

## **Top Gear E4 6a**

### **Raven Crag, Threshthwaite Cove**

#### **Location & Setting**

It seems that just about every valley in the Lakes has its own Raven Crag, each one being unique in its setting and character. This Raven Crag sits in the secluded Threshwaite Cove, overlooking the delightful Pasture Beck. It is tucked round a corner at the foot of the Kirkstone Pass road as it winds north towards Ullswater. The sleepy hamlet of Hartsop with its old cottages, many still sporting ancient spinning galleries provides a good starting point for a 45 minute walk up the valley – all very gentle until the last few hundred metres up a steep, grassy hillside. For those climbing at E3 and above this is one of the best single pitch crags in the Lakes. The rock is solid, generally clean and providing some very striking lines, usually with good protection. It is said to have more stars than a night at the Oscars! The crag slants up the hillside, facing south-east so gets the morning sun. Thanks to nesting ravens the crag will usually have a bird ban from February to the end of May.

#### **History**

The first route of note to be climbed was Redex in 1976. At E2 this provides the ‘easy option’! It was a few years later in 1980 when Pete Whillance along with others started to really exploit the opportunities on offer. The superb GTX (E3) and Grand Prix (E3), both climbed by Whillance established the crags credentials and set the motoring theme. Others continued the work, notably Pete Botterill with Boy Racer (E4) and High Performance (E5), Jeff Lamb with Running on Empty (E4) and Phil Rigby with Liquid Engineering (E6). Later, during the writing of the 1987 Eastern Crags guidebook, Bob Smith and John Earl got in on the action, largely cleaning up most of the remaining lines – the best of their crop being Internal Combustion (E6).

#### **The Route**

All the best routes have a great story behind them and Top Gear is no exception. So the story goes, Rick Graham and Ian (Squawk) Dunn had gone to climb a line across the imposing shield at the left end of the crag. They had cleaned the main part of the route on abseil, but not the groove at the bottom right of the shield, where Rick placed a Friend and cleaned out the greenery. Squawk went up and got a bit higher but by now Whillance had turned up and was sat impatiently at the bottom. He took over but it had started raining. Having climbed all the difficulties he reached the final sloping ramp, which by now was wet and oozing slime, from where he slipped and fell the full length of the cliff, hitting the ground with his face on the rope-stretch. He had snapped and pulled out numerous pieces of gear, only to be saved by the Friend placed by Rick.

The main challenge of the climbing is a rising leftwards traverse of the shield, accessed by some strenuous and committing moves to gain a large foothold at the bottom right-hand corner. The well-protected crux is getting established onto the shield above this point. From there, steady progress can be made and nowadays can be reasonably well protected by micro-cams. The rock is superb, offering small edges and shallow cracks in rough, clean rock in a great position. The ramp at the top and the final corner are a pleasant but steady finish (provided it isn't raining!) A very well-placed abseil station allows a quick descent as well as a cheeky look at the very thin Road Rage (E7), which climbs the left side of the shield past a lonely looking peg.

In the 2024 re-write of the FRCC selected guidebook to the Lakes, Lake District Rock, Top Gear has been endowed with the coveted 4 stars and is also awarded Best in Class – one of the two best E4s in the Lake District – praise indeed.

### **My Own Experience**

I first visited Raven, Threshthwaite in 1988 with John Wilson. On that first visit we started on Redex, followed by GTX before launching onto Top Gear. This was the first time of many that I have enjoyed these routes. Back then we didn't have the micro-cams that are available today and my approach was very much "get on with it!" So, my memory of that early ascent was of a very run-out experience, indeed the notes I made that day say: "*A mind-blowing lead across the shield. Sustained climbing with a 50' run-out*". Don't worry, it doesn't have to be like that, and the crux is certainly well protected by a perfect nut right in front of you. We finished that day with Running on Empty. This first visit sealed my love of the crag, and it is a place I go back to regularly, including in 1995 to fill the gap on the left side of the shield with Road Rage.

### **Alternatives**

Everything! Do them all. There genuinely isn't a poor route on the crag provided you are climbing at the right level to appreciate them and the wealth of stars awarded in the guidebooks are thoroughly deserved. At E3, Grand Prix and GTX are both excellent; E4 has even more with Running on Empty, and Boy Racer in addition to Top Gear; E5 is best served by High Performance and Lady Driver whilst the sustained Liquid Engineering and the technically demanding Internal Combustion fill the E6 slot nicely.

Get there early to enjoy the sun on your back while you warm up on the E3s before tackling something harder. Thanks to the in-situ abseil points at either end of the crag, this is a crag that lends itself to a lot of mileage, and even allowing for everyone in the team to take the lead if desired

For the concentration of high-quality routes at the grade, this is one of the stand-out venues in the Lakes. A great place to push your limits.