

Sport

Over ten pages of the best in Irish sporting action

Rallying in Paradise

Motor Sport

The Irish World's Sean Moriarty competed in Sol Rally Barbados earlier this month



Over 20 Irish and British crews tackled the 25th running of Sol Rally Barbados

Competing in one of the world's fastest sports in one of the most laid back countries on the planet must be one of life's great ironies.

But it is exactly what several Irish and British rally crews did recently - by participating in the 25th running of the Sol Rally Barbados - the Caribbean's biggest motorsport event.

Their adventure began in early May when the 20 or so "local" rally cars were loaded on a ship in Portsmouth bound for the island's capital, Bridgetown and after months of preparation and logistical challenges.

Once there the cars, ranging from full blown World Rally Car specification machines to self-prepared clubman cars, were delivered to a former Bank Brewery building that served as a temporary workshop and storage area for the international cars (they were joined by other competition cars from Trinidad and other Caribbean nations) during

their two-week stay on the island.

A fortnight may seem like an awful long time for the sake of a two-day rally event but the main attraction of competing on Rally Barbados is to combine a holiday in the sun-soaked paradise with a motoring event.

In fact international drivers were treated to two events over the course of their extended stay.

First up was the Scotiabank King of the Hill hillclimb event run in Sunday May 25.

The four kilometre (run four times) speed event, although a counting round of the Barbados Rally Championship, served as a high speed familiarisation run for the Irish and British crews.

Run over undulating roads on broken asphalt near the famous Vaucluse sugar factory in the centre of the 22 mile long and seven-mile wide island, this short test was very much a warm-up event in every sense of the word.

Outside temperatures

Brendan Brosnan and The Irish World's Sean Moriarty collect their awards in Barbados



of over 30 degrees Celsius translated into 40 plus in the rally cars.

The stage was lined from start to finish with thousands of enthusiastic local fans who were pitched on the roadside from early morning and as the day turned to evening the multiplication of their enthusiasm increased in direct proportion to the amount of local rum that was consumed.

Hillclimb

The hillclimb was also the official seeding event for the rally proper the following weekend, so competitors could count their best time over the course towards their actually starting position on Friday night.

Gully.

This particular test was not too far removed from what would usually be found on Irish rallies - fast-flowing roads through farm lands were interrupted by a series of tight hairpin bends that kept the drivers on their toes.

But any thoughts of being on vaguely familiar terrain went out the window when a group of monkeys ran on the stage in front of the competing cars.

The second stage of the rally was, basically, an extended run, in reverse, over the King of the Hill course with plenty of coconut trees lining the route to catch drivers unawares.

The spectators were out in force too - half the island's population must have

congregated at the stage's final junction where rally organiser, Barbados Rally Club, had gone to the trouble to build a huge grandstand next to the entrance of Vaucluse Raceway (a dirt track venue on the grounds of the sugar factory of the same name and the former host venue to rally's opening stage) and provided plenty of nourishment in the shape of Banks Beer, Cockspur Rum and a barbecue.

The third and final test was completely different to the other two. For starters in ran straight through the village of Dark Hole and this locality really lived up to its name.

Dark side

Almost from start to finish the stage was under the cover of trees, on the edge of the Flower Forest of Barbados, making it the darkest corner of the entire island.

Rum shops are another unique part of Barbados life. The shack-like buildings serve as the locals news gathering outlets in much the same capacity as local

pubs do on this side of the Atlantic.

Alice's Rum Shop served as the gateway to stage three - the arrival control was less than 500 meters from the front door of this bright red coloured building - and the locals, appropriately fuelled of course- served as an unofficial rally welcoming party.

This same loop was repeated that night under the cover of darkness.

Night rallying is challenging in any country but takes on even more significance in Barbados. Owing to its proximity to the equator Barbados is a very much a lights on - lights off nation with a complete absence of dusk.

With roads dotted with blind crests and sudden turns, driving, and indeed navigating, gets a little bit more exciting.

The only plus side is that the temperatures drop with the sun set so conditions in the car become immediately more comfortable.

Sunday's action was run over a loop of three stages repeated three times over a much more open and faster territory with four visits to a super special stage at Bush Park included in the itinerary.

Incredible scenery

Like Saturday, the rally passed through some incredible scenery - the East Coast Road, where the waves of the Atlantic Ocean crash in to some of the country's finest beaches and the run from service park at the St Andrews to the sugar farm at Kendal being worthy of particular mention.

Motoring World's Sean Moriarty was co-driving for Kerryman Brendan Brosnan in his unique rear-wheel-drive Peugeot 205.

They finished second in Class Group B1 to local ace Geoffrey Ulyett - just nine seconds separated them at the end.

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