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By Warwick Patterson.

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Michael Park dies in Rally GB
accident.

I had the good fortune to go to Rally Great Britain this year, and up until Sunday afternoon, it was the highlight of my year! The speed of the cars, the atmosphere at service...it was all an amazing experience. If you get a chance to go to WRC, do it! The other nice surprise was that, even though this was the top level of the sport, it wasn't that far removed from what we do here. It wasn't an unattainable, elite form of racing like F1. It's just people having fun in the forest. Sure, maybe there are a few more (million) dollars, and major titles on the line, but its still just rallying. Unfortunately, Rally GB this year ended with an event that would shock everyone with a reminder that this sport can still be dangerous.

After being an extremely jubilant and loud venue for the indoor stage on Saturday night, the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff was suddenly the quietest place in town at 2pm on Sunday. Instead of showing up to celebrate and cheer the winners, fans were showing up to remember Michael "Beef" Park, Markko Martin's co-driver, who died in an accident earlier in the day.



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With the flags at half-mast, and a silent crowd looking on, the drivers drove their cars into the stadium en masse, and stood for a moment of silence before rolling over the finish ramp into Parc Ferme. No champagne, no announcement of results. At that point in time it didn't really matter who won, because everyone had lost.

Only one stage was run on Sunday, Resolven 1, as Martin's accident occurred in the Margam Park stage, and all subsequent stages were cancelled. Walking out of the stage, it was eerily quiet as the fans walked to their cars in silence, digesting what had just occurred. Back in the service area, the atmosphere was one of shock

and sadness. Gronholms car was sitting idle with a red cover over it, and Martin's service crew were already taking down the awning and packing tools to keep themselves busy and help take their mind off the recent events. The only sounds you could hear throughout the service park were generators and the occasional power tool. Seeing these events on TV, you don't get to see how much of a community the WRC is. Everyone knows everyone else, and many people have even worked for different teams, so they are part of the extended family at each team. Park was a team member of the Subaru and Ford teams before he was at Peugeot, so there were a lot of people who had lost a close friend.

With Gronholm pulling out of the event, and Petter Solberg in second place, Loeb opted to check in late for the final time control, incurring a 2-minute time penalty and putting himself back in third position for the event. Loeb wanted to avoid winning the event, and therefore the overall Driver's Championship on this tragic day.

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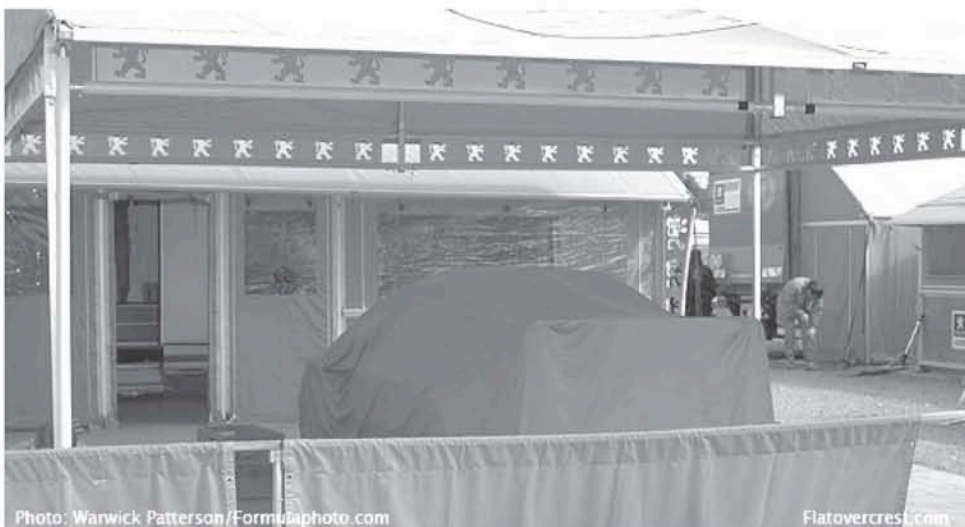


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