

Robert's Rally Round-up

AS RALLY IRELAND BITES THE DUST; WILL THE CIRCUIT BE OUR GLOBAL FUTURE?

The news that Rally Ireland will NOT now be part of the 2011 WRC has raised speculation that the CIRCUIT OF IRELAND may step up to the plate and at least become part of a Global Rally Championship in the not too distant future.

Next year the WRC will have new cars with engines limited to 1.6 litre turbo charged 4WD units. These cars will effectively be the current S2000 machines, used in the IRC, but with the new power-plants.

The BIG question is WHAT HAPPENS TO THE Inter continental Rally Challenge, which is not an FIA supported Championship, after 2011 when S2000 cars will probably cease to exist? We already know Jean Todt wants the IRC and WRC to join forces sooner rather than later.

The answers to this and lots more pressing questions on the future of World Rallying should become much clearer in the coming months.

Rally Ireland was doomed following MASSIVE losses incurred staging the 2009 event. This and the FIA not being happy with a Sligo base, which was miles away from Dublin or Belfast, didn't help. In any account, Ireland could not afford to stage another round of the WRC, that would cost £2 million-plus, and without a title sponsor there is absolutely no chance of raising that amount. One senior member of the organising team was heard to say, "People are saying it's a disaster that we haven't been included in the 2011 calendar-- it might have been an even bigger disaster if we had. Where would the money have come from? In the current economic climate there is little appetite to fund a sporting event of this scale. To be included in the calendar and then not be able to afford to run the rally would have been a real disaster."

Could this be part of the reason then that Rally Manager, Bobby Willis, has assembled the top brains from Rally Ireland, Gordon Noble (COC in 09) and Tom Walsh (COC 2007) to head up the new look Circuit of Ireland for 2010? Does this shrewd business man and much respected figure throughout the rallying world, know something the rest of us don't? Time will tell and everything will be revealed in due course. The Circuit this Easter will be an IRC "supporter event", which means Bobby is seeking inclusion in that Championship next year or in 2012.

After all the Circuit of Ireland Rally, the third oldest in the World after Monte Carlo and Poland, has always been the best known name in Motorsport in Ireland and as such deserves to become the Country's representative on any future Global front of rally sport.

Willis plans to run the COI from Belfast to Dublin in 2011, with possibly a Stormont Super Special as the opening test. Wasn't this the plan for the next Rally Ireland?

WHERE WAS I LAST MONTH?

At two Rallies plus the MG CC Derek Walker Classic Trial, that's where!

The **MG event** was based at Delamont Country Park near Downpatrick and quite a few BMMC members were helping out with the various Autotests on what proved to be a very cold but dry Saturday.

The **Omagh MC Fivemiletown Spring Rally** was held on Sat.20th Feb.

John, Anna, self and Ray went down to cover timing for two stage finishes. The weather was certainly NOT spring like. In temperatures of -2% we had persistent fog and the Co.Tyrone forests were covered in ice and snow. In fact drivers described conditions on our seven mile stage as more akin to that of the Swedish Rally than any thing else! Of the 71 starters only 48 made it to the Fivemiletown finish after eight special stages. The winner was Ian Cochrane in his Evo. But star of the show was Escort Mk.2 driver, Frank Kelly who finished only 12 seconds back in second place.

Next was **The Pedro Pet Foods Stages Rally** at Kirkistown on 27th Feb.

Just Goff and I were marshalling on this event, but Jan, Tony, Keith and Connor covered rescue, thankfully they had a very quiet day. The day before was very wet, but conditions, although slippery to start with, improved and the light winds quickly dried out the stages round the racing circuit.

From our point of view we had a fairly uneventful day at the chicane sector as the 112 competitors in this the opening round of the Hankook NI Championship took to the usual six stages.

The rally was dominated once again by last year's winner and defending NI Champion, Derek McGarrity who this time had an ex.Eamonn Boland Subaru S12B at his disposal. In the end Derek finished 1 minute 26 seconds ahead of young Stuart Biggerstaff in his dad's S9 who again started at the venue where he was second on his first rally back in January.

