



*'Until we were forced to retire we were actually beating our dad. We were so chuffed with that'*

## The Whyte sisters

*Performers Elise and Seren Whyte have shown few signs of stage fright since taking up historic rallying*

**I**'M ELISE AND I'M 21. My sister, Seren, is two years older, but we look alike and are very close, so many people think we're twins. We come from Swansea but share a flat in London, where we both studied Performing Arts. We now earn a living as entertainers, acting and dancing in plays and musicals, and we're currently appearing as sword fighters in an exhibition at the Globe Theatre. Our real passion, though, is historic rallying. Our dad was a club rally driver before we were born and he then became a marshal and rally organiser, so motor sport has always been part of our lives.

In 2009 we helped marshal at Le Jog, HERO's Land's End to John o'Groats Reliability Trial. Then, in 2010 we went along again to present HERO's video coverage of the event, and after doing the same at the Summer Trial we decided we wanted to compete. We couldn't make Le Jog in 2011 as we were appearing in a pantomime, but were determined to enter in 2012 and raise some money for the Pink Ribbon Foundation for breast cancer.

We did a one-day training course in a Triumph TR4A, which taught us how to navigate – in theory, at least. We also went to Mercedes-Benz World to drive on their skid pan as neither of us had any experience of driving on ice, and freezing conditions were

inevitable in Scotland in mid-winter.

Le Jog was our first ever event and it was a real baptism of fire. We didn't have a suitable car of our own (in fact, living in London we don't have a car at all) but we took advantage of HERO's 'Arrive and Drive' package and opted for a lovely little red 1964 Mini Cooper S. We didn't need competition licences, although we have just applied for them for future events. The Mini is a nippy little car and we fell in love with it instantly, and although I'm the best with the maps we decided to share the driving as we both wanted to get behind the wheel.

As we were waved away from the start we were shaking with nerves and could hardly remember our left from our right, but we soon settled down. Nobody expected us to finish, but finish we did and as we crossed the line the marshals and spectators burst into applause. We covered 1500 miles in three-and-a-half days, battling through wind, rain, snow and black ice. Coffee very quickly became our best friend! Of the 60 crews that started, only 29 finished; it was that tough. According to HERO's records, we are the youngest ever crew – male or female – to finish.

Because we are so close, we communicate very well in the car. We never shout at each other, although yelling seems to be perfectly normal for lots of other crews. Weirdly, I think

our day jobs are a help, too: as performers we often work late at night, so we cope well with the long hours and late finishes on rallies.

In March we did the Classic Rally Association's Poppy Rally – again driving the Mini. That was a two-day regularity rally on some amazing roads in Belgium. It included some tricky night sections, and to make things that little bit harder, it was the first time either of us had driven abroad. The breakfast table at the hotel on day one was covered with sprawling maps, coloured marker pens and speed tables, but our preparation paid off and we were much closer to our target times than we had been on Le Jog, which was encouraging.

However, on a special test on day two, the car got away from us on a wet corner and we hit a tree square-on, putting us out. That was rather embarrassing – and costly. We're quite girly and aren't really mechanically minded, but we are trying to pick things up so that if we do break down we can fix problems ourselves. Our dad was also driving in the rally and until we retired we were actually beating him. We were so chuffed with that.

In April's London to Lisbon Rally we will both be navigating for other drivers to gain some more experience, and in June we'll be back in the Mini for the the Pirelli Classic Marathon. We've still got lots and lots to learn, but we're determined to become the first female crew to win the HERO Cup.

**ELISE AND SEREN** are seeking sponsorship to allow them to continue to compete in historic rallies in the UK and abroad. To get in touch, visit their website, [www.whytesistersrally.com](http://www.whytesistersrally.com).