

Robert's Rally Round-up

July 09

McGARRITY IN COMMAND OF N.I. CHAMPIONSHIP

Following victory on last month's MOURNE RALLY, Derek McGarrity now leads the NI Rally Championship by 29 points from Kenny McKinstry as the series heads into the forests after a mid-point break.

It could all have been so different though, if McKinstry had not retired while leading the Newry MC's event. His S8 cried enough when a crankshaft broke on a road section between stages nine and ten, leaving McGarrity to take an easy win in his usual S12B Subaru.

For my part, along with Victor, I was on the Stop line of Wee Gullion which was run three times and then our location became the finish of two new stages which combined both Gullion tests but were run in reverse direction to the norm. Maurice Kerehan from Newry MC, whom I hadn't seen for some time, was our Flying Finish control for the day. An entry of 86 meant we were kept busy all day and an end of rally meal at the excellent Bellini's in Newry was much appreciated.

As Chief Timekeeper I want to thank Victor, Goff, John and Anna for all their help on the Mourne.

MacHALE DOMINATION IN DONEGAL

Gareth MacHale the youngest of Austin's sons took a surprising start to finish victory on the 2009 Topaz Donegal International Rally. Twelve years after his Dad last won this Irish Tarmac Championship classic, Gareth and co-driver Brian Murphy who also sat with Austin in that 1997 win, dominated the event leading in his 06 Focus WRC from stage one on the Friday until they crossed the finish ramp on Father's Day, the longest day of the year, Sunday 21st June. This was MacHale's first major rally victory.

The main challenge came from Eamon Boland's Subaru but his engine expired on the final day leaving pre event favourites Eugene Donnelly and Paddy Toner to come through in second after a catalogue of problems which befell their normally reliable Skoda throughout the event. In third place was a surprised Sean Devine who inherited the position when Tim McNulty retired. Robert McDaid (my boss on Rally Ireland) was co-driving Devine. Good to see Glenn Allen back rallying for the first time this year and he finished a steady sixth in his Corolla. Wesley Patterson took the modified win in his usual Mk2 Escort.

For us the Donegal Rally started when I met up with Victor on the Friday and we drove up to the finish of stage three at MALIN HEAD. Here we rendezvous with John and Anna who would be joining us for the weekend. Between us we were to cover the Flying Finish and Stop controls here and then on FANAD tomorrow and ATLANTIC DRIVE on Sunday.

The first car started Malin on time at 12.54 and was with us almost eight minutes later. Around one and a half hours and 142 cars later we stood down for a well earned hour break before the stage re-run. Mitchell and Margaret from Henderson Rescue who were covering our stage have a house right

on the Stop line and had left tea and scones for us." Just go in and help yourself" said Margaret as they left earlier, "the door is always open". Apparently up here no one locks their doors!

So the second Malin stage came and went without incident with slightly less cars left running naturally. When we were finished the Henderson's arrived and after a guided tour of their cliff top "estate" which includes such wildlife as a colony of Chuffs and a family of owls we had an "indoor" barbeque before it was time to head south and our B&B at Carrigans.

We were all staying with Clerk of the Course Danny Gormley's sister Josephine and her husband Charlie. While Victor and I have used this excellent Guesthouse as our Donegal base for a number of years, it was John and Anna's first time here, I think they were suitably impressed.

On to Day Two; Saturday, and this time it was an early start as we had to be in position at the finish of FANAD HEAD for 9am. Unfortunately the first run of the 10 mile classic was cancelled because, wait for it, the lorry carrying the straw bales required to set up chicanes broke down. The stage ran on schedule second time round without any problems and we were finished for 3pm. Then it was off to rally HQ in Letterkenny and an early evening "rally special" meal. We noticed a distinct lack of the usual Donegal atmosphere in the Mount Errigal Hotel this year, due no doubt to the economic climate, a main course meal was 14 Euros and of course drink was pricey.

While Saturday had been an early start, on the final day, Sunday, we had a much more civilised 9am breakfast before heading out to Downings and the ATLANTIC DRIVE stage. This year the stage was run in reverse direction to that of recent years and would be the last in a loop of three. We managed to find our finish location through the mist and persistent drizzle which would be a feature most of the day. In fact although it was the longest day of the year it seemed more like the middle of winter!

