war cars means that,

car world. "When I was five years old, my father's idea of a family holiday was 28,000 miles around America and Canada in a vintage Bentley," he says casually. "I've been all-in ever since."

The journey takes us through numerous stages. There are Regularities (where time, speed and distance must be carefully monitored to match the average speed noted in the road book), Specials (timed courses around various obstacles), and then navigating from stage to stage, based entirely on

says Medcalf, as we enjoy a cold beer, leaning coolly against our steed. "All supported by their adaptable, flexible and super-bright navigators," he chuckles in jest.

Over three days, some 500 miles, and numerous roaring nights, I arrive back in London with a newfound energy. In the fast-paced world in which we live, where immediacy is of the essence, finding a group of individuals who actively pursue the unhurried pastime of a bygone era, is a treat like no other. ✱

