

Robert's Rally Round-up

McKINSTRY WINS FIRST EVENT OF 2011

Kenny McKinstry won the New Year Stages Rally at Kirkistown last month driving a Subaru S11 WRC from his own stable of hire cars. Second place went to early leader and 2009 winner, Alan Carmichael also in a McKinstry car, the S8 which Kenny normally drives. George Robinson, with his older P2000 Subaru WRC, finished on the same time as Carmichael but was classified third when a tie-break rule was implemented.

With just two of the six stages remaining Kenny and Alan were tied but then McKinstry had a better SS5 and when Carmichael stalled on the final hairpin the win fell to the Banbridge man by 14 seconds.

Fourth place was also decided on a tie-break when Dominic McNeill in his Escort WRC piped the Subaru S9 of John McGaffin to the slot, while Gary White was sixth in his Gp.A 555 Impreza. Emma McKinstry came in a strong seventh in her Subaru S9 WRC, and Mark Massey was the first of the Gp.N runners in eighth with his Evo.9.

Denis Biggerstaff finished a lowly ninth in his S9 WRC saying he wasn't sure which was rustier, himself or the Subaru, which is now normally seen in the hands of his son Stuart. His dad took over the drive as Stuart was recovering from an illness, but more of that later.

Fintan McGrady in his Escort was best of the two-wheel drive runners after a smooth run in the ex-Trevor Moore Mk.2.

The main retirement during the day was number one seed Derek McGarrity, whose bright red hired Mitsubishi Lancer Evo10 suffered driveshaft failure on stage four. Derek is due to start at No. 3 in this weekends Galway Rally (Feb. 5-6) in a similar Gp. N car. Only two World Rally Cars are on the 80 strong entry list, which is well down on previous years. It could mean that the second round of the Irish Tarmac Championship, the Circuit of Ireland at Easter, might struggle to attract a quality entry.

For our part at Kirkistown, we were covering the timekeeping as usual. After an initial battle to get the ECM clocks up and running in time, everything ran smoothly with 61 cars taking the start on time. My thanks to all timekeepers who were instrumental in making sure the six stages were completed without a single hitch. A busy day for all as the event ran with 30 seconds between each car.

By the way; congratulations to New Year Stages COC Ronnie Mitchell who has just received the ANICC Clubman of the Year Award for 2010.

STUART IS OUR DRIVER OF THE YEAR

At the recent ANICC Dinner and Awards night in the Armagh City Hotel, I was privileged to present the David Gillespie Trophy to Stuart Biggerstaff whom we selected as BMMC Driver of the Year 2010.

The Trophy was first presented 20 years ago, and it went to Denis Biggerstaff, so this is the first time that a father and son have won it.

Stuart is of course the reigning NI Rally Champion, the youngest one ever, and is still recovering from a very serious illness which laid him low over Christmas. He told me he was very surprised to win the award and thanked us for choosing him over all others. Stuart also intends to be back to full fitness in time to defend his title which should start with the North Armagh Stages at Kirkistown later this month.

As I had predicted it would, the ANICC Northern Ireland Motorsport Award went to Chris Patterson who co-drove Petter Solberg to third place in the WRC 2010. Chris took over the roll of pacenote caller to the excitable Norwegian in his privateer Citroen C4 when Phil Mills stood down mid season. For 2011 they will be campaigning a new Citroen DS3 WRC in the World Championship.

TARMAC TITAN

Kenny McKinstry is the subject of the latest "Tarmac Titan" DVD from RPM which I received as a Christmas present. Kenny is our guide as the film, which lasts well over 3 hours, looks back over his ultra successfully rallying career. From his early beginnings in navigation events with John McGaffin through his Mk.2 days, his Lurgan Park victories, the Kaliber days with Robbie Philpot and his two ITRC titles to the Rallycross wins and his time with the F2 Escort in the mid 90's, which he says was his favourite car, right up to the last couple of years with WRC Subaru. It's all there and all his co-drivers plus his immediate family give their thoughts on Kenny's remarkable success which now spans more than three decades.

DEFINATELY NOT THE BOXING DAY RALLY

Postponed because of the weather conditions on Dec.27th, the UAC's "It's Not the Boxing Day Rally 2010" eventually took place on Sat.29th January 2011, some 33 days later! We were out in force with around ten BMMC members marshalling and timing some of the 20 tests which took place at various locations in and around Lisburn and Hillsborough.

Based at the Premier Inn in Lisburn where breakfast was served before the 9.30 start, the 46 car entry headed for the first test at Brian Nesbitt's farm near Annahilt. Our group consisting of Goff, Victor, Ross, Brenda, Rory and yours truly then went on to set up and run the fourth test at nearby Robin's Farm, which the cars would tackle three times during the course of the day. It was really a miniature special stage, run on the lanes around the farm buildings, with the quicker drivers completing it in around 44 seconds.

The weather was very reasonable for the last weekend of January; cold but dry with no rain, ice or snow to be seen. Anyway the three runs happened on schedule with no problems and we were back at the finish for around 4pm. The event was won by Frank and Joanna Lenehan in a Toyota Starlet with Eamonn Byrne and Anthony Preston's Mini Cooper second while Will Corry / Peter Moore finished third despite a few mechanical problems with their MG Midget.

LOOKING BACK

Marshalling memories

20 YEARS AGO

Carsport magazine of Feb.1991 featured a photo of Colin Rossborough presenting Denis Biggerstaff with the new David Gillespie Trophy (which then had a lid) at the ANICC do in the Carngrove Hotel, Portadown. Denis was our 1990 Driver of the Year.

10 YEARS AGO

Hard to believe that it's been ten years since that fateful Sunday in January 2001 when Motorsport here in Ireland and far beyond went into mourning. Bertie Fisher, his son Mark and daughter Emma were all killed in a helicopter crash near the family home in Fermanagh which left Bertie's wife Gladys and younger son Roy seriously injured. Fortunately, they both made miraculous recoveries.

Rally Diary

SAT 5TH FEB **MGCC DEREK WALKER CLASSIC TRIAL**

We will be out in force as usual this Saturday for the Derek Walker. SIGN ON 8am at Delamont Country Park near Killyleagh.

SAT 19TH FEB **MAGIC BULLET (KIRKISTOWN) STAGES RALLY**

North Armagh MC have a new sponsor for this the opening round of the 2011 Hankook MSA Northern Ireland Stage Rally Championship. We will be marshalling and providing rescue personnel. VENUE; Kirkistown Race Circuit SIGN ON; 8am.

SAT 26TH FEB **FIVEMILETOWN SPRING RALLY**

I expect to be asked to help with timekeeping on this Omagh MC event held in the forests near and around rally HQ at Fivemiletown in Co.Tyrone. The club have also been asked to provide rescue cover. Don't know sign on times yet.

SAT 12TH MARCH **BMMC TRAINING DAY AT KIRKISTOWN**

As I always say, you learn something new every training day. So just in case you think you know it all.... let me tell you..... YOU DON'T! DON'T MISS THIS ONE SIGN ON 8.45am