

Robert's Rally Round-up

CIRCUIT OF IRELAND PLANS UNVAILED

This year's Circuit of Ireland Rally, which takes place over the Easter weekend, will feature two runs over a mile long "Civic Island Super Special" stage in the centre of Lisburn on the Saturday evening at 6pm.

The rally starts from Armagh at noon on Saturday 23rd April and takes in a total of ten special stages in counties Armagh, Down and Antrim before returning to HQ at the City Hotel for an overnight halt.

Easter Sunday sees competitors resume at 10am for a further six stages in Tyrone and Monaghan, before finishing back in Armagh at 16.20. The service park is also centralised beside the City Hotel in Armagh for both days, just like the Ulster Rally was until three years ago. In fact the new compact Circuit will not leave the province of Ulster this Easter.

Bobby Willis is Rally Director for the second year while Gordon Noble resumes his COC roll for the 2011 event. The Donnelly Group are on board as title sponsors while UTV Drive are also supporting the rally.

The rally is round two of the Irish Tarmac Championship and the Saturday stages will include competitors taking part in the third round of the Hankook MSA NI Stage Rally Championship.

Derek McGarrity, in an effort to secure a fifth win, hopes to compete in a World Rally Car as does Gareth MacHale. Galway winner Tim McNulty is unsure because Killarney follows a week later and he says he can't do both.

LONG DAY AT DEREK WALKER

Last month we helped out Carol Willis and her MGCC colleagues by setting up and running various tests at the annual Derek Walker Classic Trial which started and finished at Delamont Country Park near Killyleagh. Roy, Victor and I went with Fel and Billy to set up tests three and four at Bells accident and repair facility near Crossgar. Goff was sent to another location.

The trouble with autotest sites is that all competitors have to walk and memorise the test before they can start. This meant that it took two hours to put the field of 39 cars through our tests.

Then we set off to our second location at Chambers farm near Ardglass. This is the home of the family who built the famous Ulster-built Chambers motorcar, an example of which you can see at the Ulster Museum in Belfast.

We had been here many times before on the Derek Walker, but today was not the most memorable occasion. For a start, it began to rain heavily, ok for Roy as he was "line watching" in the large barn where most of the action took place, but not so much fun for Victor and me at the start/finish line outside. It didn't help when the competitors began to arrive in "dribs and drabs", meaning the test took THREE HOURS to complete.

Anyhow when the last of the stragglers' had gone we cleared up and then it was back to Delamont for a very welcome bowl of soup and some sandwiches as we dried out.

RESCUE CREWS SPRING INTO ACTION AT FIVEMILETOWN

Donegal driver Donagh Kelly in his Evo.9 may have won the Fivemiletown Spring Rally by just 8 seconds from Martin Cairns S9 WRC, but if there had been a "Sprit of the Rally Award" it most certainly would have gone to both BMMC and BADMC rescue crews.

Omagh MC had attracted a good entry of 75 competitors for this 8-stage loose surface clubman event, held on the final Saturday in February. Ray and I were the finish timekeepers on SS1/5 Doon Forest, while John and Anna would be on finish duties at SS 4/8 Brown Hill.

Stage one started on time at 11.26 with car number one driven by last year's winner, Ian Cochrane setting the fastest time of 2mins 34 secs. in his Evo.9. The damp conditions would surely favour 4WD competitors today, but the large crowd of spectators who had walked in to the test only really wanted to see the battle for 2-wheel drive honours, due to be fought out between the always competitive and spectacular Mk.2 Escorts of Frank Kelly, Adrian Hetherington and Vivian Hamill.

Kelly came through fifth on the road just one second down on Cochrane. Then it should have been Hetherington but just two corners before the flying finish boards, he flew off the stage and into a tree. Hamill who was the next competitor into the stage stopped at the scene, so we didn't know if everyone was ok until two minutes after the crash when Aidan Caldwell arrived at the stop board and told the radio crew to get medical assistance to the scene as the SOS board was displayed.

It transpired that Adrian's co-driver Gary Nolan had been injured in the impact, so the stage was stopped and the BMMC rescue unit plus all other services were despatched to the scene from the stage start.

It took Rory, Jan, Tony and Conor plus the Ballynahinch crew, who were called in to assist, almost 50 minutes to extract Nolan from the car and carefully transport him into the waiting ambulance which would take him to the Erne hospital.

Thankfully Gary was later discharged and apparently he even returned to the prize giving in the Chestnut Bar at the end of the day.

Much praise was heaped on the efforts of the rescue crews by the Omagh MC organising officials. Under great pressure, and during some very heavy rain showers, they had acted in their usual professional and very efficient manner and got the job done properly.

After all that excitement, the second running of our stage passed off without incident and when the last of the 62 cars still going had left us we packed up and headed homeward.

LOOKING BACK

Marshalling memories

25 Years Ago

The 1986 Rothmans Circuit of Ireland was due to take place on March 28. The five day event would start in Belfast and finish in Waterford.

20 Years Ago

The annual MGCC Classic Trial was sponsored for the first time in 1991 by the Royal Insurance Company. It started from Belfast Castle and we helped to run the first test in the snowy and ice covered castle grounds. The event followed a route of 75 miles before finishing at Balloo House, Killinchy. We also ran the final test in the car park at Balloo.....and the Trial winner was one DEREK WALKER!

10 Years Ago

We ran a short stage in Tardree Forest as part of the 2001 Mid Antrim MC GMW Rally. Over 60 crews took part. In "Rally Round-up" I reported that Donegal's Hugh Martin Doherty had beaten Wesley Patterson by one second to win the New Year Stages at a cold and frosty Kirkistown.

Rally Diary

SAT. 12TH MARCH BMMC TRAINING DAY AT KIRKISTOWN

I'll say it again....you learn something new every training day....so be there please! SIGN ON 8.45

SAT. 19TH MARCH BISHOPSCOURT RALLY

Round two of the Hankook MSA NI Championship and organised as usual by BADMC. We have been asked to provide Timekeepers, so if you can help please SIGN ON at the circuit by 8am.