

# Rally ace Wheeler set for BRC3 Top Gear presenter challenge

## MOTORSPORT

RICHARD HUGHES

TORBAY rally-driving sensation Chris Wheeler will be taking on new Top Gear presenter Chris Harris this season in the British Rally Championship.

Twenty-one-year-old Wheeler, who has two national titles under his belt already, has a new car and is set to race for the BRC3 title against the motorsport journalist who has been entered for an on-going feature in the revamped television hit.

Chris Evans is the main host of the world famous show, with Harris among a host of new presenters, including American Matt LeBlanc, the former star of comedy classic *Friends*.

Wheeler was in Wales last week testing his new Citroen DS3 R3T with Harris too putting his Citroen through its paces. And they are set to go head-to-head in Carlisle next month.

An excited Wheeler said: "The new Citroen DS3 R3T is completely different to the Ford Fiesta MS1 that I have been rallying – it is far more Horse Power, compared to the Fiesta's 155.

"The gear change is a flappy paddle next to the steering wheel and it changes gear in 0.01 of a second – so there is practically no hesitation between gear changes.

"The car is lighter and has an awful lot of technology with launch control, road and stage modes, anti-lag

systems that keep the turbo spoiling and much more.

"I drove the car for the first time last week at Walters Arena in South Wales and it was a fantastic experience.

"I believe it was the right choice of car to purchase for 2016."

Team Wheeler include experienced co-driver Yan Griffiths and his dad Steve who has 'broken the bank' to finance his talented son's racing for the next two or three years.

Steve Wheeler told *Herald Express Sport*: "This is it now – we have somehow found the money to keep Chris progressing. But he has proved he has the talent over the last couple of years and to progress he had to step up to the BRC3 category."

The Wheelers found the car in Scotland and although it is second hand it has been in only six competitive races.

It may take a season for the young driver to get used to the Citroen – although the British Rally Championship has already decided Chris Wheeler is the driver to watch, along with Chris Harris.

On the official BRC website, it says: "In the BRC3 category, newly announced BBC Top Gear presenter Chris Harris will debut the exciting Toyota GT86 CS-R3 – but will be up against stiff competition from young hot-shot Chris Wheeler."

Chris Wheeler said: "To be competing against a Top Gear presenter is exciting for me and it will be a good challenge. This year will be



a tough one but I am confident we can battle throughout the year.

"Testing took place at Walters Arena, which is a forest course that competitors can hire for testing.

"I learned a lot about the new car in a matter of hours and got to grips with driving such a top end car."

A 'fuel mapping' problem will see Wheeler miss the opening round of racing, the Circuit of Ireland, with the car's manufacturer currently working on a solution to make his second-hand vehicle 'legal' after a change in fuel regulations.

Wheeler explained: "The ECU in the car is mapped for a certain fuel which is banned – so in the meantime, manufacture Citroen will now be writing a map for the ECU to run on the correct fuel needed for this year's championship."

So Wheeler will drive the car competitively for the first time in the Pirelli Carlisle Rally over the weekend of April 30 and May 1, and he will follow that up with races at the RSAC Scottish Rally, the Nicky Grist Stages in mid-Wales in July and the Isle of Man International Rally in September.

He said: "This year, as this is a new car for me, I will be taking one event at a time.

"Throughout the year my pace will naturally improve and I aim to be competitive in each rally – setting good stage times and completing events."

**SITTING COMFORTABLY:** Torquay's Chris Wheeler in his new rally car