

Supercar rally to kick off in city centre as event approved

Edinburgh is to play host to the start of a celebrity supercar rally next month, despite concerns over disruption on the roads and large crowds becoming 'over excited'.

The spectacle will see half of George Street closed to traffic over two days as 100 sports cars line up for the Gumball 3000, a nine-day road trip across Europe finishing in Porto Montenegro.

The rally's multimillionaire founder stressed it was "not a race" and told a council meeting this week participants are a "who's who of the entertainment and business worlds".

However city officials voiced reservations about allowing it to go ahead, after previous visits sparked concerns about public safety. Despite these, councillors approved the event, which will take place on June 10 and 11 and be free to attend.

Edinburgh was incorporated into rally's route previously in 2014 and 2016 but this year will be the first time the Capital has hosted the 'flag drop' which signals the beginning of the 3,000-mile trip.

Objections to the plans were raised by the council's public safety and transport teams due to disruption caused by the previous visits and videos online showing participants driving irresponsibly.

There were also concerns amongst officials about "crowd

crazing” from the presence of celebrities, and access to George Street for cyclists.

Gumball 3000 founder Maximillion Cooper attended the council’s licensing sub-committee on Monday (May 15) alongside other organisers to address the points raised.

Mr Cooper, who launched the first rally in 1999 and has since taken it across the globe with a new route each year, said Edinburgh was the “ideal location for the event to start in the British isles” as voted for by fans.

He said this year’s participants are a “real who’s who of the entertainment and business worlds” including film, TV, music and sports stars.

And he reassured the council all drivers are under strict instruction of how to act on the city’s roads and the “dos and don’ts”.

He added: “We want to come back to Edinburgh again in the future, so we don’t want to see anything happen this year that would be damaging to future relationships with this city and country.”

Local transport and environment manager Dave Sinclair said while the impact would be “manageable” he remained worried about the “interaction of potentially different road users and visitors” on George Street, which will be closed to traffic between Charlotte Street and Frederick Street, extending to Hanover Street on the second day when the supercar procession, bound for London, will leave the city centre via the Mound and Market Street.

Event coordinator Ella Clayton said organisers weren’t notified until nine months after details were first sent to the council that George Street would “potentially not be suitable” as a venue.

She said: "The width and the length of the road is substantial, it's probably one of the largest spaces in Edinburgh to accommodate this event.

"I think a lot of the concerns that have been raised really could apply to anywhere in Edinburgh.

"On the objections it was brought up about the Youtube video that had been found of some cars misbehaving on the roads, which is an unfortunate one for us because it's that very very small minority that could potentially ruin our reputation when that's just not the case, that's not what happens.

"If there is, in the very unlikely circumstance, any misbehaviour there will be police there to put it right."

She said officials had also commented on the "celebrity nature of the event".

She added: "The word 'crowd crazing' was used which feels a little bit dramatic or emotive – it suggests a stampede in a stadium or something like Black Friday which is just not anything that we have ever experienced.

"The majority of our talent on the rally, specifically on this one, are social media influencers.

"Will they create crazy crowds on the road? No, but do they give us amazing exposure online through their social media platforms? Yes they do.

"This is the start of the rally, so we know exactly where the cars are, we know exactly where they're leaving, we know exactly what times they're leaving between 11am and 1pm."

Ms Clayton admitted during the rally's 2016 stop in Edinburgh there "wasn't enough management from our side in terms of traffic and crowd management".

She added: "We weren't expecting the amount of people that

turned up. That's something we've taken into account for this one so we've gone over and beyond in terms of the public safety and road safety to make sure that that doesn't happen again."

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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