

Volunteering pays for Caribbean-bound rally marshal

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SUN, sea and seconds is every rally fan's idea of a dream holiday and for one local man that's set to come true when he heads to the Caribbean.

Ian Connolly jets off to the tropical island next Wednesday where he will spend a fortnight soaking up the sights and sounds of Rally Barbados.

He won the dream prize after giving up his time to volunteer as a time-keeper during Easter's Discover Northern Ireland Circuit of Ireland Rally.

Included in the package are return flights from London Gatwick with Virgin Atlantic, accommodation, and car hire for the duration of his trip.

Two tickets were up for grabs, with

these put forward by Barbados Rally Club and the island's very own Tourism Development Corporation.

The money-can't-buy prize is promoted by Circuit bosses as a way of enticing people to marshal, with those that do entered into the draw.

Ironically, Connolly learnt that he was one of the lucky winners as he sat at his computer at home, working on plans for another rally - the Border Hopper. "When I received the phone call to say that I had won I was gobsmacked. I thought it was a joke at first," said the 43-year-old.

"I started marshalling a long time ago - something like fifteen years - and if someone had told me I'd win a trip to Barbados I think I would have said, 'Go and catch yourself on'. It's brilliant that the sport recognises the contributions marshals make and gives them something back.

"To get the opportunity to watch the sport in another country, to see how they go about doing things, will be interesting. It's a privilege."

He added: "The fact other people in another part of the world are buying into this idea shows how close-knit the motorsport community is."

Connolly confirmed to Chronicle Sport that he is keen to adopt the Circuit of Ireland's prize concept and reward volunteers that sign-on for the two-day Ulster Rally where, for a fifth year, the Maiden City Motor Club member has been assigned the role of Chief Marshal.

"It's something I intend to raise at the next couple of meetings," he said. "It's a personal goal of mine to reward two or three marshals on every single stage with a cap or a jacket. We have to remember that these are people who do it purely for the love of rally."

ing, they give up their free time to do it.

"It's becoming increasingly difficult to find the manpower needed to run rallies so if there is an incentive for people to sign up it would help."

The 2014 Discover Northern Ireland Circuit of Ireland Rally has been 'Highly Commended' in the Best Event/Festival Experience category at the Northern Ireland Tourism Awards. It was beaten to the top spot by the Giro d'Italia which scooped the Outstanding Contribution to Tourism Award.

Pictured below: Circuit of Ireland Chief Marshal Raymond Linton (right) presents Ian Connolly with his winning ticket to Sol Rally Barbados. WK21080.



Plains podium for Fiesta crew

JOSH Moffett and John Rowan came within six seconds of winning on their BTRDA debut on Saturday - but Dave Weston Junior and

Kirsty Riddick were wise to the challenge as they held on for victory.

The Plains Rally was meant to be a shake-down for the runners-

up ahead of the Azores Rally next month, but their speed through the Welshpool forests made them serious challengers from the off.

So quick, in fact, that they beat the winner of the event for the past two seasons - Euan Thorburn - and a whole host of BTRDA Rally regulars, including Hugh Hunter, Charlie Payne and Stephen Petch.

Sixth after the opening stage - a short blast over Cwm Celli - it didn't take Moffett long to replicate the speed on gravel that has taken him to so many podium finishes on Tarmac competitions. On the next test he moved up to third before wrestling second from Thorburn on Llangower where he held station until the finish despite picking up a slow puncture two miles from the end of the fourth test.

"You could say it

was a worthwhile trip," Rowan told Chronicle Sport. "The reason we entered was to get a feel for the Fiesta on gravel and there is no better place to do that than in the Welsh forests."

"We started off slowly - driving the car on gravel took a few miles to get used to - but after that our speed began to creep up as the day wore on and our confidence steadily grew. It was pleasing that we were able to put in times equal to - or faster than - the rest of the field. We're both feeling happy."

Saturday's result sees Weston Junior extend his lead in the drivers' standings to fifteen points over Stephen Petch. Round

five of the BTRDA Rally Series takes crews to the Carlisle Stages on June 13. As for Moffett and Rowan, they make the trip to Sao Miguel Island in a fortnight's time for Rallye Azores.

Plains Rally - Top Five Results: 1. Dave Weston Jnr/Kirsty Riddick (Subaru Impreza WRC) 40m 14s; 2. Josh Moffett/John Rowan (Ford Fiesta WRC) +6s; 3. Euan Thorburn/Richard Cooke (Ford Focus WRC) +24s; 4. Hugh Hunter/Andy Marchbank (Subaru Impreza WRC) +58s; 5. Jamie Anderson/Jonathan Scott (Mitsubishi Lancer EVO9) +1m 12s.



Josh Moffett made Dave Weston Jnr work hard for victory on the Plains Rally. WK21081. Pic: Ryan Suter/JMS Photographic

Crash puts Nutt's title bid on hold

CASTLEROCK'S Michael Nutt says it is too early to say if his car will be ready for July's Tyrone Stages after crashing heavily on the Tour of the Sperrins that resulted in significant damage to his Honda Civic.

The front of the car, and the driver's side door, bore the brunt of the impact in the high-speed shunt.

It happened on the first stage of the event with suspension failure believed to have been the cause.

Both he and his father Dessie - who was navigating for him at the time - managed to escape unhurt.

It was the 30-year-old's first big accident in the five years that he has owned the Group N machine.

He now faces a race against the clock to have it fixed and on the startline for the next round of the series, which takes place in ten weeks' time. "We're going to try and have everything sorted for then, but it's too early to say if it's possible," said Nutt, who has two wins and two DNFs to his name already.

"Mathematically I can still win my Class. I haven't sat down and worked it all out but I know that in order to give myself a fighting chance I need to pick up maximum points on every

remaining round. "The car can be fixed but how long it will take is anyone's guess right now. There's a lot to sort out."

Nutt was chasing a third Class victory on the Tour of the Sperrins that would have inched him closer to Neil Monaghan, who now enjoys a commanding 'points' lead.

"What happened is a setback but the important thing is no one was injured. The car can be fixed. It could have been a lot worse," he said.

"The accident happened on a fast, narrow piece of road. We were travelling at eighty miles per hour, the car skipped over one or two bumps and when it landed on the right corner the car spun up the stage and hit a post. Even now it's still very difficult to know exactly what caused it to happen. Those who witnessed the accident have told me that the car's front right seemed to give way on landing."

He added: "I've been driving this car for a few years now and picked up dings and scratches along the way, so I'm extremely thankful we could walk away from this accident. We did a good recce and marked all the dangerous spots on our notes, but you can't compensate for something like this happening."



Strut failure is believed to have been the reason behind Michael Nutt's accident. WK21079. Pic: Paul McIlroy