

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Would you dare rally your classic from London to Lisbon?

**Lead**  
Driving a classic car from London all across Europe and down to Lisbon is already an adventure. Doing so in a classic Mini - and taking home first place in HERO-ERA's London 2 Lisbon rally - is even more remarkable.



The mighty Mini has enjoyed more than its fair share of glory when it comes to David and Goliath battles, and now father and son team Dick and Harry Baines have added to the model's list of successes by sweeping aside Porsche 911s, Ford Mustangs and big Healeys to win this year's HERO-ERA London to Lisbon classic rally.

Staged last month having been postponed from last year, the usually biennial event saw more than 40 competitors start from Brooklands on April 21 for the 10-day, 2,000 mile odyssey that incorporated 42 regularity sections and eight special tests.

An eclectic grid ranged from a 1917 La France runabout (without weather protection) to more typical classic rally favourites such as Ford Escorts, Volvo Amazons and MGBs.







Due to Covid lockdowns this was only the second multi-country rally to have been staged by HERO-ERA since 2019 (the other being last July’s Classic Marathon which saw a return to such international competition after a gap of 483 days).

As a result, some London-Lisbon cars appeared on the start line without the usual level of preparation – Roy Stephenson and Peter Robinson’s 1971 Datsun 240Z, for example, had been in a lock-up for three years and Paul and Sandra Heaney’s Triumph TR6 had been nothing but a pile of parts just three weeks before the flag dropped.

After a first test on the Brooklands banking, the cars headed towards Sussex and the south downs via a string of quaint English villages in order to reach Portsmouth and the overnight cross-Channel ferry to St Malo.



Day two saw the start of the run south through rural France towards the Poitiers night stop, a journey punctuated with a trio of ‘regularities’ and a special test, the day ending with Ken and Sarah Binstead’s three-litre Healey in the lead followed by the Baines Mini and Graham Platts and Neil Ripley in another Healey.

Previously sunny conditions turned to rain for the whole of the next day’s long run to Montauban, much of which the Mini completed on two cylinders, climbing steeper hills at a maximum speed of five mph. Day four’s goal was Andorra, meaning testing climbs and the sort of thin air that plays havoc with old carburettors.

A high-speed test on a kart circuit preceded the assault on the mountains, where serpentine passes took the cars to a height of 2,500 metres and from bright sun into dense cloud that gave way to rain and sleet.





The day ended with the Binstead Healey still in front, a lead it retained throughout day five's drive to Pamplona during which the larger cars, such as the wide-bodied 911 of Tony Sutton and Bernard Northmore, came close to being barred by the remarkably narrow streets in some of the mountain hamlets.

The tough climb, meanwhile, really did mark the end of the road for Nigel and Sally Woof after it proved too much for the gearbox of their 1963 Alfa Giulia.



The Binsteads were undoubtedly confident as the crews took to the spectacular roads of the Picos de Europa, passed along parts of the pilgrim trail to Santiago di Compostella and began to head south on day six. But fate (and a previously damaged bracket) stepped-in and saw the low-slung Healey lose its entire exhaust system - along with any chance of completing the event.

For the others, a long and uninteresting motorway blast ended in lunch at the mediaeval fortress of Torre Loizaga which houses what is described as 'Europe's most complete collection of Rolls-Royces'.



Later in the day, Neil Lawson-May and Richard Williams were forced off the road in their Lancia Fulvia by a pack of snarling farm dogs and had to be dragged from a ditch by tractor – but survived to tackle the spectacular Machucos Pass, after which the Baines Mini ended the day with a 39-second lead.



With Puente Viesgo being the goal for day seven, just 37 cars were left in the event and, after several more hours of wrestling with steering wheels on twisting mountain roads, crew fatigue was beginning to show – not helped, perhaps, by the altitudes which were sufficiently high for Golden Eagles to be spotted (as well as more ominous vultures....).

By the end of the day – and after another kart track special test – the Mini continued to lead with Nick Maris and Henry Carr a minute behind in their Datsun 240Z and Stephen Owens and Pete Johnson third in a 911.



A full week after the start, the next day's destination was Vidago. With more mountain passes to tackle, the cars had to climb back towards the 2,000 metre mark on hills that reached a maximum gradient of 19.4 per cent – a slope that, remarkably, the 105-year-old La France took in its stride.



The afternoon saw the teams cross the border into Portugal where they were faced with three regularities before heading to an overnight stop at the luxurious Vidago Palace hotel.



The Baines Mini started day nine still in the lead, but with the Mars/Carr 240Z closing in and the Owens/Johnson 911 not far behind, the rally headed towards the historic Caramulo hill climb where the two more powerful cars posted times that were around 30 seconds faster than the Mini could muster.

The quickest of all, however, proved to be the Healey of David Coxon and Phil Hawkins that completed the ascent in an impressive two minutes, 26 seconds – but nothing was enough to unseat the Mini, which finished the penultimate day still in first place, albeit by a margin of just eight seconds.



The final push from Coimbra Lisbon the following day included five special tests that resulted in a change of third place as the Owens/Johnson 911 SWB was overtaken by the SC of Tony Sutton and Bernard Northmore.

But still the Baines Mini reigned supreme, bringing the father and son crew home in first place by a 15-second margin – a remarkable result for a team that only started rallying together last year and for a car that, not long before the start, had spent 21 years in a farm shed.

And if you fancy a go at long-distance rallying, take note that the next HERO-ERA event is [the Temple Rally which runs from Athens to Rome from September 1 – 13](#).

One suggestion, however: start preparing now.....

*Photos by Will Broadhead*

## **Gallery**







































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