

News release – event review
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Damp end to Stuart's Caribbean dream

Retiring from a rally is a pretty miserable affair. Retiring from the lead of a rally is even worse. Glasgow co-driver Stuart Loudon knows... he and Paul Bird were leading the Barbados Winter Rally when the clutch on their Ford Focus RS WRC failed.

The Barbadian event, which started on Friday (November 24) night and finished late Saturday night, marked the final outing in what's been an unforgettable season for Stuart, who has worked and competed in the World Rally Championship-winning M-Sport World Rally Team this year.

Stuart and Paul had high hopes of ending the season with victory on the far side of the Atlantic, but it wasn't to be after the car stopped on Saturday's second stage.

"We did two stages on Friday night and Paul drove really well," said Stuart. "We were fastest by seven seconds on the first one, but then got a puncture on the next one. We were fairly confident for the win through Saturday, knowing if we could establish a lead then we could manage it.

"Unfortunately, the heavens opened just when we'd started the rally on Saturday and the rain was just unbelievable. Coming from Lanarkshire, I'm not immune to a bit of rain, but what I saw for a few hours in Barbados was insane. The roads were transformed into rivers, but again Paul drove sensibly and we were fastest on the first stage.

"On the second stage, the conditions were even worse, the water was a couple of inches deep all the way down the road. Once we had the problem with the clutch, it was pretty clear we were going no further. We had to get out of the car because, in those conditions, you just didn't know where the others cars could end up if they went off the road.

"So, there was Paul and I, having retired from the lead standing in the middle of a cane field getting absolutely drenched. We were like a couple of drowned rats as we waited to be collected. The good thing was that, given that it was 30 degrees, the rain was really warm.

"It's disappointing to end the event and the season in this fashion, but once the rain cleared we were left with just the most amazing view of bright blue skies, a stunning beach and a beautiful ocean. Nobody ever wants to retire from a rally, but if you're going to stop, this is the place to do it!

"It was a real shame, Neil Buckley and his team had turned out a perfect car for us as usual and this event was ready for us to win. That's the way it is

sometimes. Now, I'll settle back and watch the sun set on what's been an incredible season with M-Sport, while looking forward to what's hopefully going to be an exciting future with me making a full-time return to the co-driver's seat."

Stuart has worked as a co-ordinator with M-Sport this season, but his ultimate aim remains to make it to the World Rally Championship as a professional co-driver. Next season he will be back on track to make that happen.

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Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 97 rallies, 20 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.