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News release

### **Loudon's top-three Chinese take away**

While the fastest men and women in the world limbered up for the World Athletics Championships in China, Uddingston's Stuart Loudon showed Usain Bolt what real speed was about when he co-drove Alister McRae to a Rally Beijing Huairou podium on Friday (August 21).

Impressive as Mo Farrah and Jessica Ennis-Hill are, the high-speed spectacle was just up the road in the Huairou District, an hour's drive north of the Bird's Nest Stadium.

After two days of tough competition, the 27-year-old Loudon celebrated a third-place finish on only his second Chinese Rally Championship outing with McRae and the BAIC-Senova Rally Team.

### **The Bronze stage**

After a difficult debut on May's Chenzhou Rally – when the BAIC's Senova (loosely speaking, a re-bodied Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X) was slowed by engine, power steering and rear suspension problems – everything came together for the Lanarkshire lads' second event together.

"Third was a great result," said Stuart. "It felt fantastic to be standing on the podium next to Alister on only our second event together – he drove very, very well. OK, there was a little bit of attrition ahead of us, but we still worked hard for this result and it really meant something to the team to achieve this against some big competition."

### **Rally Beijing Huairou in detail**

The two-day event, which started on Thursday August 20, ran eight stages totaling 110 competitive miles (175km). Two stages were run twice on Thursday before the same roads were run in the opposite direction on Friday.

Stuart said: "One of the stages was quite technical and the other one was faster and more flowing – both ways, they made up a great challenge. Ironically, running at the same time as Rally Germany, I'd say the technical stage was quite similar to some of the stages around Trier, while the faster road was more like something out of the Alsace-based Rally of France.

"The road surface was changing a lot with good, well-laid asphalt giving way to concrete, to broken concrete, basically we had a bit of everything. I'd say it was 75 per cent Tarmac, 20 per cent concrete with the last five per cent broken concrete or gravel; it's fair to say the grip level was changing fairly constantly.

"And the quick bits, were really quick – we were showing 145mph in places. The organisation of the event was good, but you still had to have your wits about and expect the unexpected. Weather-wise, I think we were quite fortunate to get a big rainstorm the day after I arrived – that cleared the air and took away a fair bit of the humidity. It was still mid to high 30s for the whole rally though."

### **Give us a brake**

The main problem for the Saltire-flagged BAIC entry was getting the big motor slowed down for the tight junctions.

"The brakes weren't really up to the job of getting the car slowed down from the really high-speed sections," said Stuart. "Alister was having to pump the pedal up from fairly early. In the longer of the two stages, we went up a mountain, which wasn't a problem, across the top and then down the other side. Our descent had some fairly interesting moments!

"Our car is around 150 to 200 kilos heavier than those around us, but the team's looking at ways to reduce that and to improve the brakes. You could see, this performance gave everybody in the team a real lift – they were all pleased with fourth place, but when Niall [McShea] had a problem and we moved up to third, that was the icing on the cake. Or should that be icing on the Teacake?"

Chris Atkinson (Australia) won the event in his Volkswagen with Briton Mark Higgins (Subaru) second, ahead of the Scotsmen.

### **The watching World Rally Championship**

The International Association of Athletics Federations wasn't the only global sporting governing body in Beijing last week – the FIA was there as well.

Rally Beijing Huairou was a candidate rally for next year's World Rally Championship.

Stuart said: "Personally, I think China has a lot to offer the World Rally Championship. I've only competed on two events out here, but I have to say, they have both been on incredible roads and provide a real challenge. There's a serious enthusiasm for bringing the WRC to China and I'm sure there's the means to do the job properly. The sport's growing in this part of the world and this is a fantastic opportunity for rallying to show itself off to 1.3 billion people of a single nationality.

"Obviously, there's going to be work needed in certain areas, but it was really encouraging to see high-level FIA representation at the event. I'll admit, I wasn't sure what to expect before I came out to China to compete for the first time, but I'm loving it now. It's hot, hard work, but it's hugely rewarding when you get those roads right."

### **And the Wall?**

"It was Great.

"Once the rally had finished, we took a taxi out of the service park and in pigeon Chinese explained to the driver where we wanted to go. We took a few Caramel Wafers out there and just sat and stared at the thing – it was a real pinch-me moment to be standing next to the world's biggest wall eating the world's best biscuit. Great day. Great event."

### **Coming up...**

After his adventure in the far-east, Stuart will be on slightly more familiar territory on Sunday (August 30), when he tackles the Pendragon Stages (near Appleby, Cumbria) with Graeme Schoneville in his Honda Civic.

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