Anyway the first run started on time at 12.43. At this point there were 90 cars left in the main field plus 14 historic and 18 junior competitors following behind, so another long and busy stint for all of us. Again we had an hour's break then it was time for stage number 20, the final one of the 2009 Donegal Rally.

The day ran very smoothly with no major incidents and so, after shaking hands with the winning crews, who in turn thanked us for our part in the running of the event over the three days (All it takes is that word of thanks, it makes you feel appreciated, I only wish ALL crews would do it) all that was left to do was gather up the timing equipment and head our separate ways, John and Anna would say another night but Victor and I had to head home ready for work the next day.

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LOOKING BACK

I remember, I remember....

25 YEARS AGO July 1984

A young James Gillen from Castlederg took his second NI Autoest Championship victory in Bangor. Colin Rossborough was COC and the event was organized by the Northern Bank Motor Club with assistance from ourselves in BMRMC. Big names such as Ken Irwin and William Rutherford in Mini Specials (as was Gillen) plus Robert Dickson driving his unique Metro Special filled the next four places.

20 YEARS AGO July 1989

David Llewelin and Phil Short driving their Team Toyota GB Celica GT-4 took a dominant win in the 89 Donegal Rally. We were timing as usual on the three day event. Second was the Toughmac BMW M3 of Bertie Fisher and Rory Kennedy who finished a minute and a half down. James Cullen and Ellen Morgan were a further two and a half minutes back in a Sierra Cosworth. Austin McHale (that's the way he spelt it back then!) had a big accident at Wilhares Corner on Knockalla crashing his Sierra at over 100mph but escaping injury.

15 YEARS AGO July 1994

Stephen Finlay won in Donegal with his Malcolm Wilson Motorsport prepared Michelin Pilot Escort Cosworth , reg no. L10 MWM. Bertie Fisher slithered off the road in his Impreza on Saturday while leading and so Kenny McKinstry came through to finish second in his Legacy while Peadar Hurson had a good run to take third in a Metro 6R4.I was timekeeping once again for all three days. Meanwhile, Garth McCartney won the Tour of the Sperrins in his Sierra 4X4 putting himself back in contention for the Maxol NI Championship. Star of the Day though was Sean Haveron who was driving a 2-litre Escort Mk.2. He was second behind Derek McGarrity's Sapphire Cosworth after SS2 but then rolled on the third stage and dropped back to 31st. A come-back charge was halted on SS6 when he cut a corner, hitting a rock which kicked the steering wheel out of his hand. As he tried to grab it he caught his thumb AND BROKE IT! The pain was terrible but Sean continued to the end where he finished seventh overall before going to hospital for treatment.

10 YEARS AGO July 1999

I attended the Scottish Rally as a spectator. The top drivers were in F2 Seats and Renaults and they were spectacular on the dusty forest stages of the Galloway hills. Then Roy Bartlem and myself were timing on the Donegal which was dry Friday wet Saturday then dry on Sunday. James Cullen and Ellen Morgan won in their McKinstry Subaru Impreza after a first stage puncture had dropped them way down the leaderboard. Andrew Nesbitt fell back to 114th after stage one but charged back to eventually finish 4th.

RALLY DIARY

SAT. 4TH JULY

LOUGHGALL COUNTRY PARK RALLY

We are timekeeping for Declan McAleer and club members will be covering rescue and radios.

SUN. 5TH JULY

LOUGH NEAGH STAGES RALLY

Held over the concrete lanes of Moneyglass Desmesne this is round three of the Pacenotes ANICC 2WD Rally Challenge. No specific request for marshalling or timekeeping help but on the MMP list so go if you want to. Radio crews will be out.

TUESDAY 14TH JULY

BISHOPSCOURT CLUBMAN STAGES

We will be timekeeping on this one which is Ballynahinch MC's round of the Pacenotes ANICC 2WD Rally Challenge. In fact round number four is due to start at 10.30 so sign on for 9am please.

SAT. 1ST AUG.

DOGLEAP RALLY

Round six of the NI Championship and the first of the forest rounds this season. I will be on holiday so contact Maiden City MC if interested. Radio and Rescue crews should be involved. No further details available as I write.

SAT. 8TH AUG.

LURGAN PARK RALLY

The event goes ahead with no overall sponsor as I write but there may be an announcement soon. Don't know if Kevin Lynch will come out of "retirement" for this and the Dogleap but don't be surprised if he does! We will be covering fire points as usual. Sign on 8-9am.