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News release

Plenty of eastern promise for Stuart

Uddingston co-driver Stuart Loudon was once again at the forefront of motorsport in the Far East last weekend, when he and Alister McRae challenged for victory on the latest round of the Chinese Rally Championship.

Ultimately, the Scottish stars' efforts were thwarted by rear suspension failure on their BAIC-Saab on yesterday's (Monday) final day of the all-gravel rally. Prior to those problems, the McRae-Loudon alliance had been going quicker than ever in China.

Despite retiring from the event which ran out of Dengfeng City in the province of Henan, Stuart was full of praise for the way the BAIC-Saab Rally Team have picked up the pace of the car since the start of the season.

Silver-lined clouds

"Retiring from a rally is never the easiest thing to do," said Stuart, "and I'm not sure if it makes it easier or harder when you're up there fighting at the front... Alister had driven really, really well to get us into a battle with Mark [Higgins] for second place. Unfortunately we got a rear puncture and then, one stage later, the rear crossmember snapped and that was the end of that.

"Alister and I were really disappointed; but while we were lying underneath the car looking up at that crossmember, we both said there were positives to take from the rally.

"Going into the final day, we were just 0.9 seconds behind Mark [Higgins] and that's a big step from before, when we were a second per kilometre down on him. There's no doubt the car's quicker now and the team shed another 130 kilos out of it, but what we need to do now is to build in some strength and a bit more reliability. But, for sure, we're really pleased with how things are shaping up in China. It's just a shame we couldn't convert that one into a result."

What mountains?

Dengfeng is probably the remotest part of China that Stuart has competed in so far this season and it's fair to say, he has rarely felt further from home.

"I'm loving this year," he said, "it's so, so different. You know, just being in China is such an experience, without trying to work and compete in the place. Everything is so different, I'm just grabbing every one of these life experiences with both hands.

"The terrain on the rally was incredible, but it's the scenery which is pretty stunning as well. Not that we saw much of that for the first few days; the

smog was so bad, we didn't even know we were surrounded by mountains until mid-way through the recce!"

Tunnock's... the highlight of the day

Once again, it was Uddingston's world-renowned bakers that saved the day when it came to cuisine in China last week.

"Every day when we finished on the recce, Alister, our engineer and I would come up to my room and put the kettle on," said Stuart, "we had our wee sachets of coffee and we'd rationed out a Teacake or a Caramel Wafer each for every night. That was a real treat. I actually didn't mention to the boys that I'd saved a couple of biscuits for the journey home. I'm all for being a team player and all that, but when it comes to Tunnock's..."

Gamekeeping on Mull

Stuart will have just enough time to dial his bodyclock back into Uddingston central time before he's travelling again – this time the journey's a lot shorter and more familiar. It's Mull.

But this time, Stuart will be taking the Blue Book (the governing body of British motorsport's rule book) rather than his pacenote book as he makes his debut as an event steward on the Mull Rally (October 8-11).

"I'm definitely in the territory of poacher turned gamekeeper on Mull this year," he said. "I love the island and the event, it's fantastic. I was thinking of competing this year, but the chance to be a steward came along and I was interested. It's a great opportunity for me to see a rally from the other side of the fence.

"I'm hoping there's not going to be too much stewarding to be done though; I hope we have a bunch of good boys and girls this time around, because I would love the chance to get out there in some of that fine Scottish island air to take in the countryside. And be able to see the mountains!"

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