



SQUARE LEFT

FEATURES

Rallying bug 'has bitten hard' for John MacCrone



With the superb performance of home heroes Elfyn Evans and Daniel Barritt on the 2017 Wales Rally GB, you could be forgiven for not looking beyond the headlines.

The event is one of the trickiest rallies in the world, with such changeable grip and unpredictable weather making it a real test of a driver's endurance and skill behind the wheel.

Hard enough then for a seasoned-pro, but even harder for somebody making their first competitive outing of the year.

I hear you call Elfyn Evans and Tom Cave forward (who took third in WRC2) for performances of the rally. I'll raise you: John MacCrone.

The Scotsman kept himself out of trouble, steering his Ford Fiesta R5 to 21st overall and second privateer home, without having driven a special stage in anger in 2017 before Tir Prince on Thursday 26th October.

"A couple of things fell through when trying to get a championship run together at the start of the year," MacCrone explains. so

"We decided that GB was attainable as there was still time left to secure the required budget. It's been something that we have worked towards all year.

"Our preparation mainly consisted of watching onboards from previous years. Prior to this year I'd only done GB once back in 2011 and none of the stages were run in the same format back then so this was the best way for me to familiarise myself.

"We had a test on the Sunday before recce where I did around 50 miles, but that was it."

After spending the best part of a year on the sidelines, MacCrone's expectations were realistic ahead of the British round of the World Championship.

"My aim before the event was just to make sure I got to the end," he admits.

"After waiting all year for the rally the last thing I wanted was to be sitting in a ditch on the Friday afternoon!

"Generally I'm fairly happy with how it all went. I still feel like I'm learning in this car as I've not done too many stage miles in it despite winning events, especially when you look at how much experience my competition had with the R5's."

The advantage of diving into the deep end with such a tough rally however is it's easier to identify what areas you need to work on.

"I hadn't ever made pace notes with a four wheel drive car before on gravel and it's something I definitely need to improve on.

"Through rustiness I made too many mistakes, sliding wide here and there, which all adds up over the course of a stage and at this level you can't get away with those mistakes if you want to be at the front.

"We had a bad run on Saturday night in the fog too, but so did plenty of others! These are all things that can be ironed out with more time in the car.

"We really enjoyed the stages, especially the challenge of the longer ones and the buzz of it being a WRC event.

Saturday was a big day and I think between leaving parc ferme in the morning and returning to service at night we were out there for 17 hours! I enjoyed every second of it."



MacCrone's career has followed a difficult trajectory.

Bursting onto the scene of the British Rally Championship at the turn of the decade, the 28 year old was forced to progress sideways rather than forwards with the demise of the series and his own budget constraints.

A proud Tobermory boy, the Mull Rally is an event close to his heart. Twice a winner in 2013 and 2016, his latter performance was particularly special.

The 2015 event had ended tragically with the death of his co-driver Andrew Mort, so to fight back the emotions and win on Mull the following year showed great strength of character and was the perfect tribute to Mort.

You're unlikely to meet a more humble person around the service park than John MacCrone. It's an infectious trait that rubs off on those around him and you can't help but wish him well.

But what does the future hold? Will his successful run on Wales Rally GB lead to further opportunities?

"I really hope it does," MacCrone replied, "because the bug has bitten hard again!

"It never goes away but after having not managed to make anything happen all year all I've concentrated on is keeping my head down and waiting patiently for Wales.

"I'll be trying hard to get a campaign of some description sorted and would love to be given the chance to increase my speed in the R5!"