

20.10.17  
News release

## **All-action Maidstone rally driver takes on the world**

It's not often that sportsmen or women get the chance to take on the best in the world at their chosen discipline. But that's precisely what Maidstone driver James Slaughter will be doing when he starts Britain's round of the World Rally Championship next week.

Dayinsure Wales Rally GB is the biggest motorsport event in the United Kingdom, as well as being one of the most famous in the world. Ford Fiesta R5 driver Slaughter joins crews from 25 countries, including entries from as far afield as New Zealand and Mexico, in the challenge of driving as fast as possible down some of Wales' most treacherous forest tracks.

The Deeside-based event, which runs from October 26-29, will be by far the biggest challenge of Slaughter's rally career to date. But it's the one he's looked forward to the most.

"I grew up watching the Lombard RAC Rally as our round of the World Rally Championship used to be known in the Eighties," said Slaughter. "Dad used to take my brother and I right around the country to follow the event, we barely stopped to sleep. I well remember standing in the middle of Twiglees forest in Scotland as Hannu Mikkola and his Audi Quattro came flying past at half two in the morning. It was magical."

And now, in James' world, he will be taking the equivalent step to facing the All Blacks at Twickenham or Roger Federer on Wimbledon's Centre Court.

Just an hour before James and his Irish co-driver Niall Burns start the first of the 21 stages and near 200 miles of competitive driving on the route, four-time World Rally Champion Frenchman Sébastien Ogier will have done his best to set the fastest possible time on the individual timed sections.

Slaughter added: "In all honesty, I don't think I'm quite up to start comparing times with the best in the world – it's a very big step to what the likes of Ogier are doing. But competing on the same roads is a fantastic feeling and it's the realisation of a dream to start an event I followed so keenly when I was young."

The need for adrenalin in James' life has always been apparent. His father Dick Slaughter was a successful driver, competing at the highest level in British national rallying. But for Slaughter Jr, it was the water which took priority. James was a competitive windsurfer, racing in the British and World series for four years, before he took on the BT Global Challenge, sailing the Sydney to Cape Town leg of a round-the-world boat race. But it was the

corporate world of insurance where James has made best use of an Imperial College degree.

"I love my job," said Slaughter, "but it does involve a lot of travelling and that has an impact on how much rallying I can do. I have competed in the British Rally Championship this season, but I couldn't complete the full season because of work commitments."

Fitting in his maiden world championship outing has been made simpler by co-driver Burns and the MSL team preparing his Tiger Risk-backed Fiesta.

"Niall's been fantastic and has shouldered a lot of the organisation and administration for the event," he said. "This is starting to feel like a real adventure."

And that adventure starts with a short spectator-pleasing stage in the dark on Thursday (October 26) evening. After that, it's into the forests of mid and north Wales for a flat-out attack in a £200,000 rally car.

"This really is an enormous challenge for Niall, the team and myself," said Slaughter. "What we've done so far with the British Rally Championship rounds are really short, sprint events by comparison to Wales Rally GB. On the opening full day of competition (Friday October 27), we'll drive more than 70 miles flat-out through the forests, only stopping for fuel and to fit new tyres. That one day is longer than most of the entire route we've been used to doing.

"Turning 44 on the first day of the event, I'm a little bit older than some of the guys I'm competing against, which is why I've stayed so focused on fitness. I train every day and I'm hoping that will pay dividends as the event progresses through the weekend."

James is also giving away a few years in experience to his rivals. He only started driving his Fiesta R5 last year, having competed in historic rallying (a category for older cars) before that.

"I was driving a Ford Escort the same as Dad's when I first started," he said. "Dad was competing in the British Historic Championship in 2007. At that time, I was retiring from rugby and looking for another challenge. Taking Dad on was perfect. I stayed in historic rallying and met Marty McCormack, a young rally driver whose career I supported through work. Marty had just switched from historics to an R5 car and he took me for a ride. I was blown away by the speed of the car and set myself the goal of trying to become competitive in the more modern formula.

"The R5 car is so different to the Escort I was using. The new car is four-wheel drive, has a sequential gearbox and turbo-charged engine. Basically, everything happens so much faster in the new car – acceleration out of

slower corners is breathtaking and the speed you can carry across really rough roads is mind-blowing thanks to the unbelievable suspension technology we have. But the biggest thing I've had to get used to is the brakes – they're so good on the R5 car; you can brake so late, I'm having to really trust myself and believe in the car.

"My aim for Rally GB is to find a good rhythm and set times I feel are competitive. I would like to finish in the top 30 overall and the top 15 in my class."

Achieving such a result on his debut on the event and in the face of world-class competition would be an exceptional result for James.

### **Meet James...**

Date of birth: 26.10.73

Lives: Maidstone

Co-driver: Niall Burns

First rally: Mid Wales Historic Stages, 2008

Rally starts: 27

### **About Dayinsure Wales Rally GB**

October 26-29

Based: Deeside

Surface: gravel

Stages: 21

Competitive distance: 302.66km (188.07 miles)

Total distance: 1487.32km (924.22 miles)

Website: [www.walesrallygb.com](http://www.walesrallygb.com)

Thursday October 26

SS1 Visit Conwy Tir Prince 1.49km (0.92 miles) 1900

Friday October 27

SS2 Myherin 1 20.28km (12.60 miles) 1020

SS3 Sweet Lamb 1 4.24km (2.63 miles) 1100

SS4 Hafren 1 35.14km (21.83 miles) 1115

Remote tyre fitting zone, Newtown, 1253

SS5 Myherin 2 20.28km (12.60 miles) 1431

SS6 Sweet Lamb 2 4.24km (2.63 miles) 1511

SS7 Hafren 2 35.14km (21.83 miles) 1526

Parc Fermé 1951

Saturday October 28

SS8 Aberhirnant 1 13.91km (8.64 miles) 0755

SS9 Dyfnant 1 17.91km (11.12 miles) 0847

SS10 Gartheiniog 1 12.61km (7.83miles) 0959

SS11 Dyfi 1 25.86km (16.06 miles) 1028

SS12 Gartheiniog 2 12.61km (7.83miles) 1208

SS13 Dyfi 2 25.86km (16.06 miles) 1237  
SS14 Cholmondeley Castle 1.80km (1.11 miles) 1548  
Service Deeside 1637  
SS15 Aberhirnant 2 13.91km (8.64 miles) 1855  
SS16 Dyfnant 2 17.91km (11.12 miles) 1947  
Parc Fermé 2216

Sunday October 29

SS17 Alwen 1 10.41km (6.46 miles) 0834  
SS18 Brenig 1 6.43km (3.99 miles) 0908  
SS19 Gwydir 7.49km (4.65 miles) 1006  
SS20 Alwen 2 10.41km (6.46 miles) 1109  
SS21 Brenig 2 6.43km (3.99 miles) 1218  
Parc Fermé 1335

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