

31.12.15  
Hogmanay blog

### **It's Hogmanay and the future's right around the corner**

A new year and a new season are just a matter of hours away. Being a Scot, this is reason to celebrate. So, just before I head out – Tunnock's in one hand and single malt in the other – for a bit of first-footing, I thought I'd share some thoughts for the final time in 2015.

#### **Resolution for revolution**

New year's resolutions are all the rage about this time, so I thought I'd make three of my own. Here they are...

The World Rally Championship's calling

My number one resolution for 2016 is to make a permanent move into the World Rally Championship. I've been on the fringes for a while, but to work as a professional co-driver in the WRC is my primary and singular aim in life. Right now, I'm getting up at four in the morning, six days a week for my shift on the factory floor at Tunnock's and it's the drive and desire to work alongside one of the world's finest drivers that keeps me at it.

More Chinese takeaways

I joined Alister McRae in the BAIC Senova team for this year's Chinese Rally Championship. We took three podiums from five starts. There's a very good chance that Alister and I will be back in the Far East next season and an aim for both of us is to help develop the team and the car further. We want more podiums, but most of all we want a win.

There's no denying, the Chinese Rally Championship is quite hard work from a logistical, chopsticks and dog-eating perspective, but it's also hugely rewarding to take our sport to a stunning part of the world where the locals are really waking up to what we have to offer.

And, of course, the opportunity to co-drive a McRae is a very special one.

Wafers, caramel and coconut

I was trained as an aeronautical engineer, serving my apprenticeship for Rolls-Royce. But I gave that up to come and work at the family business in Tunnock's. Being completely honest, stepping away from cutting-edge aeronautical technology was a tough decision, but I did it for a reason. I did it to help me make the step into professional co-driving. I fully understand I'm fortunate to have the flexibility of working for the family, but there's no quarter given or asked for when it comes to keeping the caramel flowing or mixing the marshmallow. Yes, I'm working towards the exit and the achievement of a lifelong dream of reading pace notes, but sending Snowballs around the world remains a personal aim for the year ahead.

**That was the year that was**

As well as looking forward into 2016, the final few hours of 2015 are also a good moment reflect on the season passed.

#### Monte magic

Starting the season working with M-Sport on the Monte Carlo Rally was fantastic. A couple of months before the opening World Rally Championship round of the year, I'd co-driven Graeme Swann on the Wales Rally GB National in a Ford Fiesta R2 and obviously I'd done a good few WRC Academy rounds with John [MacCrone], so I knew some of the boys.

But the chance to work with Matthew Wilson preparing Henning Solberg's gravel notes was fantastic. I learned a huge amount both about M-Sport and working with a frontline team at rallying's highest level and about arguably the most technically complex and tricky round of the WRC.

#### A top 10 at Knockhill... that's Flash

Twenty years ago Colin McRae and Derek Ringer won the World Rally Championship. Earlier this year, there was an anniversary event to commemorate and celebrate some epic Scottish success. Just going to the McRae 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Rally Challenge at Knockhill was a privilege enough, but being asked to co-drive this year's British Touring Car Champion Gordon Shedden in a Ford Escort RS1800.

Celebrating the life of a genuine Scottish motorsport hero alongside another idol and icon of our sport gave me a weekend I'll never forget. I'd never seen Knockhill from the track before and I doubt I'll ever see it from as many angles as 'Flash' managed as he came to terms with a rear-wheel drive rally car for the first time. Unbelievable. Unforgettable. And ninth overall.

#### A silent tribute on Mull

Like many, the Mull Rally is very, very close to my heart. I've been fortunate enough to win the event with a guy I consider among my best friends, John MacCrone.

I wasn't competing this time around, but John was. He and co-driver Andy Mort were involved in a crash on the second day of the rally. Andy didn't survive the impact. In an instant, everything changed as the island and rally communities came together and delivered strength to those most in need. Our thoughts were then and are now with Andy's family and many friends. The tribute of a silent piper and Calum Duffy's poem offered a deeply poignant and emotional end to the weekend.

So, that was 2015. What does 2016 hold? We won't have to wait long to find out.

But, for now, are you ready? Arms crossed and linked?

*Should old acquaintance be forgot...*

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