

## **Wales Rally GB – “Call the Doctor”**

### **The objective**

Wales Rally GB (WRGB), the British round of the 2008 FIA World Rally Championship, was again to play host to the final round of the series, between December 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. Yet, with the championship already won by Sebastien Loeb and Citroen – and only four vehicle manufacturers officially taking part in the event, the rally’s organisers, International Motor Sports, part of the governing body of British motorsport, wanted to find a way to attract new audiences to the event, alongside ‘dyed-in-the-wool’ rally fans.

Therefore, as part of its wider programme, Prova was given the task to find a celebrity and a supporting charity, to take rallying to a new level – and attract new followers to the event and the sport.

The event takes place annually across the iconic forests of Wales but in recent years has also added a stage at Cardiff’s Millennium Stadium, in order to bring the sport nearer to Welsh centres of population. A celebrity, it was hoped, would help to attract a big audience, both to the forest stages and the Millennium Stadium, where a specific target of 25,000 paying spectators was set.

### **Planning**

A high calibre celebrity competing in the event would bring a massive boost to the event’s appeal in the eyes of the general media. Automotive celebrities had appeared in the event before – but the rally had rarely attracted famous participants from outside the four wheeled world.

Prova was tasked to co-ordinate the campaign to find a celebrity and undertake an associated PR programme. Part of the remit was also to find a major charity to be associated with the celebrity driver – giving the charity an additional means of revenue, the campaign an additional angle and the event another hook.

If the campaign was to work, Prova knew it needed an extremely high profile celebrity who would bring new audiences to the sport – and get hearts racing. That celebrity was Valentino Rossi.

In addition, discussions were held with vehicle manufacturers in order to find a partner within the sport who would provide the car, personnel and support required in order for Rossi to compete in WRGB.

Approaches revealed that he very much wanted to do the event – and meetings were held with his management team at last year’s British Moto GP. Meetings were also held with the BBC in terms of acquiring the support of Children in Need. Given the access to additional publicity that the campaign would give to Pudsey and his team, the BBC was extremely keen to be involved in the campaign. And Rossi’s enthusiasm for the project was even greater when he was aware of the Children in Need involvement.

Therefore, with Ford’s WRC partner – M-Sport - onboard in terms of providing a car, support and equipment and Children in Need agreeing to support the project, Prova was finally able to secure Rossi’s participation in the event.

### **Implementation**

At that point, the story was announced to the media, via Autosport. Many journalists away from the specialist motorsport media take their cues from Autosport – and with the story revealed, it was rapidly picked up by the nationals, TV and radio, specialist press and Welsh media. Significant coverage was also secured internationally. And in the run up to 2008’s BBC Children in Need, the announcement also received comprehensive coverage across BBC networks.

As Children in Need’s Marc Phillips, noted: “It’s a tremendous honour to have Valentino Rossi promoting BBC Children in Need. We have had a remarkable response to this year’s event on November 14th – and WRGB will be a fabulous final flourish for us.”



## **Creativity**

With a sporting story as large as the two wheeled legend – affectionately known as “The Doctor” - moving across to compete in the World Rally Championship, the campaign was to be a systematic one, making sure that all media outlets were aware of the story. Prova’s role was then to maximise opportunities, giving the media any further information required about Rossi, the rally – and Children in Need.

Bi-weekly stories were sent out, highlighting Rossi’s preparations for the event. In addition, we made sure that when Rossi was testing the car in the UK, a member of the Prova team was there, in a full Pudsey Bear outfit, giving the story an additional pictorial dimension.

On event, a place for Rossi was secured at the official pre-event FIA conference, while interviews were organised for the major titles. During the event, Prova personnel were on hand at the end of every stage in order to get up-to-date feedback on Rossi’s progress. These quotes were then reported back to awaiting journalists at media HQ.

As a culmination to the programme, a charity auction was held at the Service Park in Swansea. Prova was able to organise items of rally memorabilia from all of the teams, including race suits from drivers, parts of cars and exclusive trips round rally team headquarters, for auction in aid of Children in Need. This gave the campaign another hook during the rally.

## **Results**

The Valentino Rossi / Children in Need / M-Sport project was a huge success, on all fronts.

- Rossi finished the event in 12<sup>th</sup> place, earning the plaudits of the rallying community.
- In excess of 125 cuttings were recorded, with an OTS figure of over 50 million. Coverage was received in media including BBC Online, BBC Radio One, The Times, Autosport, Wales Online, The Sun, Daily Mirror, Daily Express, Metro and Yahoo.
- Attendance at the Millennium Stadium was increased to in excess of 28,000, the highest it had ever been for that stage of Wales Rally GB, due in the main to the pull of Valentino Rossi.
- The auction held at the Service Park attracted total bids of over £800. Children in Need personnel were also on hand to collect from the public during all four days of the event.

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