RALLY DRIVING



As race ace Gordon Murray (65) begins his retirement, he looks back on an action-packed career behind the wheel

Time to hit t

ROBBIE CHALMERS

Gordon Murray is living life in first gear from now on.

The 65-year-old is spending the next three months travelling around Europe with his wife in a motorhome, sampling the best golf courses the continent has to offer.

The Perth man's new life is a world away from his adrenaline-fuelled occupation that has thrilled onlookers and race-goers for the past 14 years.

Perennial KNC Groundworks Scottish Rally Championship (SRC) frontrunner Gordon is waving goodbye to his national rallying career with his head held high.

Gordon, who owns a family-run motorhome company in Inveralmond Industrial Estate, began his SRC career at the age of 50 back in 2005.

He called time on his years in the SRC at the end of the season last October when he finished third in the Scottish 2WD Championship alongside co-driver Dave O'Brien in their Ford Escort Mk2.

Gordon has always been a fan of rallying and was inspired by the likes of British world champions Colin McRae and Richard Burns who helped bring rallying to the fore of the mainstream.

But his first love was rock climbing, where he aimed to scale the heights rather than conquer the harsh bends.

Gordon said: "I was a mountaineer for most of my life up until then.

"Weekends and summer holidays were taken up with mountaineering and rock and ice climbing.

"Then I got hurt while on a glacier on Mount Blanc and that was the end of my rock climbing.

"So the next seven or eight months after that, at the weekends with nothing to do, I was frustrated.

"Then a man called Fergus Gray, from Perth, said he co-drives for a rally driver and he was selling his car and said 'fancy a look at the car.'

"So I had a look at the Subaru Impreza and that's how I started rally driving and I have enjoyed it ever since.

"I met Colin McCrae through the rallying a few times and he was definitely an inspiration to me.

"The Subaru is what he won the World Rally Championship with, so he had an influence on me rallying, there is no question.

"I had always followed the rally but never thought I would actually do it."

The 2005 Snowman Rally in Inverness would be his first event, and the Perth driver soon discovered that the high-octane sport he loved watching on TV is definitely as hard as it looks.

"There were butterflies in my first race," he said.

"When you are sitting in a high-powered rally car in the forest with the clock counting down and you hear the co-driver say 'go' – up until that point the nerves are really going.

"I found it a lot more difficult than I thought it would be.

"I thought I was a reasonably good driver until I started driving a rally car and I found out I wasn't as good as I thought.

"To be a rally driver, it needs someone who is a bit of a petrolhead really.

"Someone who is really interested in cars and also has the commitment to want to do it and do well."

Gordon would drive an Impreza for the next seven seasons and drew great pleasure from driving the iconic rally car.

But in 2013, Gordon switched to a Ford Escort Mk2 as the Subaru was "getting a bit long in the tooth", and the cost of acquiring top-line machinery did not appeal, and he drove it right the way up until 2019.

He said: "It is such a thrill to be able thread one between the trees, it's such an awesome car.

"It's sideways most of the time so you're hardly ever looking out the windscreen, just the side windows. And the speed soon came too."

The speed certainly did come, as over the last couple of seasons Murray has found himself right in the thick of the Scottish 2WD Championship battle.

After another strong and consistent season, Gordon had planned to retire after the Aberdeenshire-based Grampian Forest Rally in August with a great haul of points, but his rivals convinced him otherwise.

"It's been unbelievably close and really good this year, it's a pity I'm giving it up," he joked.

"The rest of the guys in the Escorts; Iain Wilson, Mark McCulloch, Paddy Munro and all these guys were at me and said 'you can't leave it like this you've got to do the last one.'

"I said I had no reason to do it as I had all the points I could probably muster."

Gordon's arm was twisted to do the Galloway Hills Rally, but things did not exactly go according to plan.

"It didn't go well," he said.

"I went into the last rally and I thought I would try and catch an edge on our competitors and see if I could go through the first stage really fast and try and win that part outright.

"I just let it slide a bit further than I expected it to slide, caught a banking and flipped the car.

"I was fine and it didn't really matter. It was the last rally and we got all the points we were going to get anyway.

"We couldn't really improve much on the points we had.

"I think it is part and parcel of driving a rally car.

"These things are driving through the forest on loose gravel surfaces and it is inevitable you are going to catch something at one point or another."

Despite the disappointing ending, Gordon says he has no regrets and is proud of what he has managed to

In the zone Gordon Murray in hot seat