

Osian reflects on Portugal and looks ahead to Poland

Five days after returning home to Wales from a bitter-sweet Rally of Portugal where he led the Junior World Rally Championship class on his series debut 22-year-old Osian talks about the experience.

During the three-day Matosinhos-based event, Osian and co-driver Dale Furniss completed eight stages without problems in their Citroën DS3 R3-Max. Of those eight, they were fastest on three and in the top three times on all but one.

Q&A Osian

How was Rally of Portugal?

Ultimately, it was disappointing. We went there with no real clue about where our pace would be on our first ever round of the Junior World Rally Championship – but we led the class after the first stage and set some fastest stage times.

But there were a few problems...

Just a few. We had to stop and change a puncture, we had a damper problem, brake problems, we lost an auxiliary belt and had electrical issues – we had trouble every day.

Whose fault was that?

It wasn't anybody's fault at all. The roads were unbelievably rough second time through on Friday and lots of cars suffered suspension problems and punctures. The brake and electrical problems were freak things and a stone took out the auxiliary belt. It's fair to say we had a lot of luck in Portugal – all of it bad!

But you must have been pleased with the pace you showed?

Dale [Furniss, co-driver] and I were pretty pleased to be honest. We were setting fastest times when we were, quite honestly, going very sensibly. We could have gone a whole lot quicker, but I think we both cottoned-on quite quickly that there's a big difference between a one or two-day British Rally Championship round and a full-on round of the world championship. Portugal was the longest rally either of us had ever done and the one huge lesson we learned is the speed at which you can drive and still succeed. On a rally like Portugal it's about winning absolutely as slowly as you possible can. At times it felt like we needed to think: "Right, we're going slowly, now we need to back off some more!"

But, yes, leading the Juniors on our debut was a pretty special feeling.

What's next?

The car's back with the Autosport Technology team in Kent now. When the auxiliary belt came off, the engine ran pretty hot very, very briefly, so the engine will be given a good check over and then it's a case of trying to get to the bottom of the other issues we had.

What's the next event?

The Rally of Poland at the start of July. We want the same speed, but we really need to turn that pace into points.

What do you know about that event?

It's based in the Polish Lake District, quite a long way north of Warsaw and the roads are very, very fast.

Former Formula One star Robert Kubica will be competing there then?

He will. He does the main World Rally Championship, while we're in the feeder series – one step down from the WRC, if you like. Kubica was in Portugal and seemed to go well, finishing in the top 10 overall. He's a huge, huge hero in Poland though. Last year's event was absolutely mobbed by fans from all across Europe – pretty much all of them came out to see Robert. The rally's actually sponsored by LOTOS, a Polish oil firm which sponsors him as well.

Will there be a few coming out from Wales to support you?

I hope so. I had some family out with me in Portugal and it was fantastic. When we were having a few problems, it was great to have their support in the background.

Could you win Junior WRC in Poland?

Well, I had no idea what we could do in Portugal and we managed to lead the event. I guess the only problem with Poland is that a few people might have done the event before and, therefore, have more experience than us. In Portugal, it was a level playing field – none of us had competed in the north around Porto before.

How much would a win mean?

Everything. Absolutely everything. It's no secret that we're seriously struggling to find the money to continue with this dream of competing at the highest level and, having tasted success on the first round, it would be terrible if we had to pull the plug – a win could really turn things around and show everybody what we're capable of.