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News release

## **Loudon woos Wuyi**

Uddingston's Stuart Loudon led a round of the Chinese Rally Championship for the first time before finishing third with Alister McRae on last weekend's Wuyi Rally.

The Lanarkshire pair enjoyed their third podium finish in the last four Chinese outings. But this time they made the perfect start – leading the event in their BAIC-Senova D50 after the opening stage. A puncture on Sunday hindered attempts to elevate themselves from the bottom step of the podium, they were topping more than 140mph down narrow Chinese lanes in pursuit of the two cars ahead.

### **Team tactics pay off**

The opening stage of the rally was a short, rough gravel test on Friday night. The BAIC-Senova Rally Team made the decision to change the car's suspension from the low-to-the-ground asphalt set-up to trim much more suited to the dirt roads. Your local garage would spend a morning changing the dampers and brakes on your car, but the D50 was done in 17 minutes.

That was the key to the early lead.

"The team did a fantastic job," said Stuart. "There was a huge amount of time pressure to get it done, but they backed themselves and it really paid off. Admittedly, it was only quite a short stage, but we came away from there leading – it was great to see Al and I at the top of the timesheets.

"We were back in that stage on Sunday and we were quickest again. It's a real boost for the guys in the team to see their car setting fastest times; it really shows how the car's going in the right direction."

### **Conquering the concrete**

Typically for a Chinese Rally Championship round, the Wuyi Rally ran two different roads in both directions across the two main days of competition. Largely concrete, the stages provided another super-fast trip through the captivating Far Eastern countryside. Not that Stuart had any time to appreciate the view.

"The roads were really, really fast in places," said Stuart, "we were regularly seeing speeds around 130 to 140mph. It really focuses the mind on what you're doing when the trees are rattling past the window at that speed.

"Once again, Alister drove a fantastic rally. The puncture on Sunday morning was a bit frustrating; Alister took the handbrake at a hairpin and the thing just popped off the rim. That dropped us a minute, but I'm not sure we could

say it cost us a second place – Alister was going as hard as he dared without taking silly risks and we were still dropping three or four seconds per stage. There's still a little bit more to come out of the car, we're definitely getting there."

### **Spaghetti western: far out in the far-east**

As usual, Stuart departed China full of fresh memories from his fifth trip to the People's Republic. And spaghetti bolognese was right up there with the best of them.

"Amazingly," Stuart said, "and, I think, for the first time in China, I skipped my ration of Tunnock's Teacakes for one night. We found a great restaurant in Wuyi that served European food. Or at least Wuyi's take on what Chinese European food should be. When I saw spaghetti bolognese on the menu I was all in.

"And it was fantastic. Definitely the best food I've tasted since I've been there – with the obvious exception of biscuits baked by Tunnock's! That place was a real find. A night or two before, we'd been put off one place after Al decided to take a walk down the shops. He saw the butchers preparing meat for one restaurant. If we'd gone there, I'm not sure how to put this... it might have been Rover done!"

### **The sun's shining... honest**

With temperatures in Wuyi climbing not much higher than the low-20s, Stuart felt much more comfortable in the conditions; Western Australian resident Alister less so. But the sun wasn't seen for a week.

"It's amazing when you get out there," said Stuart, "you can feel the sun's up, but the smog's so bad, you just can't see it. It's incredible. The weather wasn't too bad, it tried to rain a couple of times, but it didn't come to much.

"I really enjoyed the event, the roads were a real challenge, the car ran well and it was great to co-drive Alister again. I'll be honest, it's still a genuine honour and privilege to sit alongside a McRae – I'd happily compete with Al anywhere in the world.

"When we came off one stage, he told me how much quicker he'd have been down there 15 years ago. It felt fast enough as it was!"

### **The trophy's safe**

Stuart's Wuyi Rally third was his third podium finish – but the first time he managed to keep his hands on the trophy.

"It's a really nice trophy," he said, "so I was quite keen to keep hold of it. And there were definitely some benefits when I got on the plane to come home. The staff on the KLM flight were really interested in what Alister and I had been doing in China and the silverware certainly kept the champagne flowing

on the flight. It even got me into the cockpit, where the pilots wanted to know how we'd got on as well.

"That was a great end to a great trip – one which really showed how the team's going from strength-to-strength."

### **A McRae moment to remember**

As you might have seen, we did a wee bit of tweeting over the last few days – celebrating Colin McRae and Derek Ringer winning the World Rally Championship 20 years ago. It was great to be with Alister over the weekend, listening to his memories of that event, an event he and Chris Wood scored their career-best fourth on. It was certainly a big rally for the McRae family and one I'm really glad we marked on social media.

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