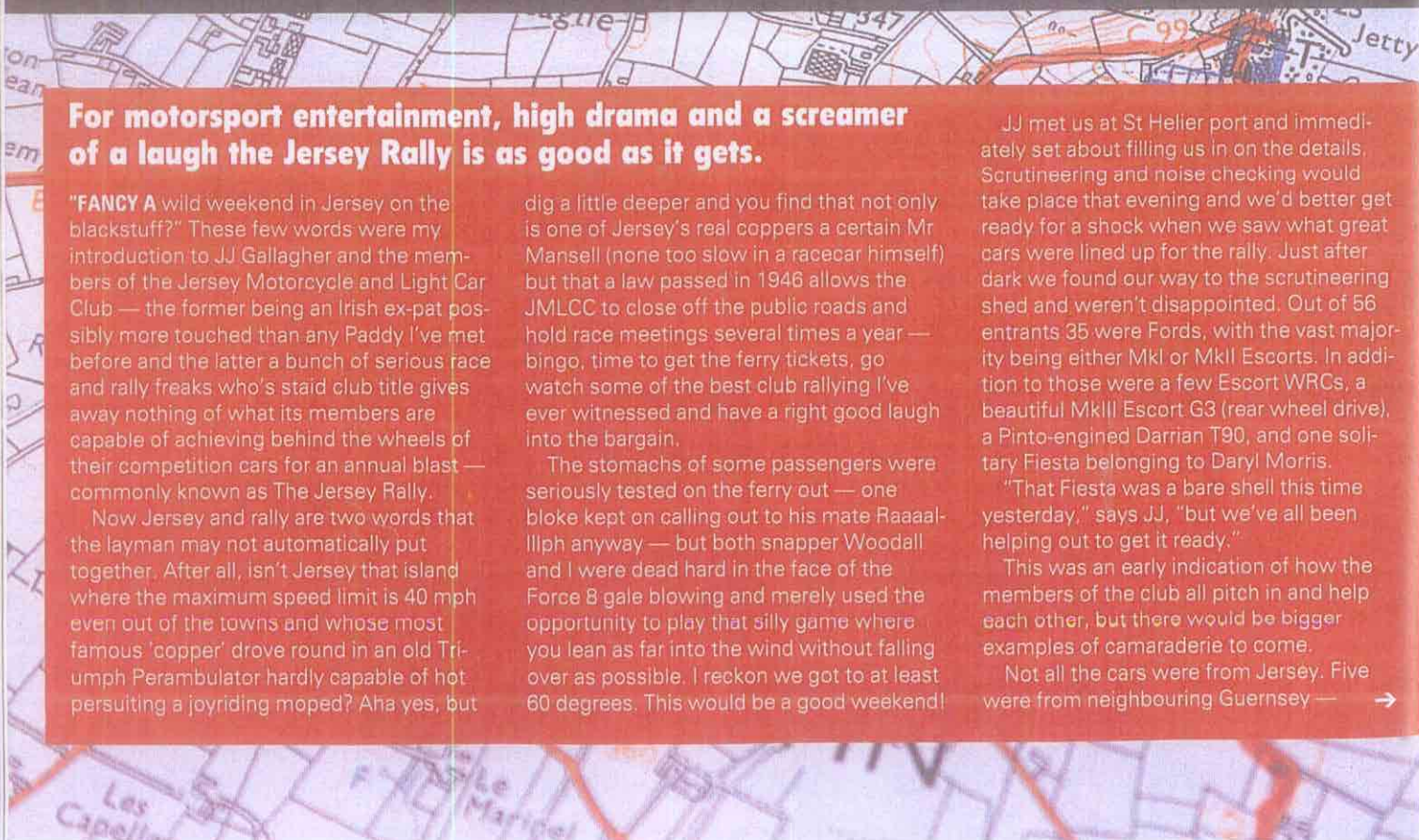




Offshore Rampage

Words Marc Stretton
Photos Dave Woodall



For motorsport entertainment, high drama and a screamer of a laugh the Jersey Rally is as good as it gets.

