

Mid Kent

● Autumn 2011 **FREE**

Living



*Louise Cook
female rally driver*



*Spend 24 hours
in Cranbrook
& Lenham*

*A tour around
ten of Kent's
loveliest castles*

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Making the most of the short days

Six months ago, when the trees were showing their first signs of life after their annual hibernation, and the dawn chorus was just beginning to be heard noticeably earlier, I wrote on this corresponding page that this year's spring could be more memorable than summer.

The premise was that the Royal wedding and subsequent street parties and Bank Holidays could mean a risk of 'peaking' too soon.

For some, this perhaps was the case thanks to the vagaries of our island climate. While April lived up to all expectations and more, ending as one of the warmest and driest on record, our summer was the coolest for almost a generation.

There were some good days, but too often the weather intervened and dampened even the best laid of plans.

A curious sense of relief can be felt as we enter the final quarter of the year. Instead of worrying if the weather can transform a good event into a great one, expectations of sun are low so arrangements are often made without the climactic variable having to come into play. With this in mind, we have started a new series exploring what can be enjoyed around the clock throughout Kent.

Our '24 hours in' feature begins by looking at Cranbrook and Lenham, with both offering plenty of attractions even during those wet days and long, dark evenings.

Our focus on 10 castles in Kent is along the same lines. These extraordinary structures were built for protection and privacy, where unwelcome guests and unwanted elements were kept at bay.

With Halloween, Fireworks Night and Christmas on the horizon, there is no shortage of events and festivities planned for the next few months. We hope you enjoy reading all about them in this edition of Mid Kent Living.

Stephen Eighteen



Contents

Page 4-5 Interview with Louise Cook

Page 6-8 Editor's choice

Page 10-13 24 hours in Cranbrook & Lenham

Page 18-19 A tour of Kent's castles

Page 20 Theatre

Page 21 Kids

Page 22-27 Thinking Christmas

Page 28-29 Health & beauty

Page 30-35 Education

Page 36 Property

Page 37-42 Homes & Gardens

Page 43 Competitions

Hitting Mid Kent towns

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Holidays	2nd October 31st October 14th November 9th December 10th December 23rd December	3 Day World War I Battle Field Tour 5 Days Potters Leisure Resort 5 Days Warners 3 Days Christmas Markets in France 3 Day Thursford Christmas Spectacular Show 5 Days Christmas in Worcester	£ 169.00 £ 325.00 £ 345.00 £ 169.00 £ 169.00 £ 425.00





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BROOKLINE



Driven by an ambition to be the best

by Peter Erlam

LOUISE Cook is a good example of how looks can be deceiving. She would not seem out of place in a girl band, on the catwalk or working in a trendy boutique. Louise has the confident air of a young woman who enjoys life to the full.



You would certainly be forgiven for failing to guess that she is a rising star in a dangerous sport dominated by men.

Curled up on the settee at her boyfriend, Stefan's home in Aylesford near Maidstone, Louise, 24, recounts

the story of how her future career began to take shape when she was just six. "My dad bought me a little toy car, a mini jeep, which I spent hours driving around at home. I crashed it a few times into the conservatory and eventually smashed the front axle. I think dad might have regretted buying that! But that's how it all started."

She added: "Dad used to take me to car shows at Brands Hatch. His friend had a box there and we'd watch races every two months. Dad's passion for cars was just passed on."

Fast-forward the story to Louise's late teens, when she entered a competition aimed at getting more women involved in rallying, and we find how her childhood scrapes in a battery-powered toy were beginning to pay off. "I went for it - and came second out of 1,000 women."

She explained: "In the first round, they taught us how to drift, do figures of eight and handbrake turns, and assessed how quickly we learnt. I got a call to say I was invited back to the final. They timed us and taught us how to use pace notes and do fitness tests.

"I finished second but the winner was 26 so she had a bit of an advantage on me. I was 19. That gave me the confidence to get my motor sport rally licence.

"My first rally was at Rockingham, Northamptonshire in 2006. That was mad, so scary. Everything was so new to me. I was in a little Peugeot 205. I really enjoyed it and finished 51st out of 105 and I was the youngest driver. That's where I caught the rally bug."

But, faced with a bill of £1,000 for fuel, accommodation and transport, it was also one of the



early reality checks on the high cost of her ambitions. "I spent my university grant on that," said Louise, who was taking a diploma in car design at Coventry. "I could not afford to keep doing that."

At the time, she had the seed of an idea that later bore fruit. "There were 20,000 students at uni and I thought if they all gave me one pound it would be the answer to my funding problems! Of course, that was never going to happen but Promotion50 developed from that in 2009. Basically, I went round companies asking them to support me with £50, for which they got a sticker on my car and a link from my website. My target was 500 companies and I managed to get 300, which was good."

Prior to that, Louise funded a two-week trip to

Finland from her savings. Stefan and her trailed a Peugeot 205 to the frozen lakes, where temperatures were as low as minus 30. With so little adhesion on the ice, it was the perfect place for Louise to hone her driving skills. But on a second visit there the following year, Louise crashed into a frozen snow bank at 85mph. She broke her collarbone and nine ribs.

Amazingly, Louise, with one arm in a sling, went out the next day and beat everyone, driving one-handed. "They presented me with a trophy and had managed to change

the title on it from Ice King to Ice Queen.

"But we had to cut the trip short. I was in a lot of pain.

I still have trouble driving, My collarbone sticks out slightly and I have to drive wearing a special HANS [head and shoulders support] device."

In fact, 2008 turned out far worse for Louise when her inspirational father, Bob, died of cancer.

However, she showed true grit by getting to grips with her funding plan. The 300 pledges of £50 meant she could start her first full season in the British Rally Championship Challenge in a modified Fiesta. "I won my RC4 class and finished in the top 10 overall, which was the goal for my first season," said Louise, a former pupil of Maidstone's Maplesden Noakes School.

Now, in her second season, she has stepped up to the BR Championship itself. She's done five rounds, with two more left - the Trackrod Rally in Yorkshire on September 23/24 and the Isle of Man in late October.

She suffered a big disappointment in August when she failed to complete the Ulster rally. "The engine had been running lean this year but we got it sorted for Ulster. I was looking forward to it. I felt I could battle for a podium finish."

But a slight misjudgement resulted in her hitting a tree stump and bending the rear suspension. Prior to Ulster, Louise was in fourth place overall, following

a successful Jim Clark rally in Scotland. Now she has slipped to fifth and, under the rules, faces dropping one of her better scores at the end of the season. Annoyingly, if she had got the result she had hoped for in Ulster she would have moved up to second place.

She now aims to do well enough in this month's Trackrod event to secure the women's title and then head to the Isle of Man more relaxed.

But what does the long-term future hold? "My ultimate goal is to be the first female to become world rally champion. I'd like to get into the World Rally Championship as soon as possible but the finances needed are incredible - £120,000 a year. And that's a lot of fifty pounds!"

In the meantime, she is delighted to have made the step up to the British Rally Championship, but it has meant finding double the amount of money, compared to the BRC Challenge.

"I managed to raise £25,000 but I'm really struggling to get the next £25,000," said Louise who has featured twice this season on Sky Sport's Rally Zone.

