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News release

Stuart's ready to face the heat in the dragon's den

Uddingston co-driver Stuart Loudon will return to China next week, where he and fellow Scotsman Alister McRae face some of the toughest conditions of their careers on the Huairou Rally (August 19-21).

The third round of the Chinese Rally Championship takes the Lanarkshire lads north of Beijing, where they will compete with the BAIC-Saab Rally Team.

And this time, it looks like it's going to be hot. Or should that be hotter?

"It was hot when I was out on the Chenzhou Rally in May," said Loudon, "but the thinking is that it gets even hotter when we get to Huairou. Which is nice..."

Temperatures will be close to 40 degrees, with that rising north of 60 degrees inside the car. Fortunately, Stuart's work as a biscuit engineer at Tunnock's has prepared him for such a challenge.

"I think I'll have a pretty good idea of what the wafers feel like when they go into the oven at work now," he smiled.

"It is going to be hot in the car, but you just have to ignore it. It's pretty important to wear sweatbands and headbands. You might end up looking like John McEnroe, but that's preferable to not being able to read the pacenotes."

Heading for the hills

The Huairou District is just 30 miles north of Beijing, but the contrast between the two couldn't be more marked. Teeming with around 24 million people, China's capital is a frantically busy place. Huairou's about a slightly slower, less frenetic pace.

Except next week. Next week is all about the pace. And Stuart's confident the BAIC-Saab Rally Team will be at the sharp end.

"We had some problems with the car last time out" said Stuart, "but since then the team has been working really hard on getting some weight out of the car and finding more speed. It's going to be a really interesting week – not least because it gives me another chance to co-drive for Alister.

"We had a difficult first event together, it was pretty fraught with issues, but Alister was totally professional. He didn't get rattled, just worked through the problems and did everything he could to get the car back to the team where they could work on it again.

“When we did get the chance to push on, it was completely clear why Alister’s had so much success around the world. The competition’s tough in the Chinese Rally Championship though and there’s no doubt we’re in for a big fight against the likes of Mark Higgins, Niall McShea and Chris Atkinson. But that’s what we’re here for.”

Huairou has a very different topography to Beijing, with 90 per cent of the district considered mountainous and almost 70 per cent of it forested – which is why it’s known as Beijing’s oxygen bar.

The high peaks can and will bring a rapid change in the weather, with thunder storms and heavy rain likely to drench the stages and potentially change the nature of the rally in an instant.

A great wall and golden arches

After an interesting introduction to Chinese cuisine in Chenzhou last time out, Stuart will be faced with the slightly more homely sight of McDonald’s and KFC – the Huairou region’s only two fastfood chains.

Of more interest will be a wall which can be dated back to the seventh century *BC*.

“You can’t do this job and not be a good traveller and tourist,” said Stuart. “It’ll be fascinating to go and have a look at the Great Wall and the area around it. The closest thing we’ve got is Hadrian’s Wall – but that’s not quite on the same level as the 13,000-mile divider between China and Mongolia!

“It’ll be interesting to have a look at McDonald’s out here, but with sweet pears and apricots growing wild around the place, there are, for me, some easier options than the, er, dog we were talking about last time!”

Taming the Pendragon

After being out of a rally car for a while, Stuart will be strapped back in just a few days after landing back from his trip to the east. He will join Graeme Schoneville in his Honda Civic for the Pendragon Stages near Appleby on August 30.

“Graeme and I have been mates for a long time,” said Stuart. I first competed alongside him back in 2009, when I was just starting out. It’s always great to co-drive for him and I’m really looking forward to that event. I’m just hoping it’ll be a wee bit cooler than what I’ll have been used to in China. You never know with west Cumbria in the late summer...”

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