

MARISA SHOWS THE WAYNE

DID RUSS BROWN FAIL IN HIS ATTEMPT TO SIGN UP A CELEBRITY NAVIGATOR FOR THE MAC 4x4? THE HELL HE DID!

Being both the 10th anniversary of the Macmillan 4x4 Challenge and the centenary of Macmillan Cancer Support, the charity for which the event aims to raise £100,000 for each run, the Mac 4x4 10-100 was billed as a special event, and it did not disappoint.

The Macmillan 4x4 Challenge is always a big deal, but this year's event was extra-special for me: my co-driver was Marisa Wayne, daughter of my childhood hero, the legendary Hollywood actor John Wayne. After losing their father to cancer in 1979,



Marisa Wayne, daughter of The Duke

Marisa and her siblings dedicated themselves to the battle against the disease. So she thought nothing of jumping on a plane across the Atlantic to support the run. Eighty teams met up at the start, the Britpart complex at Craven Arms in Shropshire. Britpart has sponsored the Mac 4x4 for several years, and its support this time included loading up two AA Special Operations Response Team (SORT) 110 Defenders with spare parts to keep the competitors going for anything up to 1000 miles. The AA 110s were an ever-present and, for many, welcome sight throughout the four-day event.

DAY 1, THURSDAY

Signed on, scrutineered and raring to go. First instructions couldn't be simpler: head west for 17.1 miles. Within minutes we were in Wales and queuing along a

farm track near Sarn for our first off-road section. Being 30th off the line in our 90, a number of vehicles had already tested the water before us and discovered that there was rather too much of it, so this section was slightly abbreviated.

It was still a good opportunity for my co-driver to get into the mindset of the event as I tuned her radar to the chopped-up pieces of numberplates that were used as code boards, secreted along the route for us to record and thus prove that we had navigated it correctly.

With section one complete, we were back on the road and heading west to a regular venue on this event, the Sweet Lamb test facility at Llangurig. As the sun was setting we plotted a route around



Arriving at the Sweet Lamb test facility



The teams tackle the first forest section



Night starts to fall at Sweet Lamb



Carry on camping at Cong



'THE MACMILLAN 4x4 CHALLENGE IS ALWAYS A BIG DEAL, BUT THIS YEAR'S EVENT WAS EXTRA-SPECIAL'

Quick! Let's head them off at the pass...



the site on an enlarged OS map. With the tight network of parallel tracks and with visible landmarks disappearing into the dusk, confusion prevailed.

Headlights appeared from every direction and one Defender drove off the track into a Land Rover-sized hole. With just five coordinates to follow, we homed in on each one with the help of our GPS. This strategy worked well for us and we were soon in a convoy of vehicles heading off the hill for our final location of the day, the Holyhead ferry terminal.

DAY 2, FRIDAY

We managed a few hours' sleep on the ferry's lounge benches, while wiser folk booked themselves into cabins. Landing at Dublin just before 6am, the convoy of 80 muddy 4x4s negotiated the city streets – an incongruous sight to bleary-eyed, early-bird commuters.

Our destination was the Enfield service area on the M4 toll road: unfortunately, my misinterpretation of the instructions brought me off at the wrong junction, so I ended up paying the toll twice, followed by a further 10 teams I had led astray. I was less than popular that morning – although I suppose I did my bit for the beleaguered Irish economy.

With competitors and their vehicles refuelled, we began our first Irish stage. While others hit the road immediately, mapping en route, we held back, favouring good plotting over speed. The route took us off the motorway, heading for County Galway with a series of questions to answer and single-letter code boards to find. Marisa observed that Irish OS maps had a lot less detail than the British ones she'd become familiar with on our training day.

A bit later on, we came across a gaggle of familiar Land Rovers parked up ahead: Mark Avogadri's and Pete Restall's Tdi Disco had blown its head gasket, seemingly bringing their Mac to a premature end. As they prepared for their long tow back to Dublin, there was nothing we could do but offer our sympathy and head on our way.

That was a bit of a downer, but then we realised precisely where the section was going to end – the village of Cong on the Galway-Mayo border. The village's claim to fame is that, in 1951, it was the filming location for Marisa's favourite movie, The Quiet Man. Its star was... John Wayne.

We arrived late in the morning and pitched tents at the Cong campsite next to Ashford Castle. My co-driver and her



Above: Marisa received a warm welcome at Pat Cohan's bar, which her father John visited in The Quiet Man. Below left: bet his mum thought she'd never see him in a sleepsuit again... Right: Land Rovers take over the ferry's car deck



MACMILLAN 4x4 CHALLENGE

companion, Christine Pfeiffer – who was also competing – were offered a room in the neighbouring hostel. Still suffering from jet lag, they gratefully accepted. Unloading Marisa's bags gave me my first taste of the significance of her presence in this community: every wall in the hostel had a picture of her father.

