

TACKLING THE TARMAc

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COOKIE CLIMBS TO FOURTH

Britain's leading Female Rally Driver, Louise Cook, contested her 10th ever rally and 5th tarmac rally this weekend, the Jim Clark International Rally, based around Kelso in the Scottish Borders. The rally was the fourth round of the Dulux Trade MSA British Rally Championship.

The recce did not go to plan, with a new note system on trial and codriver becoming ill, meant Cookie only managed one pass at some of the stages. *"I felt it was all over before it had started, without a decent recce your confidence levels are down, you start the event on the back foot and doubts make it very difficult to commit. With less experience than everyone else already, I was worried that our performance would drop dramatically. I felt so sorry for my co driver, he tried to carry on but we ended up driving the stages at 5mph and he was still feeling sick."* said Louise.

The morning of the rally consisted of a shakedown, a three mile stage that drivers can use to either set up the car, make some changes or, like Cookie, simply just settle back into driving the car on the sticky stuff. *"We didn't test before the Jim Clark, so we used the shakedown as a mini test as I hadn't driven the car on tarmac since last August. The shakedown went well with a fully recovered co driver. The car felt the best it has ever felt. We drove committed to the new pace note system for the first time and things were on the up for the rally start that evening."* said Louise.

The first loop of stages consisted of a short spectator stage through the crowd packed Duns town centre and then off to the two most demanding stages of the rally up in the hills of Bothwell and Abbey St Bathans.

The weather made tyre choices very pressured but based on the facts of the internet weather report and mm of rain, Louise took a very brave decision to go slicks all around. Despite the falling rain drops it was a decision that was proven the right one for the stages. This same loop of three stages were then repeated in darkness. With the lamp pod a blaze Louise caught and passed a fellow competitor in Abbey St Bathans despite being in the older ST, the same competitor was taking a massive 4 seconds a mile from Louise the previous year and it is a sure sign of Louise's high speed development since then. *"I have never driven so committed in the dark. We set some good stage times, up in the mix with the new faster Fiestas."* Said Cook.

The next day and back in the daylight the weather was still indecisive. *"The rain would come down but the heat on the roads meant it would evaporate very quickly so I had to choose slicks."* Said Cookie.

Louise set 5th fastest Fiesta time on Stage 10, the Eccles stage, and amazingly was only 1.16 seconds per mile off being the 2nd fastest Fiesta despite having a car 3-4 seconds per mile slower than her competitors Fiesta R2's. *"It is really pleasing to be so close and knowing the big gap between the ST and the R2, I know it is my driving making up the time. I also know where more than the 1.16 seconds a mile*

is, so it is all really positive!" Another time on stage 11 just 1.45 seconds per mile off 2nd place on the mega fast Swinton stage put Louise in contention for climbing to 5th place Fiesta.

"We were 15 seconds behind Kit Leigh in the R2, so I decided to push, maybe a little too hard. On stage 12, I ended up making friends with a chicane after braking really late and just catching the tyres on the grass, the car was not going to stop. I got away with little damage but the 1 tonne hay bale flew a good 6 metres. A mile on, the codriver missed a note that forced an overshoot on a hairpin. The two mistakes cost 45 seconds and the R2 we were aiming to catch set a time only 21 seconds quicker so we would have found 24 seconds over him in that one stage! It was a shame but I was 4 seconds a mile quicker than last year on the same stage, and that's something I am really proud of."

With the gap now up to 36 seconds, Cookie decided not to risk all her championship points trying to catch the quicker car. Cookie finished 6th Fiesta and is now lying 4th in the Fiesta Sporting Trophy UK despite being against 11 more modern Fiesta R2s. Louise is also leading the Ladies Cup from Australia's World Rally Championship driver Molly Taylor.

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"A massive thank you to RAJ Motorsport, Rosler UK, United Springs, Quazar International, The Marine Travel Company, Wolfrace, Medway Metals, product sponsors and all of the Promotion50 supporters!"



COOKIES CORNER

Jim Clark is such an amazing rally, I absolutely loved the jumps! Can you tell?! Even though we made a few mistakes and dropped a bit of time, I am so pleased to have got within 3.5 seconds a mile of the fastest Fiesta, Alistair Fisher on one stage. Alistair is at the sharp end of the WRC Academy and was leading Rally de Portugal until a mistake, so to be so close to him in a car that is 3-4 seconds per mile slower, I know we are going the right way about things. I now need to find the funds to make the Ulster Rally happen, big push!

