

News release – McRae Gravel Challenge review
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Loudon joins in McRae commemoration in Craigvinean

Britain's first World Rally Champion Colin McRae was remembered in style when Scottish rallying came together in Craigvinean forest on Saturday – with Lanarkshire co-driver Stuart Loudon renewing an old family partnership for the McRae Gravel Challenge.

Stuart's father Fergus Loudon co-drove John Gray for a decade from the mid-Eighties before Loudon Jr made his competitive debut with John on the 2006 Mull Forest Rally.

For the first time in 11 years, Stuart and John were back together and trading McRae memories a decade after the 1995 World Rally Champion died. Competing in John's Opel Manta, the pair struggled with a variety of mechanical issues including a persistent misfire, brake problems, worrying vibration from the rear suspension and loose front struts, but once fixed they were back on song and enjoying the beautiful – if short-lived (but it didn't rain) – Perthshire sunshine.

"What a great day," said Stuart. "I've had a lot of fun out there with John today. It's fair to say we had a few issues early doors with the car – we even discovered the exhaust was holding the gearbox in at first service! But the boys got the job sorted and we had a good run through the longest (11-mile) stage of the day.

"But you know what, today wasn't about the result or the performance (they finished 22nd). Today was about remembering a true legend of this sport and a genuinely amazing bloke who made – and still makes – me very proud to call myself a Scotsman.

"The spirit of the day was absolutely brilliant, everybody was out for a good time and the whole thing ran really well in the memory of Colin. I've no doubt it was a day Colin would have absolutely loved, while showing us all the way home in the Escort or the R4. And it was a real who's who of Scottish rallying with guys like Ken Wood, Murray Grierson and more than a few other former champions out. Fantastic."

Stuart was also impressed with the organisation on show from Coltness Car Club. He added: "You have to take your hat off to them (Coltness CC), they've done a superb job in running the event with fairly limited resources.

"I really should say thank you to John [Gray] as well. He hasn't driven for three years, but, fair play, he really got into the groove and everything was working really well as the event progressed. It's funny to think how things have changed a wee bit: when we started on Mull all those years ago, it was

me who couldn't keep still, nervous as hell. This time I was the laid-back one and it was John who was running around like a battery hen! Brilliant day, though and a great way to remember Colin."

Stuart will be back in the woods in a week's time, when he competes on the Trackrod Forest Stages (Saturday September 30) with Tom Preston in a Skoda Fabia R5.

"I'm looking forward to that," said Stuart. "The event runs through Dalby forest in Yorkshire and these are some of England's fastest and most exciting gravel roads. It's a pretty busy time again at the moment, a couple of days after the Trackrod, it's back to World Rally Championship duty with M-Sport World Rally Team for Rally Spain and then back home and back to Mull, for a weekend of sport (October 13-15)."

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Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 94 rallies, 19 of which are rounds of the World Rally Championship and one of which was with an Ashes-winning English cricketer. He makes biscuits in the family business when he's not working towards his dream of becoming a factory co-driver in the WRC.