

MERRICK AGAIN WINS TOP RALLY AWARD

For the second time in three years, the Merrick Forest Stages Rally has been named best event in the Scottish Rally Championship.

The Newton Stewart based rally, the penultimate event in the 2009 eight-round Hankook series, beat stiff competition to lift the coveted Chairman's Cup at the SRC awards ceremony in Glasgow on Saturday.

Rally manager Allan Marshall, who was one of more than 500 guests who attended the dinner at the Marriot Hotel, said the award had come as a complete surprise. He said: "Until it was announced, I had no inkling that we'd won it".

"I'm absolutely delighted, and just want to say a big thank you to the small team who work so hard to ensure the event runs smoothly".

The Merrick first won the accolade in 2007 – the first year the rally was run under a new format, having taken over from the successful Park Systems event.

Castle Douglas businessman Ian Bendall also came on board as the main sponsor.

One of the main criteria used by the championship committee in judging the best event award is the feedback from competitors.

At the end of each rally, crews are encouraged to add comments about the condition of the stages and organisation of the event.

Comments this year included: "Have been to all the championship events this season and have to say this is the best – with the compact route, plenty of service time, and an early finish".

Another read: "I loved it last year, and enjoyed it even more today. Love its compact nature and the variety of the stages. Congratulations to all who worked so hard to put on this event".

Plans are now well underway for next year's Merrick, for which the rally HQ will switch from Newton Stewart to the County Buildings in Wigtown.

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