



SQUARE LEFT

OPINION

Closed road rallying is the best kind of rallying



Remaining objective is a big part of being a journalist, but this is an opinion column, so I'm just going to go ahead and say it.

The Jim Clark Rally is the best rally in the world. Or should that be was?

The Circuit of Ireland (pictured above) wasn't too bad either. Come to think of it, nor is the Isle of Man.

There's an undeniably charm to a forest rally: the effort to get yourself to a viewing point is an adventure in itself.

But closed road rallying is just better. Heavily biased having grown up with the Jim Clark Rally on my doorstep perhaps, but it truly is something special and rather unique in the UK.

After the tragic events that occurred on the Jim Clark three and a half years ago, the event – which was the only closed road rally on mainland Britain – has ceased to run.

A Fatal Accident Inquiry was launched, which caused insurance premiums to rise, and forced the popular Mull Rally to be canned last year too.

It's all a little bit bleak up in Scotland, but happily there is light at the end of the tunnel. England was the first nation to do it, now Wales has followed suit. Thanks to new legislation, event organisers no longer require an individual Act of Parliament to suspend the Road Traffic Act and host a closed road event.

Now the sport's governing body, the MSA, has the right to grant permission based on projected plans rather than proceedings reaching government level.

This was massive news for England back in April but even bigger for Wales given where the British round of the World Rally Championship is held.

The possibilities are tantalisingly endless.

The beauty is the characteristics of the event needn't change. Nobody is suggesting that the event switches from its gruelling muddy challenge into a barnstorm around the Welsh B-roads.

Instead, public roads can be used to link up forest tracks, and effectively double the length of some stages to increase the challenge.

And it has also emerged that the Cambrian Rally, the opening round of the BTRDA, is looking to exploit this new legislation in a bid to launch itself into the British Rally Championship calendar.

It can only be considered a positive step for UK rallying. The legislation will largely be used to blend together existing gravel tests, but who knows when we may see our first closed road rally in a number of years? It may not be too far around the corner!

Now just to get Nicola Sturgeon on the case so we can have the Jim Clark Rally back...