"FANCY A wild weekend in Jersey on the blackstuff?" These few words were my introduction to JJ Gallagher and the members of the Jersey Motorcycle and Light Car Club — the former being an Irish ex-pat possibly more touched than any Paddy I've met before and the latter a bunch of serious race and rally freaks who's staid club title gives away nothing of what its members are capable of achieving behind the wheels of their competition cars for an annual blast — commonly known as The Jersey Rally.

Now Jersey and rally are two words that the layman may not automatically put together. After all, isn't Jersey that island where the maximum speed limit is 40 mph even out of the towns and whose most famous 'copper' drove round in an old Triumph Perambulator hardly capable of hot pursuing a joyriding moped? Aha yes, but

dig a little deeper and you find that not only is one of Jersey's real coppers a certain Mr Mansell (none too slow in a racecar himself) but that a law passed in 1946 allows the JMLCC to close off the public roads and hold race meetings several times a year — bingo, time to get the ferry tickets, go watch some of the best club rallying I've ever witnessed and have a right good laugh into the bargain.

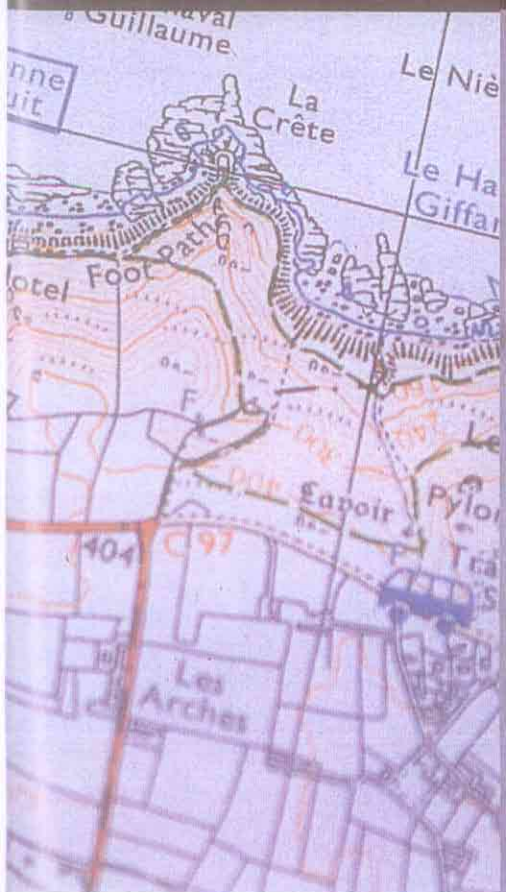
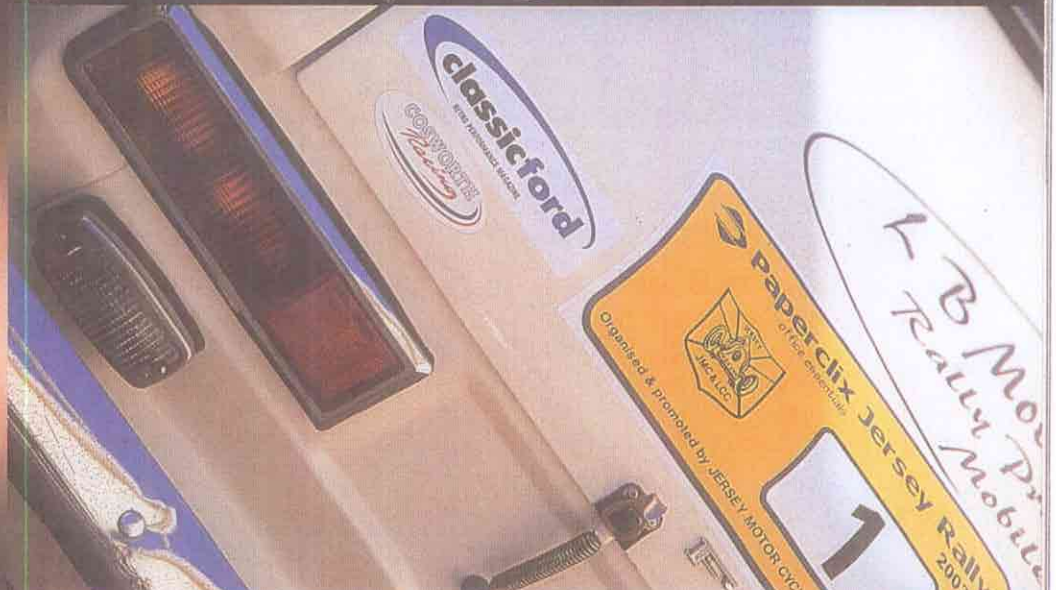
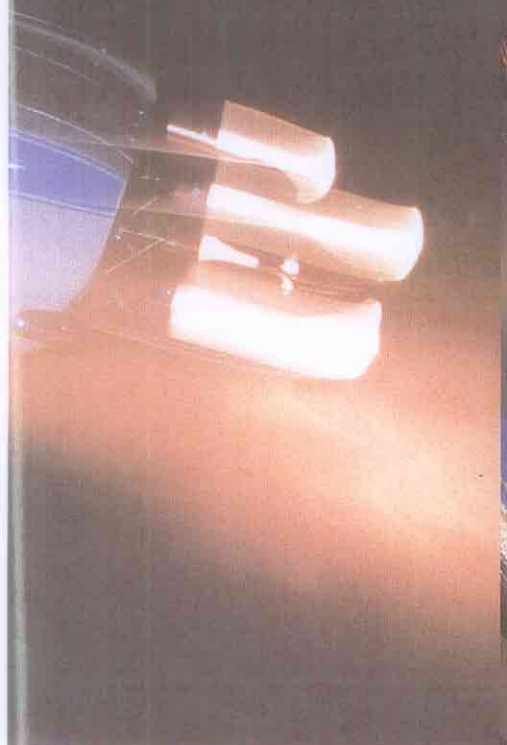
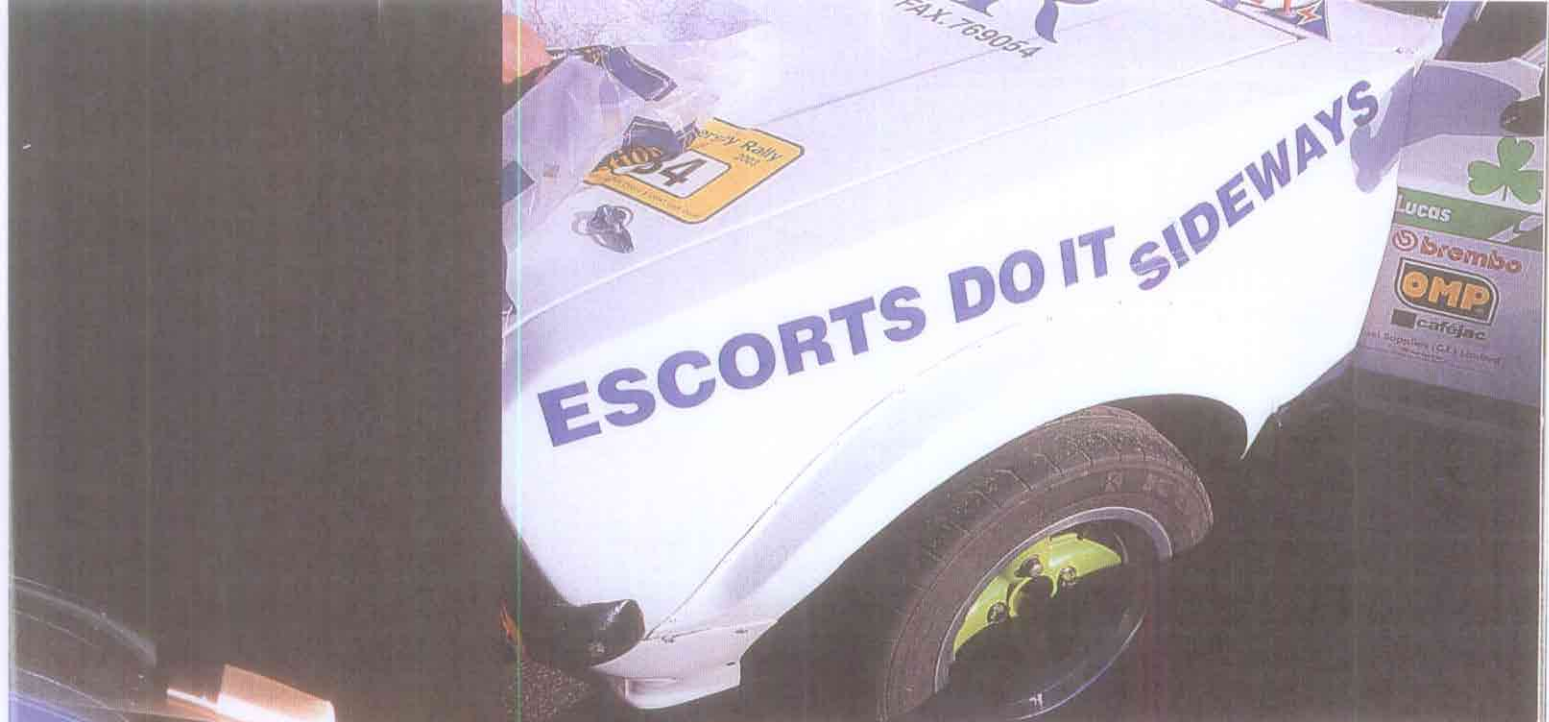
The stomachs of some passengers were seriously tested on the ferry out — one bloke kept on calling out to his mate Raaaaa-l-l-l-ph anyway — but both snapper Woodall and I were dead hard in the face of the Force 8 gale blowing and merely used the opportunity to play that silly game where you lean as far into the wind without falling over as possible. I reckon we got to at least 60 degrees. This would be a good weekend!