After lunch, odd- and even-numbered teams were given different routes to follow, to reduce the congestion on the little country roads. Ours took us north through some scenic – and in places very tight – lanes. We cringed at the thought of the two L322 Range Rovers that were on the event squeezing through them. Marisa now had a good feel for the Irish maps and we were extremely chuffed to answer all the questions and tick off more than a dozen code boards.

Back at camp, we discovered the AA boys had replaced Mark and Pete's head gasket in just three hours. The SORT team were definitely the event's A-Team.

An evening off gave us the opportunity to explore the village – and to visit the pub that features in The Quiet Man. I've had a number of fairly well-known celebs as co-drivers on this event over the years but nothing had prepared me for the level of attention that was lavished on Ms Wayne: I felt like I was in the company of royalty.

Everyone was polite, happy to have their photograph taken with Marisa, who remained charming throughout. She, too, was happy to have fulfilled her

ambition of visiting the Pat Cohan Bar. For my part, I have to say it serves the nicest pint of 'Black Beer' I've ever tasted.

DAY 3, SATURDAY

Now it was our turn to do the southern circuit that had been completed by the 'odds' the day before. This was an even more scenic route around Lough Corrib and the hills of Joyce Country.

It was clear that word had got out that Team 30 were the ones to watch: we received waves and cheers, more reminiscent of the Monte Carlo Rally than the normal response to having 40 4x4s pass through your village in a little over an hour. We took our time to enjoy the scenery and get some photographs before returning to the campsite for a quick turnaround for our final Irish stage.

We bade farewell to Cong, heading in an anti-clockwise C-shape towards the city of Galway. The last nine miles gave Marisa a chance to get behind the wheel for some forest-track driving: quite a contrast to the subsequent 120-mile motorway drag back to Dublin.

Our ferry docked at Holyhead shortly after midnight and, after a 20-minute dash, we were at our campsite, the Tracmon race circuit at Ty Croes.

DAY 4, SUNDAY

A great start to the day on two fronts – it was a beautiful sunrise and the race circuit café had opened early to serve breakfast. The morning was spent on a



Team 20 stops to admire the view



Team Blues Brothers rocking and rolling



'BALA OFFERED MARISA WAYNE THE CHANCE TO RAISE HER OFF-ROAD DRIVING EXPERIENCE IN A LARGE MUD HOLE'



Top: Marisa at The Quiet Man museum and hostel; Above: marshal Jason Smith's signature codeboards; Below: the vehicles were a bit muddier on the trip home; Below right: Marisa with the overall winners, Simon Vogel and Mike Walker



picturesque tour of Snowdonia following written directions and answering clues, some of which were quite cryptic.

'What's on the NEWS?' was one example. Much to the amusement of my co-driver, the answer was 'Rooster'. Not the one-eyed marshal played by her father in True Grit, but a silhouette of a chicken on a weather vane above N-E-W-S compass pointers. This three-hour navigation dog-legged in a roughly south-easterly direction, finishing at Bala's popular 4x4 pay-and-play site.

Bala offered Marisa the opportunity to raise her off-road driving experience a notch. The organisers had set up a photo opportunity in a large mud hole, which she drove with ease. The remainder of the trail was a signed track to test our observational skills, looking for those broken numberplates again.

With the final section completed, we were on our way to the De Vere Hotel in Daresbury for a well-earned shower prior to the prizegiving dinner. Marisa took on the role of award presenter, adding a real touch of glamour to the proceedings. Overall winners for the sixth time were Simon Vogel and Mike

Walker, while the highest sponsorship trophy went to Colin Batchelor and Ian Culbert, who have so far raised £5700 of this year's current total of £89,000. The Spirit of the Event Award went – much to their surprise – to event organisers Peter Rowland and Selwyn Kendrick.

There was one more surprise in store: Marisa had to present a trophy to herself, as it turned out we had won second place in the scatter event. I was speechless but my co-driver summed it up quite logically: 'At some point we must have done something right.'

Well done to the organising team for putting on such a superb event, and special thanks to Rogers of Bedford for preparing our Defender prior to the challenge – it never skipped a beat.

And what did Marisa – who used to own a Discovery – make of it all? 'This was completely different from any charity event I've participated in. I really enjoyed the camaraderie and the scenery was just breathtaking. Would I do it again if I got the chance? Definitely!'

■ Thanks to Matt Morgan, Nick Forsyth and several Mac 4x4 competitors for their help with photography. **LRO**

