

T3s go wild in the country

The Synchronauts meet up once a year for their annual get together; wild camping in a field by a river and driving up and down mountains in Wales. What could possibly go wrong?

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Syncropendence 2017 is the annual club meeting for all members of Club 80-90 Synchronauts - which is basically open to club members who own a T3/T25 Syncro and taking its name from the fact it is usually held around July 4th.

It's home for the past couple of years has been a field in the Welsh mountains - about an hour of so west of Shrewsbury (near a town that had way too many Ls in it) where phone signals are few and far between - especially on Vodafone. I had to climb halfway up the opposite mountain to get a phone signal to inform my B&B that I might be late;

I don't do wild camping (bring your own bed / water / toilet and power) - and even if I did there is no way my car would have made it across the fields to the campsite. Not to mention the river I'd have to cross en-route; many thanks to everybody who gave me lifts across rivers / up / down mountains over the weekend.

People, and dogs and even a ferret, started to arrive on the Friday afternoon and the event really kicked off with a driver's safety briefing on the Saturday morning. Safety is a key ingredient of the weekend as the club is registered for motorsports with the MSA. That safety briefing included such items

1: This Dutch syncro is a regular attendee at Syncropendence

2: Where we go - the ferret goes!

3: Driver's safety briefing

4: Gently does it ...

5: One of the few occasions when flooring the gas pedal is needed

6: When there are tracks they are loose gravel and stones, lots of stones

as identifying the first aiders (they even carried a de-fib machine in case of heart attacks!), confirming convoy and vehicle recovery procedures, and even pointing out who was responsible for helicopter marshalling - if required. Apparently they nearly called in a chopper on a previous year when they discovered a mountain biker who'd had a really bad fall.

Then it was a line-up while there were checks that the VWs were road, or rather off-road worthy and then we all headed for the hills. This year there were just over a dozen vehicles heading for the hills (14 if you want to be exact) - in some past years it's been almost double that. The experience of drivers varied from those such as club boss Clive, who had many off-road miles under his belt, and was designated driving instructor, to those who had never done more than drive their Syncro





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into a field. That category included a couple who had recently bought a T3 Syncro and were in the process of converting it into a camper for 2018 when they are planning to take a round the world trip. Part of that planning included some driving lessons with Clive (often the hardest thing to learn is that at times you just need to put the vehicle in the right gear, usually G, and then take both feet off the pedals and let it do the work for you) and putting together a spares package so that when they break down they can phone home and ask mum to post them the part they require while they wait at the roadside in the middle of Timbuktu.

Now I've had experience of T3 Syncro convoys before - you may remember my epic adventure last year driving up rivers, but luckily the weather for this weekend was much better - with barely a cloud in sight. The convoy climbed up from the valley on gravel paths and across grass, and over the top and then down and up and over another mountain, around the famous lonely tree landmark before all converging on a plateau high in the mountains surrounded by spectacular views for their famous annual team photo.

For some reason it reminded me of a scene for Jurassic Park and I fully expected to see herds of dinosaurs strolling across the grass.

But all we encountered were sheep.

Then the dirty dozen or so split up to explore the scenery and pose for my camera. There was a wide range of scenery to explore and put the T3s to the limits of their 4WD ability; some even managed to push their VWs beyond that very impressive limit and got stuck in the infamous Mud Hole and had to be rescued! However when you are roaming the hillside with a load of other VW 4x4s there is always a friendly expert on hand to help pull you out of a hole, while everybody else stands around and makes comments. And you could always chat and learn about diffs, tyres or engine conversions (there was a wide range of engine specs present) while you waited for recovery.

After a couple of hours driving it was time to return to the campsite base for lunch and swap stories and prepare for the afternoon's adventure which included driving down the river which surrounded the campsite and then back into the mountains to tackle a slalom course which had been laid out for the team. It was a challenge and drivers had to make sure they were in the right gear and make sure they didn't touch any of the gates while their VW was pitched at all manner of wild angles.

Sometime later it was back down the hill, avoiding the clay pigeon

Some even managed to push their VWs beyond that very impressive limit and got stuck in the infamous Mud Hole



7: Secluded camping spot

8: The river surrounding the campsite proved too tempting to resist

9: You don't want a loose wheel nut on this terrain!

10: The infamous Mud Hole

11: Three wheels on my wagen ...

12: How to feel King of the Hill

shooting area, for the communal meal - a Greek theme for 2017 - and bonfire. It was a similar timetable of driving challenges for the Sunday, and some people even stayed over on the Sunday night too.

To find out more about the Synchronauts and their meetings check out www.synchronauts.org.uk/ Or, if you fancy an off roading experience catch them at Camper Jam where they take passengers round the purpose built off roading course in the woods. An amazing £1740.31 for Clic Sergeant Cancer was raised from donations by thrilled passengers at last year's show! 🐾