

## **Red Flag Event**

**Date:** 8 December 2019

**Start Time:** 8.45 AM

**Purpose:** provide emergency radio communications for an all-day, high-speed, high-octane, high-danger sport for South Auckland Car Club members and guests.

**Venue:** Maramarua Forest.

**Parent organisation:** South Auckland Car Club.

**AREC members present:** Peter (ZL1PJH), Mike (ham in training with Peter), Ian (ZL1PZ) Gavin (ZL1NUX), Ian (ZL1AOX), David (ZL1DK).

### **A Hurried Start**

I left home in Waiuku on the run, with no map to get me to the event, conscious I had only one hour to pick up Mike in Otaua and get to the pit area before the rally began. The sun barely lit the sky. I drove faster than I felt comfortable. At the Otaua intersection, David ZL1DK answered my call on 146.900. Yes, the VHF set I had screwed to the car in the dark worked okay. Yes, the event was on. I just had to get there on time.

### **Last Minute Instructions**

My next hurdle was to find the pit area. I knew enough to turn off Highway 2 at Kopuku Road and head south. At Symes Road, a SACC sign told me to leave the tar seal for a gravel road into the forest. Before long, a pit area appeared. There was Dave with a sheaf of forms. He gave me a simplex frequency of 146.525 and placed me first in line behind the lead car on the run to the rally stations which were Alpha, Bravo and Charlie. Mike and I were going to Alpha. A Clerk of the Course instructed us that once the hill climb began we could not let anyone through the locked gate beside the station.

### **In the Firing Line**

What did Mike and I view once we had placed the car in front of the 'stay-locked' gate? We looked down 150 metres of level gravel road with tall pine trees on either side. We knew the road to our left was a steep slope up through the forest. That meant cars coming towards us down the straight gravel lane would go as fast as they could to keep speed up the hill.

### **They're Off!**

And go fast they did! Most of them came towards us with wild left and right swings, as rear wheels tried to overtake front wheels on an unstable surface. At the last moment, each car braked a little and turned up the hill. Clouds of dust billowed over us. Rocks kicked up on the corner clanged against the steel of the locked gate.

### **Visitors Arrive**

In the few micro-seconds available to us, we tried to establish the numbers on the A4 paper sheets taped to each car. When the roar of their exhausts dropped, we radioed 'Alpha - Car 23' or 'Alpha - Car 11' back to Dave at Base. Cars went by each minute - which kept us busy recording car numbers and reporting back. While we worked at this, a number of visitors appeared behind us. They knew they could not come through the stay-locked gate so they parked their cars off to the side and stood around us to watch the rally. We turned up the radio so they knew as much as we did of what was happening. One woman told me her son was in Car 20. I could tell from his finish times that he was fast.

### **Red Flag Required**

A message came through from Base we were to put up a red flag. Our marshal hurried out with the flag. Racing stopped. One of the cars had left Station Charlie further up the hill but had not arrived at Finish. I had been writing down each car's progress throughout the course and saw Car 20 had not yet completed the stage.

### **Car 20 Stopped**

Messages started to come through from Base. No one in Station Charlie could see Car 20. No one at Finish could see or hear the missing car. A support car was on its way up the course. Then a message the support car could see Car 20 stationary. The passenger was out of the car. Nothing more for some minutes.

### **Everyone OK**

I could see the woman who was the mother of Car 20 lean out to get a view up the course. I knew Station Charlie was too far uphill for her to see anything. Time to get more information. 'Alpha to Base. I have Car 20's mum here. Do you have status on Car 20?' There was a long pause then the support car reported 'Everyone OK'. A minute or two later Car 20 came by with a vigorous wave to his mum. A good feeling for me that the 'communication' part of our AREC coverage had done its job.

### **Heading Home**

One more stage and the rally was over. Mike and I headed back along Highway 2. We talked antennae and metres to check them. I had a twenty dollar fuel voucher given me by Dave. A good day for everyone.

### **Station Alpha – P.O.V. shot**



As cars round this corner, they throw up rocks and gravel which comes rollicking towards us! While this happens, we try to read the car number on each rear window. Not easy.