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News release

Loudon lands another Chinese podium

Tunnock's ambassador in China and star co-driver Uddingston's Stuart Loudon has landed back in Glasgow after the latest, fun-packed, adventure-filled ride of a lifetime alongside Alister McRae – the Scotsmen bagging a podium finish on the China Rally Longyou.

The event finished on Sunday (November 1) after two days of shocking weather and stunning stages in the Far East. The McRae-Loudon connection was, however, pleased to report the biggest step forward yet in the performance of their BAIC-Senova D50.

After running second on the opening day, they finished third after a problem with the centre differential early on Sunday morning.

Diff difficulties made the difference

The BAIC-Senova Rally Team car was second only to Chris Atkinson's Prodrive-built Volkswagen Golf on Saturday night, but when the pump on the centre differential failed on the first stage on Sunday morning, an eight-second buffer to Mark Higgins wasn't going to be enough.

"The problem with the car made it really difficult for Alister to keep it on the road," said Stuart. "There was one really quick section which we'd driven before – it took us over a crest at between 120 and 130mph. The time before, the car went light, but it wasn't a drama. This time it went light and nearly threw us off the road.

"It's a shame we had that problem, it would have been a great fight with Mark on the second day, but after that we took third."

You keep the trophy...

After celebrating his second podium in three events, Stuart was looking forward to boarding the plane home with a trophy buried in his hand baggage. It wasn't to be.

"Turns out, the trophies stay in China," Stuart explained. "I didn't mind. I might have put up a bit more of a fight if I hadn't been told that Longyou remains one of the regions in China which still uses the gas chamber to execute prisoners... That put rather a different slant on things, I don't think so many Brits have ever been so well behaved abroad!

"Longyou was another fascinating place to visit, with some really interesting culture. In terms of the rally, it's fair to say the organisation is not a million miles away from what's going to be required at world championship level next year, but at the same time there remain some questions to be asked about

security on the stages. There was no doubt, however, that we were on an Asia Pacific Rally Championship round this time; the presence of the FIA (world motorsport's governing body) is always going to raise the game a level.

"You do see some incredible sights in China and I'd have to say, some of the driving on the road sections was pretty astonishing – and not in a good way. After a couple of days, we'd become fairly used to it and taken to asking each other: "Where are we again? Oh yeah..." Crazy, but cool at the same time."

When it's raining, it's raining

Cool and wet. It didn't stop raining for the duration of the rally.

"I got out to China on the Tuesday before the event," said Stuart. "Pretty much as soon as I stepped off the plane, it started to drizzle, then it rained and it rained and it rained. It wasn't constant heavy rain, except at night; it was just drizzling, then pouring down, then it would ease off a bit. It was dreich – there's another good Scottish word that a few more Chinese people know after last week!"

And the weather certainly affected the roads and tyre choices. "Chinese Rally Championship regulations require you to cut extra blocks of tread out of the tyre to clear more of the water and mud away – that's certainly something we needed to do. The conditions on some of the mountain stages, particularly on the second day were really bad.

"It's fair to say, it was going to take more than a bit of rain to dampen the spirits of a couple of Lanarkshire lads, though. Alister and I have known a bit of rain in our time!"

Express in the Orient is coming

Before Alister and Stuart started the rally, the BAIC-Senova Rally Team had worked on the car and fitted a new engine and improvements to the brakes. The car was a big step forward from when Stuart first stepped aboard earlier this season.

"The car was a lot, lot better," said Stuart. "The new engine felt really strong and reliable. You could certainly feel the extra torque and power out of the slow corners and the times we were putting up were a fair reflection of the work the team has put in. As well as the extra power, the team had worked on extra brake ducting and cooling and that helped as well – even if it was helped a little bit by the wet nature of the roads and the lower than usual ambient temperature.

"Moving forward, this is really encouraging for the future – the team and the car is looking stronger than ever for the final two rounds of the season."

Happiness is... a chip butty

Apparently, man cannot live on Tunnock's alone. Obviously, Stuart's putting that theory to the test in China, but last week he discovered another great taste of home: the chip butty.

"The food was the usual mixed bag last week. We went to one restaurant and got some extra chips served with some sort of steak. Then there were some rolls brought out, I made a chip butty and even found some ketchup – it was fantastic!

"One of the team members wanted to take us out to a restaurant to show us some fine Chinese dining, Longyou style. The problem is, the kind of high-end food is the really strange stuff. I'm not sure what it was, but it was gristle, guts and raw fish – these kind of things are delicacies out there. You really don't want to offend anybody, so I was trying to work out the nicest possible way of asking for some egg-fried rice!

"Once again, the Tunnock's came to the rescue, with plenty of Snowballs to round out the evening. I'd always been taught there was no chocolate before lunch (engineering the world's finest chocolate biscuits, that's not a policy I'm entirely in favour of...), but I must admit I did put a couple of Caramel Wafers away on my way out to day two. I'd had a look in on breakfast, hearing the guys talking about a boiled egg, I thought that would do quite nicely – maybe with some wee soldiers.

"No chicken could have laid what I saw in breakfast that morning... Five layers of wafer and four layers of caramel did the trick!"

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