

□ Ireland's claim to fame used to be whiskey, leprechauns and the blarney stone. It still has all three — plus Rosemary Smith — a tall, vivacious, attractive blonde and one of the world's top woman rally drivers.

The conception of the female motorsport competitor as George Chualo with long hair gets shot down in flames with Miss Smith who looks more like she should be modelling the clothes she designs, than competing in one of the most difficult, grueling and at times dangerous sports in the world.

If some doubting Thomas' still exists as to her driving ability, she has only to mention some of her successes: first overall in the Tulip Rally in 1965; five time winner of the Coupe de Dames in the Circuit of Ireland Rally; first in class finishes in the Tour de France, Alpine Rally, Scottish International, and the RAC of England! In the 1966 Monte Carlo (prior to disqualification) Rosemary was first in class and sixth overall.

Born 27 years ago in Dublin, where she still lives with her parents, Rosemary first learned to drive at the age of 14. "My father, who had a car dealership used to teach me on back lanes and country roads. But, at that time, my sole interest in cars was strictly as a form of transportation."

She left school at 16 to enter the Grafton Academy of Dress Design in Dublin. "Academic studies were not for me," she says "my sister had all the brains when it came to schooling!" She left the Academy after winning first prize in their annual design contest — no mean feat after only being there for six months, and went to 'learn the trade' in a garment factory for the fantastic weekly salary of \$8.00.

After spending a couple of years there she decided to start her own dress salon and shortly after branched out into a flourishing 'boutique' establishing herself as a top Dublin designer. She owned this shop for seven years giving it up last September.

Rosemary entered her first rally in 1961 — strictly due to the coaxing of a friend who felt it might be a new and interesting way to spend some leisure time and with Rosemary as navigator they won the rally.

Turning driver, she participated in her first Monte Carlo in January 1962 at the wheel of a privately owned Rapier and although the car was virtually unprepared and brand

new, she did get to the finish — much to her own personal satisfaction.

It was just after the Monte that she was approached by the Competition Department of Rootes to drive for them on their rally team. At first, she admits, she was just not that interested in continuing to rally but after some persuasion she decided to give it a more serious try.

She has driven for Rootes since that date — competing in everything from Imps to Tigers and was entered by Rootes of Canada in this past Shell 4000 Car Rally in a factory prepared Imp — her first introduction to North American rallying.



Rosemary Smith

As a driver Rosemary is a perfectionist and her pet dislike is female (and/or male) drivers who try to compete on an international level with little or no experience. "Be it racing or rallying, they are not only a hazard to others but put themselves in a dangerous position. I dislike very much seeing another driver blocking or taking no notice of other competitors around him or her. This person shouldn't be racing or rallying."

Rosemary is obviously a keen competitor. Her overall win in the Tulip Rally did not give her such a sense of accomplishment as in the '65 Alpine event where she finished fifth overall in a closely fought rally which she feels requires more driving skill than the Tulip. She is definitely not satisfied with just the Coupe des Dames and a lower standing — she competes for high overall standings.

Aside from racing and rallying, Miss Smith does not stray far afield for other forms of recreation since her other interest lies in go-

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Rosemary
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karting. And in 1965 she was Women's Go-Karting Champion of Ireland. As for other hobbies, she states that, "Ireland is perfect for all sorts of sports such as tennis, boating, golf, etc., and when I have time I enjoy and like to participate in all these things."

Single, Rosemary is in no hurry to get married. "I've been engaged five times, and every time the man involved has been very interested in my driving . . . until discussions arise about married life and it is obvious that I would have to give up the driving. Hence, five broken engagements."

Since last September, Rosemary Smith, dress designer, has become Rosemary Smith, full time rally driver. When she is not doing an excellent job of PR for Rootes in various parts of the world, she is rallying or checking out rally routes for the Competition Department.

As for her future in motorsport. "There are at the present only two fully contracted woman factory rallyists in Europe — myself and Pat Moss. The majority of manufacturers now feel that International rallying — like Grand Prix driving — is a man's sport. Much more demanding and much more skill required than in the past. Therefore, many of the top woman drivers are without rides. I should like to compete for at least another two years — or until such time that I feel I'm not doing the job that's expected of me, in which case I shall quit immediately."

One thing is for certain. Rosemary Smith will always be remembered in International Rally circles as one of the most successful, popular and attractive rallyists in motorsport. An excellent ambassador for Rootes and Ireland.