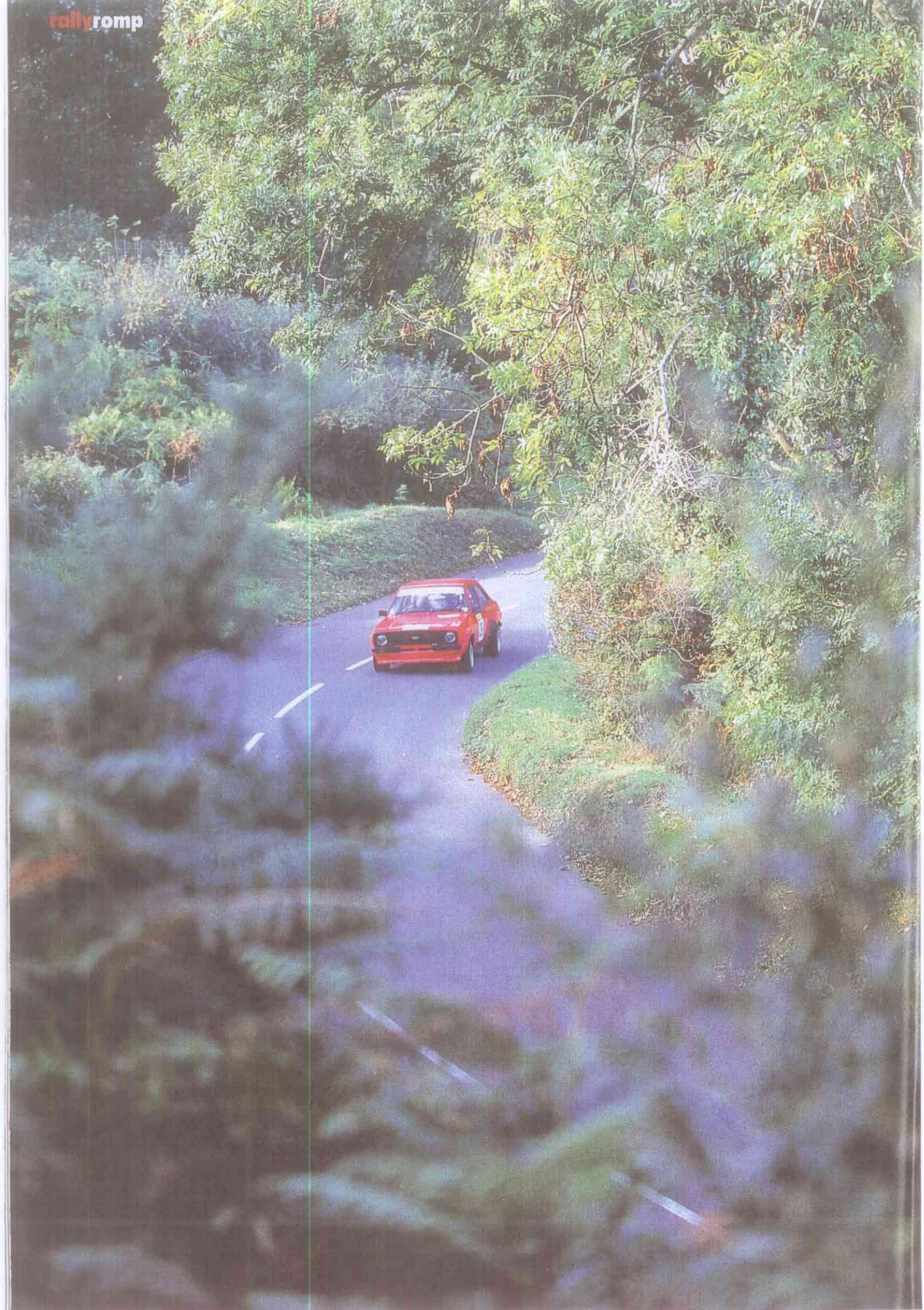
JJ met us at St Helier port and immediately set about filling us in on the details. Scrutineering and noise checking would take place that evening and we'd better get ready for a shock when we saw what great cars were lined up for the rally. Just after dark we found our way to the scrutineering shed and weren't disappointed. Out of 56 entrants 35 were Fords, with the vast majority being either MkI or MkII Escorts. In addition to those were a few Escort WRCs, a beautiful MkIII Escort G3 (rear wheel drive), a Pinto-engined Darrian T90, and one solitary Fiesta belonging to Daryl Morris.

