

Robert's Rally Round-up

Jan. 10

LOOKING BACK A DECADE OF ZEROS

As the final cords of "Fairytale of New York" drift into the distance, until next Christmas, and the last piece of turkey pie is scoffed... I thought I would take a look back at the first decade of the 21st century and recall some memories from ten years of Motorsport marshalling.

2000

No "Circuit" or "Ulster" that year, but Plum Tyndall held a Festival of Motorsport at Stormont in August to celebrate the new Millennium. We were also celebrating 20 years of the BMMC in Northern Ireland. The NI Championship went down to the wire with Robin Phillips beating Denis Biggerstaff by 3 seconds on the LAST STAGE of the final event to win the title.

2001

The deaths of BERTIE, MARK and EMMA FISHER in January came as a complete shock to us all and plunged local motorsport into mourning. We also lost club member and friend, Norman Strain that year.

Foot and Mouth disease had a devastating effect on Motorsport in 2001, with nearly all the major rallies cancelled. Although the ANICC managed to run a curtailed NI Championship and Lurgan Park survived. The one major that did take place was the Network Q Rally GB where we saw Richard Burns win the World Championship after early leader and title favourite, Colin McRae, crashed out just half a mile before the junction we were marshalling on Rhondda.

2002

Circuit of Ireland moved to Enniskillen, Dom Buckley wins Lurgan Park, Derek McGarrity is NI Champion and we witness new World Champion, Marcus Gronholm's big crash on the Halfway stage of Rally GB.

2003

Eugene Donnelly wins NI title; Glenn Allen has massive accident on approach to my stage finish location of the Lakeland Stages Rally. Kris Meeke barrel rolls his Opel Corsa over a cliff at my marshalling point on Rally GB. Popular club member Bobby Barr dies suddenly in October. Year ends with a Rallysprint at the Titanic Quarter in Belfast.

2004

Kevin Lynch won the NI Championship and Lurgan Park. Rallycross returned to Kirkistown when the British Championship visited in a double header weekend with Nutts Corner. Naill McShea won the World Production or Gp.N title. We were once again marshalling on Wales Rally GB which was held in September for the first time, Petter Solberg won for the third time. Ten marshals made the trip.

2005

We marshalled on all nine rounds of the NI Championship, the Circuit and the Ulster, plus Wales Rally GB, where Keith Thompson was with Phoenix Rescue as they dealt with the tragic accident involving Michael Park. In October we were in Sligo for the first Rally Ireland as the country prepared for a round of the WRC which could happen in two years time. Richard Burns died as the result of a very aggressive brain tumour, on the same day as George Best, Friday 25th November 2005.

2006

Kevin Lynch won his third NI Championship. In March we were involved with Rally Ireland 2 back in Sligo which was successfully observed for inclusion in the WRC for 2007. The Circuit of Ireland moved to Londonderry in April. Colin McRae starred on the Donegal Rally in a Metro 6R4. Six club members travelled to Wales Rally GB for three days marshalling, Gronholm won for Ford as Loeb couldn't take part having fallen off a mountain bike prior to the event.

2007

On Saturday 15th September 2007, the world of rallying lost its first "Superstar" when Colin McRae died along with his five year old son Johnny and their friends, Graeme Duncan and Ben Porcelli in a tragic helicopter crash near Colin's home in Lanark. The WRC has never been quite the same since.

Rally Ireland in November was a major success story. In fact it was judged to have been the 2nd best round of the WRC behind Finland! Marcus Gronholm crashes out on the Lough Gill stage, as a result Sebastien Loeb goes on to win the rally and then ties up his fourth World title with victory in Wales the following month. Loeb had been to Donegal in June, as a test session, and dominated the rally.

2008

Young Connor McCloskey won the Pacenotes NI Championship. Eamonn Boland was the surprise winner of the "Circuit" at Easter which was based around Newry for the three days. Boland also took the "Ulster" win as he went on to become Irish Tarmac Champion.

2009

I reviewed 2009 last month, but since then we have marshalled one more event.

" IT'S NOT THE BOXING DAY RALLY" took place on Monday 28th December and was based in Hillsborough. On what turned out to be one of the coldest days of the year (-2%) Victor and I were due to cover the finish timing on two tests held at Law's Yard in Culcavy. Ronnie Mitchell was COC for the UAC annual post Christmas event which used to be on Dec.26th but for the past few years has been held on the day after that (27th) To avoid Sunday, this year the rally moved to the 28th, are you still with me? Anyway that is the reason for the new name; it's Not The Boxing Day Rally"

After an hour's delay to allow for a bit of a thaw (in fact Ronnie almost cancelled the event due to frozen test sites) the rally started at 10.30 and we had 50 competitors, driving all types of cars ranging from Mk.2 Escorts and Subarus to MGs and Minis, from all parts and parts of Ireland, arrive with us to do test one. There were no regularity sections this year and co-drivers just had to get their drivers between the nine test sites which were to be visited twice before an afternoon finish at "The Pheasant" in Annahilt. We were finished for 2.30, but don't ask me who won the rally as at the time of writing no results were available on the UAC website.

By the way, this had been my 380th time to sign on since January 2000!

RALLY DIARY

SAT. 16TH JANUARY

First event this decade will be the 500 Club's **NEW YEAR STAGES RALLY at Kirkistown**

I NEED TIMEKEEPERS; so please sign on at 8AM if you can help.

The rally is Round One of the Pacenotes 2WD Rally Challenge.

SAT. 30TH JAN.

RALLYCROSS AT NUTTS CORNER

The next round of the Open NI Winter Series. No sign on time as yet (see Fel)

SAT. 6TH FEB.

MGCC DEREK WALKER CLASSIC TRIAL

Don't know venue yet, but again Fel should have details. Last year it was based at Delamont Country Park near Killyleagh, Co.Down.

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE CIRCUIT OF IRELAND

This Easter the Circuit of Ireland Rally takes place over two days, APRIL 3RD and 4TH

Bobby Willis is the Event Director and he will have Andrew Kellitt as his COC.

Des O'Loan is DCOC responsible for marshals and Michael Orr will be route co-ordinator

I have agreed to be Chief Timekeeper once again and I know I can count on your support.

The route will be similar to that of 2009 with the Saturday stages in Co.Down and Sunday in South Armagh and Louth.

Rally HQ will again be the PARK INN in DUNDALK with the Service Park in NEWRY.

There will be five stage locations on Saturday and four on Sunday. Two of the Saturday stages, near Loughbrickland, will combine following the first loop and will then run as a 16 mile stage in darkness.

This year's event is to be observed and, following a favourable report, will hopefully be included in the 2011 Intercontinental Rally Challenge (IRC)