



*Sian Lloyd*

## TV WEATHER GIRL

The Three Castles Welsh Classic Trial isn't all just glam cars and their fortunate owners, says Sian. It raises money for charity and boosts Wales' economy

**I**n an age when so many fairytales seem to be just that (the proposed racetrack in the Valleys anyone?), it's heartwarming to be able to report on one Welsh venture that just keeps on growing. Now in its 'glorious twelfth' year, the Three Castles Welsh Classic Trial is an annual car rally for motors of almost all ages. The idea was born in the depths of that depressing period back in 2001, when North Wales was blighted by the horrors of Foot and Mouth disease.

Sitting in their cosy kitchen on Anglesey, a husband and wife couple decided to do something about the economic threats facing the region. Twelve years down the line, they can happily claim to have pumped hundreds of thousands of pounds in to the North Wales economy. Wendy, born on the island and brought up in Bethesda, is proud to have "given something back", whilst London adman Ian combines a zeal for classic car rallying with a love of the Welsh landscape. It's a perfect combination.

Of course, there's nothing new about rallying in Wales. My husband Jonathan talks fondly about those halcyon days in the 70s and 80s, when rallying was at its peak. It's fallen off somewhat since then, largely due to spiralling costs. Back in the early noughties when Wendy and Ian formulated their plan, there was something very bold about bringing visitors with million pound cars to Wales. Rallying was the ideal vehicle for introducing folk to our landscape. And these affluent folk would in turn spend in our shops and eateries. Places like the award-winning Kimmel Arms and Portmeirion report guests returning to stay at other times of the year.

In that very first year, Ian and Wendy attracted over 100 fine classic cars from all over Europe, including eight fabulously valuable cars from the Ferrari Owners Club of Holland. There were 1920s Bentleys, Aston Martins, Jaguar XKs, Austin Healeys, and even Bugattis. The event's gone from strength to strength, nowadays running an entry of around 135 cars of all sorts over three days in early June.

But it's not just for glam cars and their fortunate owners. The event has also introduced lots of different people to classic rallying. This is a rally for everyone. Any car can win. My husband dreams of participating in a value for money MGB from the 70s. Simple, straightforward, reliable and great fun. And since this is one of the most sociable rallying events in Europe, I rather fancy doing a crash course in road books and joining him as a co-driver!

All this is achieved by a crew of over a hundred people, with local passion and knowledge shining through. The enthusiastic support of the good people of Llandudno and those across the rally's 500 mile route, is second to none. The local motor clubs also play a vital part, manning controls on windswept mountaintops and down in the depths of isolated valleys. Mind you, the weather normally behaves during that first week in June, meaning not too much scope for jokes when I host the Awards Ceremony at Venue Cymru on the Saturday night.

As well as the obvious boost to hotels and petrol stations, Three Castles also raises money for local good causes. Charities to benefit so far include Ty Gobaith Children's Hospice, St David's Hospice, the Army Benevolent Fund Wales and the RAF

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Association at RAF Valley. In 2014 the Classic Trial will be supporting the welfare work of the Llandudno branch of Blind Veterans UK, formerly known as St Dunstan's. This charity helps blind ex-Service men and women lead independent lives by giving them a full range of support services.

I'm proud to be involved, albeit in a minor hosting role, with the Three Castles Classic. We need more quality events like this in Wales. The elegant Victorian seaside town of Llandudno is the home of the event for four days and nights. There'll be a terrific atmosphere at scrutineering on the Promenade, as well as at the Finish Line.

I promise to conjure up five-star weather for this five-star event, so see you there!