"That Fiesta was a bare shell this time yesterday," says JJ, "but we've all been helping out to get it ready."

This was an early indication of how the members of the club all pitch in and help each other, but there would be bigger examples of camaraderie to come.

Not all the cars were from Jersey. Five were from neighbouring Guernsey — →







Co-driver Adele Mason trying to look relaxed just before her first full rally...



trouble is this loon was this driver — JJ 'no sleep' Gallagher. Nice hat JJ!

massive rivalry of course — and 14 cars came over from the UK.

When JJ's MkII failed to pass scrutiny because of a worn steering joint we soon saw people offering replacements and left him and his mechanic Ray, 'burning the midnight oil' while we slunk off for an early night. Apparently JJ was up 'til 3 am, because when he'd finished his own car he then helped out putting some finishing touches to Daryl's Fiesta. "What does this guy do for sleep?" I thought at the time. The answer came later — he does without if a rally car needs mending.

With just four or five cars having been in the scrutineering shed at a time the full impact of seeing all these classic Fords gathered together didn't strike until the next morning when the competitors gathered for a press call and sign on. 'Stunning' is the only word you can use to describe the scene, the pictures tell the story on that one.

"Hope you two got a good nights sleep," said a way too bright-eyed JJ as he introduced

us to his co-driver Adele Mason. Now Adele sums up the spirit of this event (and the feeling towards rallying on Jersey) if anyone does. We soon learned that this was to be her first full rally experience, having only ever been in the car with JJ once before, but she seemed to be showing no signs of nervousness. "No way," she says "I've been looking forward to this for ages."

What even with JJ in control of the car?" we asked open-mouthed.

"I'll tell you what that's like tomorrow," she laughed.

We left the crews to their briefing and turned our attention to finding a good place to capture the action. I didn't really have much of a clue at this point but then someone stuffed the previous day's edition of the Jersey Evening Post in my mitts and all my worries about knowing what was going on were solved. The paper had a 16 page guide to the rally that was so comprehensive it contained detailed maps of every stage on the event and even showed all the back

routes to the best viewing spots — now that's service for you.

At our first vantage point it soon became clear that this rally is enjoyed by almost everyone on the island. Despite any preconceptions we may have had of the residents of Jersey's attitude to noisy rally cars thundering past their very expensive houses, nothing could be further from the truth.

All along the route spectators were gathered in expectation and when we set up our cameras in the driveway of what must have been a £1 million mansion, rather than telling us to sod off his land, the owner trotted out and offered us all coffee and biscuits. I say almost everyone enjoys the Jersey Rally, but we did hear later of a farmer who used to wait til the stage past his house was live then trundle a horsebox right into the middle of the road! There's always one. Hopefully someone had tied him up this year.