THE EDITOR talks to **ROSEMARY SMITH**



ALTHOUGH they don't all by any means reach the standards set by say, Russian women discus throwers, girls who get to the top in international sport don't always hang on to characteristics which get masculine heads whipping round to the accompaniment of loud appreciative noises. (Not, of course, that we have anything against Russian women discus throwers, who are undoubtedly immensely good at throwing discuses, or disci.) This is, we realise, pretty dodgy ground to be a-treading, but if we're honest the idea of a top international sportswoman is a bit terrifying, and the first handshake could be painful, if you see what we mean.

But Rosemary Smith (the blonde Dublin dress designer, as the advertisements and the press handouts tend to say with monotonous regularity) isn't like that. She comes under the heading of pretty delectable birds by any standards, and so far as the top sportswoman bit goes, she has shown that she can pedal a motor car round an Alp or a race track with the best of 'em. Just lately, she has become particularly well-known for the way she conducts an Imp, which means that for the purposes of this issue we reckoned she had to be the girl to talk to about driving the things in rallies and so on. We were going to talk to her about driving them on the road in the normal way until we discovered that she tends to trot about in an Elan when no one's looking.

She started motoring in Ireland with a Triumph Herald, and changed to a Mini in 1961. Then came Rapiers and Alpines, a drive in the Rootes works team which led to more and more drives in the same outfit and, in due course, a suggestion from Marcus Chambers to drive an Imp in the Scottish Rally. She didn't think much of the idea, and since the whole thing was a disaster she could have been right. But now she is dead in favour of 'em. "Since then," she said, "the only Imp we have ever had trouble with was a bog-standard one we used for a Monte recce"—she was talking to us a couple of days before she finished third in the 1600 c.c. G.T. class on the Gulf Rally, slightly astern of two other Imps. Earlier this year, however, she had a somewhat busy few weeks when she drove a works Imp in the Circuit of Ireland, the Shell 4,000 cross-Canada rally, the Acropolis and then, within 12 hours, the Scottish—a tremendous programme in such a short space of time and you don't want to go forgetting that she collected an award or two in each event. Alright, so she knows what she's talking about. What does she say?

Well, in the first place, she's the first to admit that she doesn't know a camshaft from an oil filter. Our Rosemary is one of those people who reckons that all a driver has to do is to drive, without arguing about it. So she doesn't have the thing stuffed full of special equipment, she doesn't insist on her own fads and fancies and so long as the cars

are as well-prepared as they can be—and with Rootes they are—she doesn't reckon to ask for anything else. There's one exception to all this—she won't drive a car bearing the number of one she pranged rather well four years ago.

Imps for rallies tend to run with a higher ground clearance, which gives them a slight advantage over the Minis. But they do suffer from excess weight, and, says our Miss Smith, one of the biggest improvements which could be made would be to save a bit of weight. Other than that, she gets on well with the car. She's always liked it, and is now at the point where she is, to coin a phrase, at one with the car—"I get to the stage when it thinks for me"—and regards it as a very nice car for a long-distance event.

She should know—on the Canadian Shell 4,000 rally she did 4,211 miles of tough competition, and was impressed by the fact that they only used six tyres, including the ones they started with.

If you're going to live in a car this long you want to be reasonably comfortable, and she reckons the Imp is good in this respect because there is plenty of room in it. Snags? Naturally—nothing's perfect. On the twisty bits you've got to *drive* it all the time, and in the mountains they are so slow up the hills that you have to go like a tram on the way down, which can be a bit tiring. But the car compensates to some extent for this by being a much lighter car to handle compared with some of the others.

What about the handling? "Well," says our Miss Smith, "Whatever way the Imp handles, I like it." A reminder, in the Irish brogue she has (one on each foot, naturally) that she admits to not knowing a wheelnut from a starting handle. "Once you get used to it you can go flying into a corner, lift your foot and the tails come round. Then when its pointing the right way, you put your foot down and off you go. You don't just ease your foot—you take it right off, and off you go the right way".

So far as brakes are concerned, she was very pleased with the disc and drum set-up they used for the Alpine. Now they're back on drums, and she definitely finds the brakes fading under long-distance rally conditions.

Taking it all round, she reckons that an Imp driven fast is just as much of a handful as a Cooper or a Cortina, although it obviously isn't as fast as either. There's a definite technique which has to be learned—"In my case from my mistakes"—and she reckons that the car is more inclined to go off if you try and drive it neatly.

Our Miss Smith obviously enjoys her association with the Imp. "From the word go they've come on in leaps and bounds—I think its fantastic what they've done in a short time."

Good luck to both of them, that's what we say. What do you say?