

March 2014

Motor Sport on the Public Highway

Summary

The government is considering changing the law to allow motor sport events to take place on the public highway in Britain. It has launched a public consultation to gauge opinion on the proposals.

Current legislation

As you know, it is illegal under Section 12 of the Road Traffic Act to take part in or promote a 'race or trial of speed' on the public highway. The person would be guilty of a criminal offence punishable by a fine of up to £2,500, obligatory disqualification from driving and the imposition of between 3 to 11 penalty points.

A Local Authority can close a road for many purposes – road works, events, demonstrations, etc – but they do not have the power to suspend the Road Traffic Act. This means that although the road itself may be 'closed', all vehicles on it still have to be road legal, taxed, insured and MOT'd, while all the road laws are still in force regarding speed limits and traffic signals.

In order to suspend the Road Traffic Act, a specific Act of Parliament is needed which is expensive and slow. Three Acts of Parliament are already in force, allowing the Jim Clark Rally, the Mull Rally and the Brighton Speed Trials to take place each year.

The proposal

The MSA has been campaigning for an amendment to the law that would reform this procedure, giving Local Authorities the power to suspend the Road Traffic Act and decide what happens on the roads in their region. That way, local people get to decide whether they want to have a motor sport event or not in their area. It is important to note that no sporting organisation will have the right to impose an event on an area – the final say will always lie with the Local Authority.

Type of events to be permitted

- Stage Rally held exclusively on tarmac roads
- Perhaps just one stage of a forest rally held in a town centre
- Short stretch of tarmac road joining two forest tracks to enable a viable stage for a rally
- Hill climb or Sprint held on closed stretch of public highway
- Local festival held around a small motor sport event like an Autotest or Hill climb

Number of events to be held

It is not anticipated that the number of events permitted under this legislation will exceed perhaps 200 in total, across both two and four wheel motor sport. The vast majority of these are likely to be for relatively low profile, local events with minimal impact. It is unlikely that 'major' events of the scale of a Jim Clark Rally (ie 3 days of rolling road closures along a 60-80 mile route) will number more than 20 in a year.

Impact on other user groups and local population

There is no intention to adversely affect other road user groups during any proposed event, but road closures will of course have an impact on local access. There are already many events (both motor sport and motoring) taking place on the public highway and the lessons learned from these events will inform the protocol for closed road events. As with all current motor sport events, access to emergency services is always preserved, disruption to local businesses and residents is minimised as far as possible and permissive access is afforded to all other users as is reasonably practical during the event itself.

Safety

All motor sport events must be organised to the very highest regulatory standards to ensure they are safe and responsibly run, taking into account the needs of all interested parties, including the emergency services and other user groups. The sport has an excellent track record of properly managed and carefully regulated events, of which there are approximately 5,000 organised every year in the UK. The consultation document lists only the Motor Sports Association and the Auto-Cycle Union as the proposed designating bodies in terms of event approval under this legislation, a situation that the MSA supports in order to ensure that everyone involved in the organisation of an event is suitably qualified.

Further information or any further background information:
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