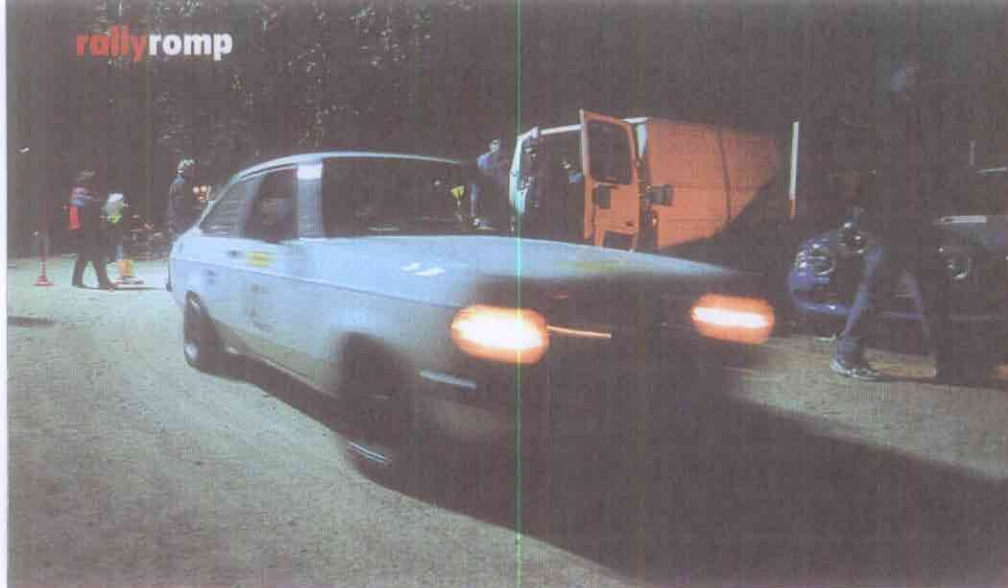
And so the rally got under way and we sat on the first hairpin, fingers waiting on →



Daryl Morris' Fiesta was just a rolling shell 48 hours before the off. He made the end though — but only just.



Cups of coffee were dished out by friendly natives.



There seems to be something missing from JJ's car. The other side isn't too good looking either.

shutter releases. Car number 1, last year's winner, crewed by driver Dean Le Bailly and co-driver Simon Bertie Roberts led off. I'd had a good look round Dean's mint Mk1 Escort the night before and 'faultless' would be the best way to describe it, so I really wasn't expecting to see the car approaching the corner quite as fast as it did. He was really going for it.

"Yeah," said JJ later. "Dean is one of the best rally car builders on the island. He won't hold back. In fact last year he crumpled the car on one stage and replaced the whole floorpan through the night before taking the win the next day."

Next were Chris Le Bonniec and Richard Hollick in an Escort WRC — 2000 and 2001 champions. Chris also owns a genuine RS1800, but decided at the last minute to go with the WRC and wrestle the title back from Dean. What a choice to have though?

As stage after stage on the first day went by, the action just got better and better, but

it soon became clear that following this rally wasn't just going to be about who was leading. Almost from the off there were reports of cars flying through hedges or into stone walls. I know you shouldn't, but guiltily I really did quite enjoy the excitement of who was going to fall off next. Call me evil...

In no time the daylight runs were over and it was time to find a good view for the six night stages. This is what watching rallying is all about. Hearing the roar of engines and watching the pitch black night being lit up by massive spotlamps tearing towards you. A suitable base camp was set up allowing a good view of a seriously tight hairpin followed by a long straight disappearing into the night. And we had picked well. Watching the drivers attempting a hand-brake round the bend led to some jaw-clenching moments as unsuccessful cars fought to find reverse and manoeuvre out of the way before the next racer blasted along. Then the cars would take off along the strip

and the sound of straight-cut gears whining like a Spitfire in a dive would echo round the valley sides. No apologies for going all poetic on you there — it really was that good a noise.

