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News release

Stuart sends a big 您好 from... somewhere in China

Stuart Loudon genuinely has no idea where he's going. Which is rare – very rare – for a world-class co-driver like him.

Who can blame him? The opening line of his travel itinerary read: 你的飛行...

Now, Stuart's a clever fella – as consumers of Tunnock's Teacakes and Caramel Wafers around the world will testify – but even he's not fluent in written Chinese.

Departing Glasgow airport at 0605 earlier this week, Stuart had been given a booking reference and nothing else. He headed for the KLM desk and was handed a ticket to Amsterdam's Schipol airport – he knew that much because the nice person told him. The rest of the itinerary?

"Absolutely no idea," he said. "It was written completely in Chinese. The only thing I did know is that I had a flight time and flight number out of Amsterdam. I was told I was going to Baiyun International Airport in Guangzhou.

"And I only knew that because the person at check-in said: "That's your bag checked through to Guangzhou. Don't worry – KLM is a code share with China Southern..." So, clearly, my bag had more of an idea where I was going than I did!"

Co-drivers are a funny breed; they don't need to know everything, they need to know more than that. They don't just need to know what's going to happen, they need to know what might happen. And when. How. And why.

"I must admit I'm a little apprehensive about the whole thing..." admits Stuart.

Lanarkshire's finest head east

When Alister McRae called Stuart to ask if he wanted to co-drive the British and Asia Pacific Rally Champion in this year's Chinese Championship, he jumped at the chance.

Born and raised in Lanarkshire, Loudon was only too well aware of the rallying dynasty that is the McRae family. A season alongside Alister was too good an opportunity to miss.

As was the opportunity to head east and see a completely different part of the world.

"When I said yes to Alister, I had absolutely no hesitation," said Stuart. "I still don't – but I thought there might have been more documentation or more details coming from the team or the organisers in China.

"I was talking to a few of the other guys who have been out in China competing. I asked if it was anything like the World Rally Championship. I might as well have asked if the dark chocolate Teacake had reached the moon yet..."

"The consistent advice I was given was to relax and just go with it. OK, but what about the stages? "Stuart, just relax and let it all happen... It will all work out in the end."

"Aye, right. But what about...

"Those conversations have been pretty common recently. But now it's here. I'm away and off to do something completely different."

Stuart and Alister will be competing in the Chenzhou Rally in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X – although the car will be badged as a Chinese car. The rally runs on concrete roads in the south of the Hunan province. The Scotsmen will face drivers like triple British Rally Champion Mark Higgins, Production Car World Rally Champion Niall McShea and Subaru World Rally Team driver Chris Atkinson. Stuart will gather alongside these stars of world rallying in Chenzhou city for the start on Sunday and at the finish a day later.

There, you know as much as Stuart about what he faces this weekend.

Tunnock's, far better than Chinese Wispas

Stuart's in for quite a week this week. In terms of cuisine, he's in for the ride of his life.

Two of the words he's learned already are chá and dàngǎo. To the uninitiated among you, that's tea and cake. So, put them together Chádàngǎo (茶餅 in local) and what do you get: Chinese Teacake.

Just in case Chenzhou's not stocked with Uddington's finest, Stuart's packed a few packets of Tunock's himself.

"I'm not too sure what to expect from the food," he said, "so a Caramel Wafer and Teacake's the perfect way to get me through the week!"

He might be 6,000 miles east, but unwrapping the famous silver and red wrapper will bring him straight home.

"I honestly can't wait to start competing," he said. "I love traveling and discovering somewhere completely new, that's one of the amazing parts of doing what I do as a co-driver. But the real thrill comes in the competition and sitting alongside a McRae is the realisation of a life-long dream for me.

"Obviously, the situation is a bit strange, going out to China not knowing so much about what's going on, but at the end of the day I have total faith in Alister and the team.

"When I get to the airport in China, I'm told there'll be somebody there waiting for me. They're taking me to the station, where I'll hop on and train heading for, hang on what does it say here. Oh, yes, heading for... 杭州

"What could go wrong?"

The writing's on the sign and it says:

歡迎來到中國 Stuart.

Welcome to China, Stuart.

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