

Robert's Rally Round-up

June 09

BALLYCASTLE RALLY

On the final Saturday in May we headed for the north Antrim coastal town of Ballycastle for the second round of the Pacenotes ANICC 2WD Rally Challenge.

In total contrast to the stormy conditions which brought round one at Kirkistown to a premature end way back in January; this Mid Antrim MC event took place on a pleasantly dry and sunny spring day.

After meeting up with the rest of our timing team for an early breakfast in the Marine Hotel rally HQ, we headed for our stage to set up the start and finish points. The rally would consist of eight special stages held over the tarmac forest drives of Ballypatrick and Ballycastle.

We would cover the short two and a quarter mile stage at Ballycastle which thankfully ran all day without any major incidents. This was not the case on the longer five miles of Ballypatrick where on the first stage of the rally and on his first event, David Christie crashed his Mk.2 Escort which then caught fire and was total destroyed in the blaze, both crew members escaped without injury.

Despite all this the rally continued with local hero George Robinson taking victory in his S6 Subaru Impreza WRC while second placed man Declan McNaughton was top 2WD finisher in his Escort. Top points scorer in the Challenge was Michael Conlon who finished fifth on the day but Andrew Bushe still leads overall despite not taking part in Ballycastle.

I would just like to thank all club members who helped with the timing on this event.

McGARRITY TAKES LAST GASP WIN IN DAVAGH

Derek McGarrity won the Tour of the Sperrins but he had to wait until the final stage of the Davagh Forest based event to clinch the narrow victory.

Held in atrocious weather conditions over the treacherous and narrow Davagh tarmac roads (the only location the organising Magherafelt club could get) the five stage event was round four of the MSA Hankook NI Championship.

As expected local driver and Davagh expert, Camillus Bradley powered his Vauxhall-engined Mk.2 Escort to an immediate lead; he was an amazing ten seconds quicker than anyone over the first four-mile test. It all came to nought though on stage two when he rolled into a ditch and out of the rally.

There were four different leaders all day as the lead changed after each stage, but the three WR cars of McGarrity, McKinstry and Biggerstaff all had problems and dropped back. Then on the last stage Derek McGarrity who had climbed back to third came through to win by just one point three seconds from the well driven Mk.2 Escort of Declan McNaughton. Raymond Johnston was third in his Evo 9.

For our part we covered the finish and stop controls on all five stages and thanks to Goff and John for their assistance in what was a very wet day in Davagh.

BILLY NOT SUPERSTITIOUS ABOUT LOUGHGALL

Club member, Billy Stevenson who picked up our "driver of the year award" back in January was back in rallying action last month when he took part in the Historic Rally Car Challenge which was part of the third Loughgall Festival of Motorsport.

Around 50 competitors took part in the seven stage rally which once again used the tarmac roads within Loughgall Country Park in Co. Armagh. Each test was approximately three miles long.

Fastest all day was Wesley Patterson in his usual Mk.2 Escort a repeat performance of last year; but as he was in the modified section he couldn't qualify for overall honours, that went to Seamus O'Connell in his Historic Class Escort 1800.

Billy Stevenson, despite running with number 13 on his the oldest car in the event, a 1959 Ford Popular 100E, finished second behind Mervyn Johnston's flying Mini in class 1A but a fantastic tenth overall.

Three of us were on timing duties all day, which turned out to be very wet for a time, but as was the case in 08, dried up towards the end. The whole event raised thousands of pounds for Macmillan Cancer Support and other Lions charities. It was jointly organised by North Armagh Motorcycle and Car Club and Armagh Lions Club.

Look out for television coverage of Loughgall on RPM during June.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLUS VIDEO CLIPS ON ALL THREE OF THE ABOVE EVENTS LOG ON TO RallyBuzz.com

LOOKING BACK

Marshalling memories

25 YEARS AGO June 1984

Billy Coleman won the Rothmans Circuit of Ireland when others including Jimmy McRae, Austin McHale and Henri Toivonen all retired while in contention.

Toivonen should have won as he was miles ahead on Sunday in his Rothmans Porsche, but he injured his ankle while taking part in a kart race at the Waterford halt on the Sunday night. We were on a stop control in Co. Mayo on Monday evening and when Henri arrived he told me "I have only one gear left, it is fifth!" He had obviously been crash changing gears without using the clutch. Later we watched as his crew try to change the gearbox at a roadside service in Sligo but as they eventually ran out of time Toivonen thanked them all for their efforts and then Ronnie McCartney drove the Finn back to Belfast. Little did I know then that this was the last time we would see the extraordinary talent that was Henri Toivonen in action, he of course died two years later in Corsica.

20 YEARS AGO June 1989

Kenny McKinstry driving a Mk.2 Escort won the first and second rounds of the Adair- Singleton NI Rally Championship. We were running a stage on both the all-night Conecrusher and then the Carryduff Forklift Stages.

15 YEARS AGO June 1994

Denis Biggerstaff was the first of FIVE Metro 6R4's to cross the finishing line in the Superfinal of the third round of the British Rallycross Championship at Nutts Corner. Altogether a total of six Metros plus an RS200 took part. We of course were trackside as usual.

10 YEARS AGO June 1999

We were timekeeping at the Ballycastle Rally which saw only 34 cars competing on the 8 stage event. Trevor Moore won in his Escort Cosworth from George Robinson. Star of the day had been Andy Hawthorne in his self-built 2 litre mid-engined rear wheel drive Nova, unfortunately he crashed out from second place.

5 YEARS AGO June 2004

Kevin Lynch led the NI Championship; he won the Tour of the Sperrins in his S9 Subaru. Derek McGarrity was second in the title race while Kevin Shaw lay third. We were timing in a very dusty Banagher on the Sperrins.

RALLY DIARY

SAT. 6TH JUNE

MODERN TYRE SERVICE MOURNE RALLY

The loss of the Cooley Mountain stage means that the Newry club have had to revise their NI Championship round this weekend. We are out in force timekeeping and providing Rescue and Radio cover. There will be a total of 13 tests using Camlough, Wee Gullion and Big Gullion. The big news is that McKinstry and Biggerstaff have not entered and appear to have given up on the Championship. Glenn Allen is due to return in the Corolla.

FRI. 19TH - SUN. 21ST JUNE

TOPAZ DONEGAL INTERNATIONAL RALLY

We are timekeeping on all three days. Day one is on the Inishowen peninsula (including the classic Malin Head test) Saturday features Fanad and Knockalla while Sunday sees the rally finish on the Atlantic Drive stage.

SAT. 4TH JULY

LOUGHGALL COUNTRY PARK RALLY

A second visit this year to Loughgall Country Park , this time for North Armagh MC's Clubman 2-wheel drive only event. Expect to see lots of Mk.2 Escorts competing in this popular event. We will be assisting McAleer timing and of course Rescue and Radio crews will be in action also.

