

OUT IN THE COLD: NEUPRO PATCHES

By Dr Jon Stamford

I'm sorry but every time I write I seem to be on my way to or from some interesting destination abroad. Last week for instance I was meeting my scientific heroes in Lund. I had barely got home and changed into my pyjamas before it was time to leave again. This time, although the destination was again Sweden, I found myself to the north-west of Stockholm among the many narrow forest roads that comprise the Swedish Rally 2016.



There had been some concern that the rally would not take place.

Inclement weather was to blame. And inclement, in rallying terms, means that there was hardly any snow and temperatures were only marginally below zero. In other words, the roads were too safe and presented too little a challenge to the average rally driver. Acceptable rallying weather in Sweden is the point at which most public roads would be regarded as treacherous. Indeed the ditches either side of the road bore witness to that heady mixture of invisible road markings and overexuberant Swedish driving. Throw in visits to the systembolaget on the way and the consequences are almost inevitable.

An unexpected drop in temperature and increased snowfall at the last minute saved the rally from an ignominious abandonment. Apart from the tell-tale absence of snowbanks, it was business as usual. Dry crisp air and temperatures dipping below -8°C. Ice everywhere. And from throughout Scandinavia, the rally fans had come, each with their own champions. It mattered not one jot that a Frenchman, Sebastien Ogier, won the rally at a canter. The Scandinavian battle was far more significant with the Norwegian Andreas Mikkelsen pitted against the flying Finn, Jari-Matti Latvala.

This rivalry was short lived. Latvala, despite being one of the most exciting rally drivers around is also one of the most accident-prone (see You Tube) and it was not long into the second stage of the rally before Latvala had, yet again, broken his car.

Almost as short lived was my participation after taking a tumble on the slippery surface and spraining my wrist and cracking the back of my head against the ice. Funnily enough I hadn't been feeling at my best in the cold and it was only on the way home on Sunday that I realised why.

I use Neupro patches (in amongst a whole bundle of other stuff) and one of my favourite locations for attachment is on the thigh. I find they provide decent absorption there and stick down pretty well.

Under normal circumstances that is. And by 'normal circumstances' I mean the relatively constant British weather, rarely too warm and hardly ever significantly below freezing point.

Of course, standing for several hours at a time in Swedish forests at -8° C and below is not the same thing at all. When I got back in the car at the end of each day, I was acutely aware of how cold I was. Especially my legs. And at this point of course I had a moment of realisation. The body's natural reaction to external cold is to shut down blood supply to the skin. This is a logical survival reaction, preserving core body temperature as much as possible. For the most part, the consequences are minor. But if, like me, your medication depends on absorption through the skin, this will be potentially compromised in circumstances where the blood supply is reduced such as in Scandinavia winters.

So this leads me onto my thought for the day. Or more accurately question for the day. Does control of symptoms by Neupro depend on the outside temperature if the patches are applied to limbs rather than say the torso? Is absorption affected by Scandinavian winters or, for that matter, by North African summers? There must be data out there, surely.

Back at the rally, I dusted myself down after my fall, checked nothing was broken and made it down to the rally route just in time to miss Latvala snap another piece off his car.