



SQUARE LEFT

OPINION

Are Britain's championships right to be heading abroad?



Travelling abroad may feel like a new concept for UK rally series', but the Irish Tarmac Championship was doing it for years a decade ago.

Having diminished from the scene for a few years, it's a trend that's beginning catching on again.

The British Rally Championship was the first, including the iconic Ypres Rally in its itinerary in 2017. Now the Asphalt Rally Championship has followed suit, also heading to Belgium for its third round in 2018: Rally van Wervik.

Purists have taken a disliking to the idea. It can't really be a 'British' championship if its taking place overseas can it?

Once you have gotten over your pedantic outburst though, the penny starts to drop.

Ask the overwhelming majority of the competitors who travelled to Belgium last year what their favourite BRC round of the year was, they'll tell you it was Ypres.

Pleasing competitors is the number one goal for any championship, so praise doesn't get any higher.

It shouldn't come as a surprise though given Ypres' recognition worldwide. But it goes some way to explain its inclusion in the British Rally Championship schedule.

The opportunity to take on different opposition can't be underestimated either. The chance to take on Thierry Neuville in equal machinery doesn't come about every day, but even beyond the star headline, the ability to check your times with other skilled drivers is a great eye-opener.

And a great opportunity to make a name for yourself. With Europe's finest descending on the event, performing well will get you noticed.

Career-wise then it's a definite plus. Learning new stages and surfaces is vital if you are eyeing a move up to the world stage in the future, so for a championship looking to promote talent like the BRC is, helping them out in this way is a no-brainer.

But what about the Asphalt Rally Championship?

You can predict they have seen the soaring success Belgium was for the BRC and fancied a slice of the cake for themselves.

The returning series isn't treating itself as a WRC stepping stone like its bigger brother, but that doesn't mean to say it shouldn't challenge its competitors.

Seasoned drivers who are loyal to a particular series are just as important to the longevity of the championship as the fresh blood bursting through.

Drivers who have been around for years will be hard pushed to find a challenge. Take Damian Cole for instance.

The multiple Asphalt champion knows the UK stages like the back of his hand, but he's never competed in Belgium before. It may upset traditionalists who want British series' to exploit their own roads, but the inclusion of an overseas event draws in competitors.

Rally van Wervik will be closer to home for some competitors than the final round of the season up in the Cheviots is. And it's not as if the whole championship is being staged on mainland Europe, it's just one event.

Ypres has already proved a raving success, so expect Rally van Wervik to gallop along the same track.

And don't be surprised to see more series doing it in the future too.