

in the spotlight

Caroline Carslaw

Name: Caroline Carslaw
Birth date: 08 October 1992
Lives: Glasgow
Occupation: Graduate Mechanical Engineer
Hobbies: Motorsport, skiing, gym
Sponsors: Complete Cleaning Services, LDF Finance, SpidaTrap, First Independent Finance, Bunzl Cleaning and Hygiene Supplies



When did you first get behind the wheel of a car?

After getting behind the wheel of my battery powered pink Lamborghini at the age of three or four, I then progressed to cutting the grass on my dad's ride-on lawnmower! After that, I think I was about 14 when my dad let me have a go of his (very) old Toyota Hilux around some fields – it had to be started with a screwdriver! It was quite tail happy, so that actually taught me how to opposite lock! Then I started driving lessons on my 17th birthday and passed my test six weeks later.

What was your first road car? Did it survive?!

It was a wee white Fiat 500! Great first car and was so easy to park. It did survive but needed some work to the wing after an encounter with a gate post not long after passing my test. I had that car for nearly three years then the lack of power became an issue!

How did you become interested in motorsport?

My dad (Donald) rallied from the late '70s until about 2004/2005, as did my uncle (Robin Watson), so I have grown up with it and used to go and watch rallies when I was wee. Then in 2012 my dad asked me if I wanted to have a go and I thought, yeah why not! I also became a member of the Scottish Sporting Car Club (SSCC) and that was a great way to get started in motorsport!

What was your first event?

My first event was the Kingdom Stages at Craig in November 2012 in our Fiesta ST. It was the first time I had experienced a tarmac rally and also driving with real purpose and intent. My co-driver was John Duke (he is still my co-driver now) who has a wealth of experience, having competed in the British Rally Championship in the '70s and '80s, and was very calm during the 'moments'

The one moment that I remember was when we were overtaking the car in front and the red mist set in. My approach to the upcoming long right hander was far too quick. We ended up fishtailing around the stretch of tarmac before hitting some hay bales. The wee Fiesta took a bit of a knock but I was back into first gear and off again before the car we had overtaken!

How did you progress from there?

I liked the tarmac but wanted to experience gravel, so I had a day with Andrew Wood, who was great at explaining and demonstrating techniques and driving styles for the gravel...and I'm now hooked!

We did the Border Counties in 2013 and it was all sheet ice and snow on the stages – not what I was expecting for my first gravel rally! Cars littered the stages but somehow our wee Fiesta made it until the end and I won second in class 7!

That year I learned a lot about how to handle the car and we were continually improving, finishing the season with the Class 7 win for the championship. I also won First Lady Driver, so it wasn't bad for my first full season rallying!

We had a break in 2014, as I had university commitments but we returned to the forests again in 2015, doing the SRC and selected other events from the BTRDA. Colin Greer from GSR Services also sat beside me on a few test days - I'm definitely quicker and progressing thanks to him! GSR also prepare and look after the Fiesta for me. Their expertise is invaluable!

Favourite event?

The Speyside Stages in 2013 was awesome! The stages were fast and flowing, and out of eight or nine in class 7, we came first, so I'll always remember that as a proper class win!

Favourite moments?

I'm getting quicker and learning how to get the most out of the car with the limited power we have. Every rally I've done has favourite moments for me but at the RSAC Scottish Rally in 2015, when I passed the spot on stage one where we'd actually gone off in 2013, I was so excited we nearly went off again! We didn't though thankfully and completed the event, winning our class.

Best achievements?

I was 38th overall in last year's Wales Rally GB National event and was the first female driver. I got a free entry to the event after winning the Road to Wales award! I was also the SRC Ladies Champion in 2015 and finished second in the Junior championship. A couple of years ago, in 2013, I won the class seven SRC title and was First Lady Driver.

Biggest accident?

My biggest accident occurred while on a test day before the Snowman in 2014. I was on the last lap of the day and misjudged a 'Right 5' corner with a ditch on the outside and a pile of boulders on the inside. Unfortunately the back end of the car went into the ditch, so I kept the power on to pop us out but ended up going headfirst into the boulders. It was a sore one going from about 70mph to a dead stop. I never want to experience that again! I actually wouldn't have known what had happened only for photographer Mark Deamer, who had been just up the hill and got photos of the whole sequence of events!

Plans for the future?

I'm continuing in the SRC this year to see how we fare. Other than that, I just want to keep enjoying the sport! I would, however, like to try 4WD some day...sponsors permitting!

