



SQUARE LEFT

OPINION

Is the BRC in need of a change?



Right now we should be analysing the results from the Border Counties Rally, but due to recent bad weather in the UK, the rally was [postponed](#).

The British Rally Championship now faces an awkward silence with another six weeks to wait until its new first round, the Pirelli International, with a less convincing Border Counties entry list at the centre of discussion.

Just six R5 cars appeared under the BRC1 category on the unseeded entry list – three Skoda Fabias (David Bogie, Rhys Yates, Marty McCormack) and three Ford Fiestas (Matt Edwards, Alex Laffey, Lawrence Whyte) – which is a drop of 50% from the 12 that started the same event last year.

This has sparked a bit of a debate: is the BRC in need of a change?

It would be easy to immediately say yes to that question. Six R5 cars isn't exactly a headline entry to shout about, nor is it likely to create a championship battle that'll go down as a classic given some of the best drivers of the last two years Fredrik Ahlin, Tom Cave, Osian Pryce and Keith Cronin are all absent.

The R5 formula has subsequently been called into question, but I'm not even going to entertain that argument with a response. Admittedly they aren't the cheapest way to go rallying, but rallying is expensive in the first place.

To me, the ultimate problem with the BRC's top class is the lack of incentive in winning. There is no real prize structure in place.

Cronin forged his name into the record books last season as he became the first man ever to win four British titles for four different manufactures: Mitsubishi, Subaru, Citroen and Ford.

Yet the Irishman is without the funding for a drive this season. Rectifying this problem is a lot easier said than done, but it has to be recognised as a problem.

In years gone by, the BRC was a hot-bed for manufacturer interest and one-make championships. Series' such as the 106 and then 206 Trophy by Peugeot and the Mitsubishi series saw the champion of each cup receive a factory backed season the following year.

Granted, the financial climate is very different now to what it was 10 – 15 years ago, but surely there can be some way in which the championship can support the champion and give them a leg up in the global rallying ladder?

Or maybe that's not the point of becoming British Rally Champion? Maybe we all need a rethink?



Because that's exactly what the Junior BRC is doing. Since its relaunch, both the previous champions have gone straight from winning the Junior British series and into the Junior World Rally Championship: first Rob Duggan and now Callum Devine.

It's a lot easier to progress up the rallying ranks in an R2 than jumping into an R5 and expecting to make an impression. First you make your name nationally in an R2 before taking that car to the world stage, where you jump up to the world stage in an R5 car and learn both four-wheel-drive rallying and the events in the WRC calendar, all under the watchful eye of the manufacturer teams you are sharing the service park with.

What's happening in the R2s does prove a precedent though, because with a serious cash prize on offer and the chance to test a Hyundai i20 R5 acting as another lure, the entries are booming.

The same Border Counties entry list that featured six R5 cars was well into double figures with its R2 counterparts.

William Creighton, Marty Gallagher, James Williams, Steve Rokland, Nabila Tajpar, Alex Waterman, Josh Cornwell, James McDiarmid, William Hill, Josh McErlean, Finlay Retson, Scott Macbeth, James Wilson and Kevin Hogan had all entered the Jedburgh-based event eyeing glory. That's 14 young and hungry drivers in a variety of cars which always produce close battles.

I sense you've pieced together an obvious solution: why not phase out the R5s and promote the R2 category to the top of the tree?

Not so fast on that one, because that's been tried before.

Remember who the 2013 British Rally Champion was? Didn't think you did.

The R3 formula failed to excite between 2012 and '14 and in truth, could never really cut it.

The R5s need to be there as they are the world-renowned formula for up and coming drivers. If the BRC wants to be taken seriously it simply has to include these potent weapons in its ranks.

We are just going to have to accept that we might not always have World Championship hopefuls in the top rank, but instead welcome fiercely competitive clubman competitors who fancy more than just 45 stage miles from a rally.

Ultimately what is needed is for the action to begin, as then talk will shift to the way the season is panning out rather than what can or can't be improved.

I'm not going to pretend that I'm enthralled by the number of R5 drivers committing to the 2018 British Rally Championship, but the battle within the Juniors will more than make up for it I promise you.

There is a silver lining everywhere if you look hard enough for it, and the BRC organisers have to be commended for the championship that have spawned the life back into.

The 2013 champion was Jukka Korhonen by the way.