

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HIGH PEAK & 061 MOTOR CLUB

One evening in late 1979 Pete Oliver, Les Penson and Pete Wilets were having an after-hours drink as a guest of Phil Bennison, the landlord of the Robin Hood public house in High Lane, Stockport. They were all members of, and had attended that evening, a meeting of the local car club at the Robin Hood and all were disenchanted with the way the club was being run. It was not the first time that these views had been expressed but this time they had decided to do something about it – start their own club.

All had been involved in motor sport for many years and the news was passed along their network of contacts that an inaugural meeting of the new club would take place at the Stanley Arms in Portwood, Stockport where the landlady allowed the use of a first floor room. The first task facing the club was to decide on a name and the area in which it was to target its membership drive. The latter was agreed upon as South Manchester, an area wide enough, it was hoped, not to upset Stockport Motor Club. The first suggestion for a name was the South Manchester Auto Club, until someone pointed out what the initials were and how the purpose of the Club may have been misinterpreted! It was Dave Ganley who suggested that we adopt the local telephone code for Manchester, 061, as our name and so 061 MC came into being. The telephone theme continued as Dave found an old telephone with the inside removed and this became a piggy bank, which was passed around at every meeting for members to donate what they could afford.

Having elected the club's first officials – the three named above became Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary respectively – and decided that all the membership who chose to turn up at the Committee meetings comprised the committee (a somewhat revolutionary step!) the next priority was to increase the membership to 25 – the number required to obtain affiliation to the RAC. This was quickly achieved and by 1980, despite an objection from Stockport MC, the club was officially recognised by the RAC, following which successful applications for membership to the East Midlands, North West and Northern Associations were made.

It soon became clear that the club had outgrown the accommodation at the Stanley Arms and it moved to the Burnage Inn in Burnage, Manchester and it was from here that we organised the first ever 061 Road rally. It was difficult in those days to get a date on the popular Derbyshire and Cheshire maps because of the many road rallies run in the area and the club was forced into running an event on 109 and the North western part of 118 – an area not previously rallied. Unfortunately on the night of the event the police, who were unused to road rallies, took exception to what was going on and the Club decided to stop the event halfway.

Everyone thought that this was probably the end for 061 MC, but amazingly the turn out on the club night following the event was probably the largest in its history. Many competitors turned up to congratulate the organising team for what they had attempted and a considerable number put their money where their mouths were by becoming members, including Rob Braithwaite and Mike Roper, the leading Derbyshire crew of the time, and Neil Stewart

and Geoff Gilman who were to become stalwarts of the club in later years. 061 were also helped by the support it received from Dave Orrick, who had been navigating Car 1 on the rally. Dave, an International Stage co-driver and motorsports journalist gave the club many plugs in both Motoring News and Rallysport Magazine which he edited.

Over the years the club moved venue on a number of occasions (usually following change of landlord), and after the Burnage Inn it enjoyed a long stay at The Carousel in Reddish, Stockport, before moving to perhaps its natural home back at the Robin Hood, High Lane. However shortly after Phil Bennison left the Robin, the club moved again and after a brief period of meeting at The Magnet in Stockport town centre, it found the ideal location at Disley Sports Club where the club has been since 1989.

Although the original membership of the club was drawn principally from the South Manchester area this changed over the years as a result of the meeting venues moving progressively closer to the Peak District and the membership increasingly came from that area. This, coupled with the fact that 061 had not been the dialling code for Manchester for many years, eventually persuaded the club in 2000 to change its name to High Peak and 061 Motor Club and at the same time it became a Limited Company.

The club has always prided it self on its commitment to train members in the art of motorsport and it has a host of home-grown successes to back up its claim of being the best training ground for new stars in the area, if not in the country. Current members who joined the club as novices but went on to major success in road rallying, including Championship win and overall victories in rallies include Martin Payne, Alan Ogden, Martin Self and Brian Stott. However, such is the reputation of the club that it has also been able to attract members who are already well established in the sport – Martin Smith for example who was East Midlands champion in 2000 and in the mid-eighties Jonathan Ingram who was one of the last winners of the coveted Motoring News Championship.

Whilst High Peak and 061 is primarily a rally club it has never neglected other forms of motorsport, and during its history has organised numerous autotests and a stage rally and has members who have successfully competed in karting, historic car rallying and even racing. In 2001 the club is particularly proud of the success of Rob Yates who won his class in the BTRDA Stage Championship. However the success of the club is built upon the 061 Road Rally, which despite its inauspicious start back in 1980, is now one of the premier road rallies in the country. It has been voted best East Midlands Championship round on several occasions and in 2000 was honoured by the Association of North Western Car Clubs to be asked to run the event as the Inter Association road Rally, attracting crews from all over Great Britain.

It's a long time since those four people sat round the bar in the Robin Hood, and none of them could have dreamt of the successes (and the disappointments) of the next two decades and more. The future of High Peak and 061 MC, as ever, is in the hands of its members, and that now includes you. So what's your contribution going to be?