



DRIVE ON, SPORT

From management cool to red-hot thrills, **Rachel Charwood** interviews Gavin Heseltine, Supplies Manager, on the fast track

Gavin Heseltine, Supplies Manager for the North-East, has an unusual hobby. During the week he exudes the cool, collected persona with which we in the region are so familiar, but come the weekend, he becomes an altogether different character. So what is this hobby that causes him to relish speed, thrills and spills? Gavin is a keen amateur rally enthusiast, acting as co-driver/navigator.

Rallying is the only form of motor sport in which two people are carried within the vehicle. Referred to as the 'crew', these comprise a driver and co-driver, or navigator. Gavin's role as co-driver depends upon the type of event entered, but includes advising the driver on the optimum route to take, warning of hazards, determining the best speed of travel based upon an assessment of prevailing road and weather conditions, and timekeeping.

During a single-venue event, which is in lapped stages, he must also keep a careful count of the number of laps completed. During a multi-venue event, he is responsible for ensuring that the car arrives at the right place, at the right time, having got there via the right route.

Gavin became involved in rallying in 1981, when an old school friend, aware of his interest in maps, asked him to navigate a service van for him and his driver during the Crystal Stages Rally that year. His interest fired, Gavin continued this involvement during 1982-83, navigating service vehicles for different crews. During this period, Gavin also became a member of his local motor club - the North Humberston Motor Club. The turning point for Gavin came in 1983, when he was asked to navigate the rally car of one of the drivers for whom he regularly navigated the service vehicle. He leapt at the chance, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Gavin's first event as navigator of a rally car was the 'Alex E Carr, Holderness Trophy Rally'

organised by his home club. It was a single-venue event held at the Army Driving Training School, Driffield. The car was a Mark 1 Ford Escort powered by a 1.8 litre Lotus Twin Cam engine, owned by the car's driver, John Dixon. Based on John's previous results, the crew was seeded 7th out of 60 competitors. Gavin recalls:



Gavin Heseltine

"I can still remember the shock to my system as we set off from the start line of Stage One. I heard 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, GO! All hell broke loose. The noise increased and the car slithered away, scrabbling for traction. I was stunned by the speed at which everything happened and took quite a while to find my voice to give instructions on approaching hazards.

"Before I got a chance to settle down, we hit problems with the handling of the car, and stopped with what felt like a rear puncture. On closer investigation it became clear that the rear near-side wheel

was completely missing! We were unable to continue, having done less than three miles, and had to wait for the organisers to tow the car back. An ignominious end, perhaps, but I was hooked."

By the end of 1983, Gavin had been on three different types of event, with three different drivers, in three different cars. By early 1986, he had competed in 27 events, with seven different drivers, in 10 different cars. Eleven of these were finishes, and two resulted in awards. All retirements up to this stage were mechanically caused, with one notable exception ... when a puncture led to a close encounter with a quarry wall! Although Gavin has had many near-misses, he has miraculously managed to avoid serious injury.

In 1997, Gavin clocked up his 100th event. Since he first started rallying, he has gained an international rallying licence, competed against international and British champions and had 10 crashes. Not bad for somebody who has never held a driving licence, and cannot drive!