

White-knuckled in Whiteash

Managers are usually the ones ordering a shake-up.

But when FE Scotland bosses Hugh Insley and Les Bryson accepted lifts in a rally car, it was they who received a shake-up.

Hurling through a forest at 130 miles an hour in a powerful car driven by a newly-licensed 17-year-old was, they admitted, terrifying.

"I can't recall very much about the whole terrifying experience," Hugh said. "Cornering past a pile of logs at more than 100 miles an hour effectively wiped out my memory – but I'll tell you, I would do it all over again, given the chance!" Which is just as well for Moray district forester Jim Lauder, who dropped Hugh and Les into the hot seats when he discovered it was possible to get rides with the rally drivers on the press and sponsors' day preceding the Speyside Stages Rally in the district's Whiteash Forest.

And their drivers were not exactly from the also-ran category who might have gone easier on their passengers' nerves. Les's driver, in a Peugeot 205 GTI, was Alick Kerr, who sped to second in the junior class, and Hugh's driver, Gary Adam, in a Subaru Impreza 555, took third place in the Scottish Rally Championship event.

WHO? ME? SCARED? Les Bryson puts a brave face on his shredded nerves.



Forestry Flyers step up to the mark

Silvan House's Forestry Flyers pulled on their running shoes and pulled off third place overall in a challenge to walk, jog or run five kilometres in Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden to raise funds for the British Heart Foundation.

And despite the wide variety of ages, shapes and fitness levels of the 27 squad members, they all completed the event, organised by jogScotland. Indeed, they all had enough in reserve to make it the nearest pub afterwards.

It was the Flyers' third outing, and they plan to be in action again in the New Year, when Edinburgh hosts the Great Winter Run, a 5k race in Holyrood Park on 13th January. Anyone wanting to join in the fun – perhaps using it as an excuse to burn off the Christmas excess – should email Linda McGinley in Silvan House or call her on 0131 314 6503.

Theatre in the woods

An outdoor woodland amphitheatre carved out of the natural environment of a forest glade has won a major landscape award.

Forestry Commission Wales's 200-seat amphitheatre, Theatr Tymaen, in the heart of Afan Forest Park, was commissioned to entice more people to experience the beauty of the woods around them.

Now it's scooped the prize in the category for mainly hard landscaping over £50,000 value in the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) National Landscape Awards.

Since opening in April, the theatre has proved immensely popular for concerts, theatrical performances, story telling, corporate events, product launches and workshops, and has even been used for church services, an arts festival and a woodland festival.

South Wales community programme manager Peter Cloke said, "The theatre gives people another reason to experience and enjoy the natural environment. We'd like it to be used by everyone from the community."



Jef lays down the challenge

Mountain-biking may be the sport of choice for many Commission staff, but one of our number is doing rather well on a sleeker style of bicycle.

Already a keen mountain-biker, Jef Sharp, GIS cartographer with National Office for England in Cambridge, took up road racing a few years ago, and enjoyed success at the recent Civil Service Road Race Championships in Preston.

The only Commission representative among 50 competitors, Jef came away from the four races with three first places and a third.

"It was the hottest day of the year so I was very happy to do so well in such tough conditions," said Jef, who is now the Civil Service Sports Club (CSSC) National Champion.

"The competition is open to all members of the

club, so it would be great to see some Commission staff there next year to challenge me for top spot!"

Jef, who is closing in on 100 wins for his racing career, works hard for his success. He rides to work every day, and twice a week takes a detour on the way home to cover up to 50 miles. He clocks between 150 and 200 miles a week, even in winter.

"I have two small children, so finding the time to train is not easy, but this regime keeps me very fit," said Jef. "In the build-up to a big race I will train harder and try to go faster on the long rides."

Anyone who would like to give Jef a run for his money in the championships next summer can contact him for further information at jef.sharp@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Ranger's play hits the airwaves

A New Forest District ranger's flair for the dramatic has caught the attention of BBC producers.

Moors Valley Country Park ranger Justin Rylands heard his 10-minute play broadcast to thousands of listeners after he entered Radio 2's "Imagine" drama competition.

Now Justin, 41, has been invited to submit more stories for consideration, thanks to the success of his story about "Saint Nick".

A panel of judges, including Mark Radcliffe, singer Alison Moyet and Radio 2 controller Lesley Douglas, chose Justin's entry for airing on the Mark Radcliffe Show in October.

The challenge had been to write about 'what would happen if you met your music hero'. It struck a perfect chord with the talented musician and composer from Dorset.

"'Saint Nick' was a comedy-drama tale about the singer, Nick Cave, and the performer's imagined alter-ego, St Nicholas (Santa Claus)," said Justin. "I didn't think I stood any chance of winning because thousands of people must have entered."

"The idea of getting a play aired on national radio is simply fantastic. It's nerve-racking too. You've no way of telling whether people are going to enjoy the work you've put so much effort into."

He added that turning his story idea into a top-class script was made easy by having one of the best jobs on Earth.

"I spend most of my day working in some of the most beautiful woodlands in Britain. Moors Valley is the perfect place for a bit of creative thinking," he explained.