

NEW DEFENDER CHALLENGE BY BOWLER SERIES GETS UNDERWAY WITH COMPETITIVE FIRST ROUND AT MID WALES STAGES RALLY

- Driver Edd Cobley and co-driver Allan Jackson take the plaudits on first round of new Defender Challenge by Bowler race series
- Rally fans gather on Sweet Lamb hillside to witness the Mid Wales Stages event

Newtown, Wales, March 2014: The inaugural round of the Defender Challenge by Bowler one-make rally series officially began this weekend as the first teams to enter the competition rolled up to the start line in Newtown, Mid Wales, as part of Sunday's Mid Wales Stages rally.

The culmination of a challenging first round, dogged by consistent rain, saw Edd Cobley and co-driver Allan Jackson claim a well-deserved first place after clocking a time of 66.16.5. Also showing decent pace in their first competitive stage rally were Damian Taft and co-driver Simon Taft, posting a time of 78.13.5, closely followed by Andrew Wicklow and Simon Armstrong in third with 79.05.9.

The 55 mile route saw teams race over forest roads and hillside tracks through areas including Pikes Peak and Sweet Lamb. Across five stages the drivers were able to hone their skills, driving on a mix of terrain including over loose gravel and through muddy tracks, with the rain creating slippery surfaces in places to provide a further test.

The day wasn't without incident, with the wet weather increasing throughout the day to challenge all drivers. On one of the last turns on Stage 4, driver Richard Hayward (car 302) slid out of a corner before mounting a bank and hitting a tree, sustaining transmission damage in the process of trying to return to the course. In the spirit of the Defender Challenge, racer Damien Taft (car 303) had slowed down to check if Hayward needed assistance before continuing, with Hayward and his co-driver Matt Lister able to get their vehicle back on the road. Hayward was able to complete the stage and, whilst the crew worked through the service to successfully get the car running, it transpired that the time taken to get the vehicle out of the ditch meant Hayward was over his time allocation so couldn't progress to the final stage.

Speaking at the finish point, Edd Cobley (car 301), 34, said: "Today was absolutely fantastic. The Defender performed as it always performs, a brilliant drive and a great car. There were a few interesting moments on some of the hairpins but we had a really good day. We had great support from the organisers and from Bowler and I think we surprised a fair few people by nipping at people's heels on the stage. In these wet conditions the Defender was in its element."

Speaking as he crossed the line, driver Damien Taft (car 303), 47 from Enville, said: "Today's racing was awesome. We really progressed as the day went on and we got better stage by stage. The Defender was fantastic, it performed brilliantly. As our first round in the competition we couldn't have wished for anymore."

Taft added: "For me, this is a first chance to get involved with Land Rover since I last competed which was twenty years ago in the Camel Trophy. I had the idea I wanted to rally again and the Defender Challenge provides the ideal step towards racing in the Dakar."

Speaking at the service centre, Drew Bowler, Managing Director of Bowler Motorsport, said: "We couldn't be happier with how Round 1 of the Defender Challenge by Bowler has gone. The cars performed really well and the drivers have clearly enjoyed themselves, with a number of them developing through the day. The weather delivered some interesting challenges but we all did what we set out to do and the drivers are now up and running on the pathway to rally raid. The

organisation of today's event was fantastic and we were all delighted with our welcome from the organisers, the other teams and the spectators."

Across the remaining six rounds, competitors will face a demanding blend of hill rallies and stage rallies spread across South Wales, Somerset, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire and Dorset, before the final round takes place in Scotland in mid-November. Entrants will also have the option of competing in additional rallies in Europe and North Africa alongside the Bowler Works team.

More teams are set to be added ahead of the second race of the series, with a total of up to 15 cars due to compete in this year's series. Each team must take part in a minimum of five of the seven rounds, with their top five placings counting towards the final standings.

The ultimate aim of the series is to provide a route for teams to progress to top rally raid competitions such as the Dakar and the Africa Race, a pathway previously non-existent for drivers and teams aspiring to compete in the world's toughest races. Competing in the Defender Challenge by Bowler are drivers with experience of races such as the Dakar, the Dubai Desert Challenge, and drivers for whom this will be their first stage rally. For Damien Taft, this was his first motorsport event since representing the UK in the 1994 Camel Trophy. In addition, Richard Hayward is a previous Dakar competitor and a second place finisher in the former London-Dakar race. Other drivers, such as Steve Richards and Andrew Wicklow, were racing in their first ever stage rally event, both with the aim of developing their skills and gaining the required licence to compete in the Dakar.

All competitors drive Bowler-prepared Land Rover Defender 90 vehicles that have been expertly modified for safety, performance and durability. The modifications to the competing Land Rover Defender 90 vehicles include a full MSA / FIA certified roll cage, fire extinguisher system, racing seats and harnesses, light-weight Bowler wheels, a full Bowler racing suspension system with bespoke springs and heavy duty racing dampers and an engine tuned to 175hp that delivers 450Nm of torque.

The Defender Challenge is a 'class' within existing rally events where total entries of all classes will be between 80 and 130 cars (including the Defender Challenge cars). These events vary in distance and duration, but all will give the team (driver, navigator, service crew) an introductory experience of national level motorsport. Completion of the series will gain the driver their National B rally licence, and attendance at some of Bowlers' overseas races will allow this to be converted into the International licence required for events such as the Dakar.

People wishing to find out more information about the Defender Challenge by Bowler should visit: www.bowlermotorsport.com. Updates during the race can be found on the @LandroverUKPR twitter feed.

Defender Challenge by Bowler standing after Round 1:

Position	Car	Driver	Co-Driver	Time
1	301	Edd Copley	Allan Jackson	66.16.5
2	303	Damien Taft	Simon Taft	78.13.5
3	305	Andrew Wicklow	Simon Armstrong	79.05.9
4	304	Steve Richards	Kevin Handley	96.58.9*
5	302	Richard Hayward	Matt Lister	Stage 4**

**includes time penalties*

***finished Stage 4 but outside of time allocation to progress to Stage 5*

-ENDS-