

Police force the Scally to re-route after 40 years

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THE police have robbed Scotland of yet another classic race. After 40 years on the same course, Shettleston Harriers have been forced to amend the route of the Allan Scally road relay this weekend.

Police support has been withdrawn because of football matches at Celtic Park and Firhill, plus an Orange walk in the city, say the organisers.

The course has remained unchanged since 1969, a significant heritage which enabled athletes not only to chart their own progress year on year, but also compare themselves with former champions.

"Police offered us changes of our starting time, but for various reasons these were not suitable," said Bill Scally, son of the Glasgow East End benefactor and Shettleston coach for whom the event is named.

"We have enjoyed excellent support from the police over the years, which allowed us to run through some busy road crossings on the old course, but in the interest of safety of the runners, the old route could not be used without the police in attendance."

The new course, almost entirely on pavements, is in the Mount Vernon and Sandyhills area. Changing remains at Bannerman High School. There will be signs to the new start 600 metres west of the school, at the Barrachnie track which was the club's traditional home, prior to moving to Crownpoint.

The future is a matter for the club's committee, who seem unlikely to take this lightly. They organised a rebel race and were the most vociferous opponents when the Edinburgh-Glasgow road relay, most cherished and prestigious event on the winter road calendar, was axed in 2003 after 64 years,



NAT MUIR: Shettleston legend

because of police and governing body safety concerns. This despite assurances that the sport's insurance remained valid. It's not illegal to run on public roads, other than motorways.

The Edinburgh to Glasgow was the last of three UK point-to-point relays, which in their hey-day were all backed by the News of the World. The London to Brighton and Manchester to Blackpool events went to the wall nearly 40 years ago. Classics like the Nigel Barge and Glasgow University road race continue, but had to bow to the inevitable, and re-route.

British athletics have said in the past that they believe there is a concerted effort by the Association of Chief Police Officers to drive races off roads. They insist it's not the service's intention or wish to be awkward or unhelpful.

The fact is, however, that the increased volume of traffic poses risks, causing races to be axed or emasculated. Victoria Park's McAndrew Relay is one of few long-standing Scottish races to continue on its traditional course, but with a modified start point which alters the dynamic of the event.

So there will be new course records at the Scally this weekend. No more rejoicing in the fact that one might have run as fast as five years earlier, or got within a minute, or whatever, of legends like Nat Muir or Lachie Stewart. A chapter of sporting history has been closed.