Then everything went quiet. Rumours soon picked up of a big crash somewhere on the stage and when we heard it was the G3 Escort that had hit something very hard, it was a small relief that JJ's name wasn't being mentioned, but a touch of sadness as I'd really liked the look of that MkIII. News soon came back that the crew of Paul and Mandy Trebert were shaken but unharmed and that Mandy had been heard shouting to Paul to make sure the car was fixed by the morning, as she was loaded into the ambulance for a hospital check.

Relief that JJ was still out there somewhere didn't last too long though, and it was with only slight surprise I saw his number flash up on the phone a few minutes later. "We're in the middle of a field," he shouted. "There's a bit of damage but I'm sure we'll be able to fix it." We eventually made it to the crash scene along roads I wouldn't like to travel at 30 mph down, let alone full blast in a rally car. And as the Escort appeared in the headlights I couldn't believe JJ had actually made his previous statement. His MkII was parked at 90 degrees to the road, with one back wheel ripped completely off at the halfshaft and the rear quarter on the other side smashed in by at least a



And the winner was... Chris Le Bonniec in a WRC. Chris owns and rallies a genuine RS1800 too.





foot. But then he repeated the statement and all I could do was admire the guy. And what about Adele, was she shaking and gibbering in the corner? No way, her grin was as big as ever — fair play.

In the end I found out JJ's glass is obviously always three quarters full, because believe it or not, he did fix the mangled car and was back on the starting line by 8 am the following morning. By the time we left JJ, Adele and Ray at 2 am, the bent axle was stripped from the underside and the rear quarter pushed out — I'm proud to say that the panel beating was courtesy of yours truly, snapper Woodall and Woodall's scissors jack from the boot of his Scooby,

plus some serious work with a lump hammer by Ray.

When JJ reappeared at 2 am with a brand new axle casing — kindly donated by fellow competitor John Le Noa from his brand-new project car — I had to leave. I just couldn't keep my eyes open, and when the axle turned out to have rear disc bracketry already welded to it (JJ's car was running drums) I must admit I lost all faith in this Irish lunatic. "Oh ye of little faith" was the general consensus of opinion as the phone rang at 9 am, with JJ laughing from the other end. "We finished at 7," he says. "See you later, I'm off for a bit of rallying." I didn't question how he was going to manage that

without having slept. There was no way I couldn't have faith in him now.

Not only did JJ and Adele finish the day (with only a minor front-end bump to add to the car's damage) but they then stayed up at the after rally party until 4 am the next morning. Are there some different sorts of nutrients down in the Channel Islands or something? Personally I was knackered even after 6 hours sleep, a luxury by comparison — though we'd had to break into our hotel via a ladder cos we'd forgotten our keys — doh!

