

HandS across the ocean

Last year's collaboration between the Circuit of Ireland, the Barbados Rally Club (BRC) and the island's Tourism Development Corporation (TDC), with two of our marshals winning a trip to the Caribbean to enjoy Sol Rally Barbados (May 29-31) first-hand, has been a win-win situation, reaping rewards on both sides of the Atlantic.

From a sports-tourism viewpoint, which is a key driver behind the BRC's premier event, the benefits have been tangible: Ireland has been the biggest growth area for first-timers in recent years, while one of last year's winners has even played his part!

Steve Reeves, who marshalled on both runs of the Buck's Head stage in 2014, bought a second ticket so his wife Pauline could share his prize, and they have really caught the Caribbean bug...

Steve said: "The entire trip was such an experience. The atmosphere is superb, from the King of the Hill to the opening night stage in Bushy Park through to the final stage at the same place. It was so good that shortly after we arrived back home, we booked a return trip for this year's event. We're going for another two weeks and are staying at the same hotel again. We're really looking forward to it!"

Apart from the wider sports-tourism benefits for Barbados, there has also been some valuable payback for Irish marshalling, too. Reeves added: "Before last year's Circuit, the last time that I had marshalled was in the '70s.

But when I heard the call for marshals through Volunteer Now, I decided to sign up. Since then, I've marshalled at a lot of

events with the British Motorsport Marshals' Club and am now a certified fire marshal. I'm doing all three days at the Circuit this year, and Pauline is going to marshal for the first time."

Fellow-winner Jason Jackson, who marshalled on the Loughries and Ards Town Centre stages, echoed his thoughts: "Last year's Circuit was my first time marshalling, but I really wanted to do it, because the stages were right on my doorstep. I've marshalled at other events as a result and I'm back marshalling at the Circuit of Ireland again this year. Sol Rally Barbados was definitely a great experience and one I'd love to go back to. Having such a fantastic prize trip is a great incentive for marshals."

All volunteers over the age of 17 are automatically entered for the draw. The prize includes return flights from London Gatwick to Barbados on Virgin Atlantic Airways, accommodation and a shared rental car. As well as Sol RB15, the 25th Anniversary of the BRC's premier event, the trip encompasses Simpson Motors Scrutineering and LIME King of the Hill (KotH) the previous weekend (May 23/24).

Sol Rally Barbados is a tarmac rally, with more than 20 special stages run on the island's intricate network of public roads, under road closure orders granted by the Ministry of Transport & Works, following a Friday night start at the island's recently redeveloped Bushy Park circuit.

LIME KotH, run under a similar arrangement, features four timed runs, the results of which are used to seed the running order for the main event.

Barbados rallying legend Roger Skeete has won 13 of the 25 events so far, including the first International All-Stage Rally in 1990 and Sol

RB14, while there are strong Irish connections: Kenny McKinstry was the first international winner in 1993, and went on to win again in 1996, before Kris Meeke won back-to-back in 2008 & '09.

BRC Chairman Mark Hamilton said: "Our six-year association with the TDC has helped us to promote our event, and Barbados as a destination, to the rally-centric Irish with tremendous success - we are two islands with rallying at the heart of our culture, so there is a natural fit. Our efforts have resulted in a huge increase in competitors from Ireland and we're delighted to repay that support by offering a once-in-a-lifetime trip for two of our volunteers. Motor sport is the same on both sides of the Atlantic - without our unpaid volunteers, our sport would be lost."

Circuit of Ireland Event Director Bobby Willis says: "Marshals are the unsung heroes of our sport and it's fantastic that our friends in the beautiful island of Barbados have offered this superb prize to our rally. Last year's winners had a fantastic time and to think that two more of our volunteers could win such a stunning prize is just amazing!"

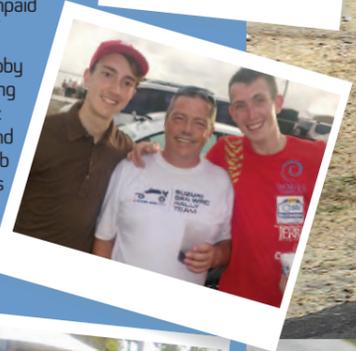
* HandS - geddit? Health & Safety = marshals! = trip to Barbados



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