George Robinson looked to have secured second place as he had held that position from the start, but transmission problems with his P2000 Subaru on the final stages saw him drop behind Biggerstaff and take the last podium place.

Raymond Johnston won the Production category and was fourth in his Evo.9; while Drew Stewart took top 2WD honours in his Escort Mk.2. In all 93 cars finished the North Armagh MC event.

LOOKING BACK

Marshalling memories

25 YEARS AGO... March 1985

Colin McRae, son of Jimmy, picked the fourth round of the Northern Ireland Beginner's Autotest Championship, held in Castle Park, Bangor in February and run by the UAC, to make his Irish four wheel competition debut in a Mini on loan from Castlederg's Ken Irwin and watched by Ronnie McCartney. Colin put in a fine performance, finishing third overall and winning his class. This was his second autotest, his first was in Scotland. McRae had been in NI on one other occasion to compete on a Motorcycle event. We were marshalling in Bangor, and I can recall timing the future World Rally Champion on one of the slightly snowy tests.

Another Colin, Richards this time, won the Belfast Car Ferries Rallycross Championship at Nutts Corner driving a Porsche from Jackie Harris's Metro. Meanwhile the first Rallycross at Kirkistown since 1979 saw Ronnie White take victory in his Fiesta. Both events were held in snowy February conditions and of course we were marshalling.

Neil Bolton was awarded the BMRMC's Shadow Trophy in recognition of his services to motorsport in 1984. This was the first time the award had left mainland Britain and was presented by Stuart Turner at the Ulster Motor Show in Belfast.

20 YEARS AGO...March 1990

Derek and Roisin Boyd won the GMW Rally held in Ballymena Showgrounds last month (Feb.) We provided marshals for the nine stage event run by Mid Antrim MC. Davy Greer in a Corolla was second and Stephen Mawhinney third in his Sunbeam. Dominic McNeil crashed his 309 GTI into the perimeter fence.

Dermot Carnegie won the third round of the Kirkistown Winter Rallycross Championship in his Metro 6R4. David Francis and David Patton were second and third in Escorts.

15 YEARS AGO...March 1995

BMRMC's Doctor Paula McAlinden was selected as the Vauxhall/Ulster Motoring Writers Association 1995 Marshal of the Year.

10 YEARS AGO...March 1999

Last month (Feb.1999) we ran a stage in Tardree forest for Mid Antrim MC's GMW Rally. It was great to see such a good turn out of marshals (seven cars plus the rescue unit) who set up and ran the short point seven of a mile stage. Mervin Hill won the event in his ex.Delacour Escort Cosworth.

RALLY DIARY

SAT. 13TH MARCH

BISHOPSCOURT STAGES RALLY

Round two of the Hankook NI Rally Championship, this event is run by Ballynahinch MC and sponsored by McGrady Insurance. We will be providing Timekeepers and I could us any available help. Ring me if you can assist. SIGN ON 8am.

SAT. 20TH MARCH

BMMC/BRMC TRAINING DAY at KIRKISTOWN

As we always say; "you learn something new every time". So even if you think you know everything, come and refresh your skills. More rally content is promised this year. SIGN ON 9am

SAT.3RD/SUN.4TH APRIL

CIRCUIT OF IRELAND RALLY

Round two of the Citroen Irish Tarmac Championship and round three of the Hankook NI Championship, I have now covered all Timekeeping positions but any last minute help will never be turned away! Fifteen special stages around Newry/ Banbridge and South Armagh/Monaghan make up this IRC supporter event. Could Kris Meeke and Guy Wilks compete, during a break from their 2010 IRC campaign? Only Bobby Willis has the answer, but with him anything is possible. Other entries should include Derek McGarrity, Gareth MacHale, Tim McNulty, star of Galway Craig Breen in the sensational Fiesta S2000 and possibly Eugene Donnelly IF he gets the funds to run his Skoda.