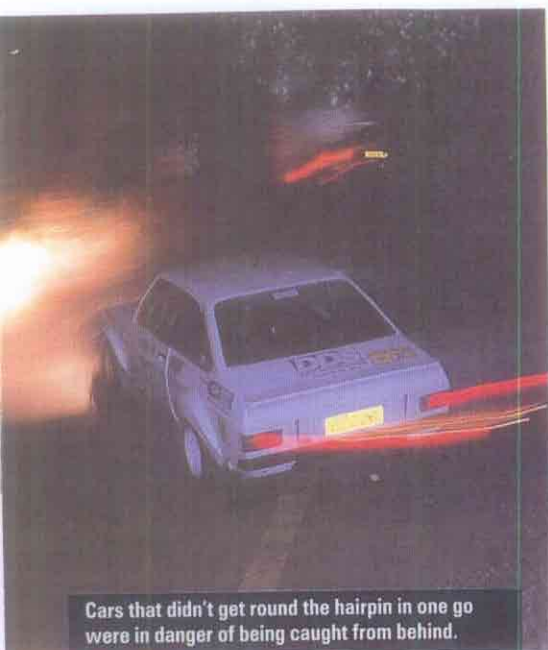
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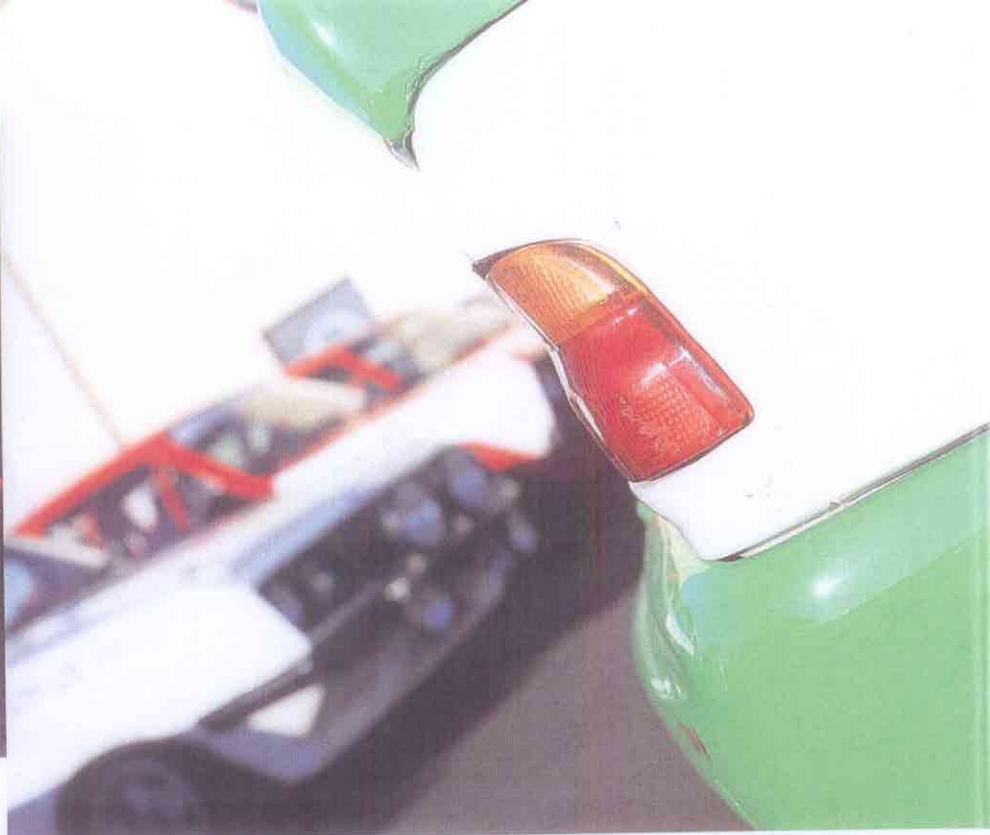
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Cars that didn't get round the hairpin in one go were in danger of being caught from behind.



For the record the overall winners of the rally were comeback guys Chris le Bonniec and Richard Hollick in the WRC, but they only narrowly beat the flying Mk1 of Dean Le Bailly and Simon Bertie Roberts.

This wasn't meant to be a full-on rally report though. I just wanted tell the story of a great weekend. For most drivers, it didn't matter who won, sometimes it really just is the taking part that matters. And with the attitude of JJ, Adele and all the other crews we met helping each other out during the course of the event, that's something that the Jersey Rally seems to prove hands down each year. We'll be back.



The Darrian T90 was Pinto-powered so it was well worth a bit of *Classic Ford* support.



The Escort G3 was one of the best turned out and coolest cars on the rally — until this happened.



Jersey Motorcycle and Light Car Club has organised events since 1920 and rallying appeared in 1935. Its present day membership numbers are 1000-plus, which proves the popularity of motorsport on the island. The modern day Jersey Rally had its inaugural run in October 1983 with 32 entries competing over 10 special stages. The winners of that event were Tony Morgan and Roger Evans and Tony must be keen because he was entered again this year (although his choice of an Evo 7 leaves a bit to be desired in our eyes!). This year's event was the 21st Rally and with 21 special stages over two days, there was plenty of action to witness. Other events through the year include sprints, sand races, trials and hillclimbs. Check out all the details on the dedicated website www.jerseymotorsport.com.

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Getting There

We travelled by Condor Ferries which runs links to the Channel Islands from the Poole and Weymouth Ports. Those of you with the 2003 *Classic Ford* calendar still on your walls will see that Condor has a big link with rallying in the Islands, being a major sponsor of Kevin Mecham's Guernsey-based MkII Escort. To check out times and prices, visit the website www.condorferries.co.uk.



Mark Surcouf and his mates tracked us down to show us it ain't just great rally cars on Jersey.