They’re off… on a classic winter’s drive to Monte Carlo

Published: January 30, 2019

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/theyre-off-on-a-classic-winters-drive-to-monte-carlo/



Car 404 – a 1936 Riley Kestrel – leaving the start ramp in the hands of husband and wife crew Richard and Noel Schneider, who travelled from the United States to take part.

Classic cars and their intrepid crews head south from Clydebank this evening (30th January)…

A hardy group of 17 cars and crews are heading south on wintry roads following the start this evening in Clydebank in West Dunbartonshire of the UK leg of the classic Monte Carlo

Rally. The Clydeside town is the only British start point of six European cities for a range of classic cars to make the 1300-mile trip to the South of France which is staged by the Automobile Club de Monaco (ACM).

Almost 80 cars left the start ramp in Aurora Avenue in the shadow of the town's giant Titan Crane at 6pm on Wednesday January 30th in three separate categories but only the hard core will be making the challenging drive all the way to the South of France.

The Historique Class is being run for the 22nd year and is restricted to car models which competed in the Monte Carlo Rallies between 1955 and 1980. It will run over eight days on open public roads with the cars and crews undertaking a series of fourteen demanding test stages in the mountains of southern France.

Among the cars taking part in that class are three from the 1960s – a Mk2 3.8 litre Jaguar, a Rover 2000 SC, and an Austin A40, although the crew of that car had an early setback when their entire set of wheels and snow tyres were stolen from their garage over the weekend. They managed to source a replacement set just in time. There was also an Opel Kadett GTE, Fiat 124 Coupe, and Lancia Fulvia 1600 HF from the 70s. Several crews reported mechanical issues which were resolved, in some cases just minutes before reaching the start line.

The Classique event is for older cars and in the 2019 entry list there are no fewer than five Rileys from the 1930s – two of them driven by American crews and another which actually competed in the Monte Carlo Rally before the last war – and an MG TC from 1949.

Other cars include a 1958 Standard Pennant and a 65 year old Ford Popular.

They will follow the same route to Monte Carlo but will not compete in any test stages, the goal simply being to finish after checking in at a series of control points on the way, including Dumfries in the south of Scotland, Barnby Moor in Nottinghamshire and Banbury in Oxfordshire.

Once again the event featured the popular Monte Heritage Runs which followed on from the full-scale starts taking in a series of short classic routes in Scotland including Aberdeen, Stirling and Dumfries. A hardy group of ten crews had already driven through the snow from John O'Groats via Aberdeen to Clydebank to join in the fun at the start.

Waving off the cars was Convener of the Cultural Committee at West Dunbartonshire Council, Bailie Denis Agnew who said: "I was delighted to welcome back the Monte Carlo Rally to Clydebank.

Seeing the cars gathered beside our iconic Titan Crane on our historic waterfront was a fantastic moment and I was honoured to wave them off.

This Rally will be one of many events in 2019 which will project West Dunbartonshire onto a world stage, and hopefully will encourage visitors to this area."

Douglas Anderson, the UK co-ordinator of the event and the man responsible for bringing the Monte start back to Scotland a few years ago, was delighted: "It has been another wonderful Scottish start and it's been great to return to Clydeside. The crowds got right behind the event and gave the crews a big boost on their demanding drive to the South of France. The Monte has a special magic."