

# **Robert's Rally Round-up**

Sept. 09

## **THE RETURN OF THE KING**

Kenny McKinstry co-driven this time by Manx man John Skinner, scored a start-to-finish victory in last month's Orchard Motorsport LURGAN PARK RALLY. It was unbelievably his ELEVENTH win in this unique event which attracted the usual large crowd to see what turned out to be an excellent day's motorsport with no incidents of note; in fact we finished slightly ahead of schedule.

With no Kevin Lynch to worry about this year (apparently he has given up rallying altogether due to the economic situation) McKinstry was back to his old form and went 3 seconds ahead of Eugene Donnelly on the first of the eight stages. Kenny was in his now usual S8 spec. Impreza while the Gene was driving the Skoda Fabia. Derek McGarrity was back for the first time since his roll some years ago and settled into third in the S12B Subaru. Unfortunately, Sean Devine didn't show and Denis Biggerstaff blew his engine in the S9 while testing the night before. Still there were fifty runners in total, including 25 Mk 2 Escorts which made up the Challenge event, won on the final stage by Camillus Bradley after long time leader and defending champion, Wesley Patterson retired with a broken track control arm.

For my part I was again Fire Officer and although we had possibly the least number of BMMC/BRMC marshals on duty that I can remember (not counting three on Rescue duty and one on Radio there were only six of us) my thanks go to those who made the effort to attend. Looking back ten years ago to 1999 and a total of thirty club members had signed on.

This year marked the 30th anniversary of the Lurgan Park Rally and my 29<sup>th</sup> as a marshal (I missed the first one in 1980)

So the top three places remained the same throughout the day's eight stages with Darren Gass taking fourth in his S11 closing to just point two of a second behind McGarrity (although Gass did take a short cut on stage five) and Glenn Allen fifth in the Corolla. John McGlaughlin won Gp.N after a huge battle with Raymond Johnston over the final two stages.

For Kenny McKinstry though, this eleventh victory was particularly sweet coming as it did six years after his last, a certain Mr. Lynch had of course won the last five. The new record will possibly never be beaten, except by the man himself of course! Make no mistake at around the 60 year old mark the original "King of the Park" has been re-crowned!

## **EUGENE HOLDS OFF GARETH FOR MEMORABLE ULSTER WIN**

Going into the final 8-mile 14<sup>th</sup> stage of this year's ULSTER RALLY, Gareth MacHale held a lead of just POINT FIVE OF A SECOND over Eugene Donnelly. It had been an epic event based in Antrim and using

the classic Co.Antrim / Derry stages including Tardree, Glendun, Torr Head and Slieve Gallion for the first time in years. This is how the story of our 2009 Ulster unfolded.

First Derek McGarrity set fastest time on stage one at Tardree to go into a 2-second lead from Donnelly's Skoda with MacHale in the 05 Focus one second down in third.

These three swapped the lead all day Friday with Eugene eventually leading overnight by 3 seconds from Gareth.

We as a team covered both runs of the six mile Tardree stage with Goff, Steven and David on the start line, Colin and Victor joining me at the flying finish while Fel, Billy and Chairman J.C. were on the stop line. A full complement of G.O.R.M's (Grumpy Old Rally Marshals) then, including Mr. And Mrs. Hughes on stage finish radio and Chris, Jan and Keith on the rescue unit.

The "International" event was a round of the Irish Tarmac and the British Rally Championship had comprised of 65 competitors while the "National Rally" which included the Mk.2 Escorts and historics had 64 starters.

Friday went well for us with no incidents of note and despite a few heavy showers the weather was reasonable good, we were cleared up by 9.30pm. I was back home an hour later.

On to day two, Saturday and this time we all headed to SS10/14 Lisnamuck near Tobermore in Co.Derry. The weather was good and we were set up in plenty of time for the first run due at 10.59.

Once again I was on the flying finish, with Victor and John, while Fel and Billy were now joined by Julie at the stop car. Goff only got to start five cars and we had just three finish the stage before all services including BMMC Rescue were sent in. Apparently Darren Gass, fourth on the road in his S11 had crashed at over 130 mph and four spectators were injured. The accident happened as he approached a badly marked junction at the end of a long straight and the Subaru ploughed through a barbed wire fence and hedge into a field. Although three casualties were despatched to hospital only one was seriously hurt and as I write the youngster was still detained although thought to be in a stable condition. This was the last thing the Rally and COC Michael Johnston needed as up to now every thing had been running smoothly. Thankfully the incident did not receive negative reports from the press, TV or radio and of course the event was able to continue.

We did not see any more rally cars on that run as Glenn Allen running in fifth also crashed out just before the Gass incident. The stage was cancelled and all the remaining competitors went by alternative road book to the next stage. So we had a long break until the next run at 16.32.

By this time there were just 40 cars left in the International section and as the National rally finished after stage 12 we would not be seeing them today, Camillus Bradley the winner of that section after a battle with Declan McNaughton. The British or Group N section of the event saw the much anticipated fight between Mark Higgins and Kieth Cronin fizzle out when Cronin crashed during the second run of Torr Head on Friday night. Higgins went on to win and set himself up to clinch the BRC title on the final round in Yorkshire later this month. Draperstown's Marty McCormack won the British Junior Championship on the Ulster and was named Pirelli Star Driver as he dominated the Citroen Racing Trophy event in his C2R2 Max.

But back to the main battle for overall honours. Gareth MacHale had sneaked ahead of Eugene Donnelly on stage nine, the first run over the 17.41 miles of Slieve Gallion. This was right in the heart of Donnelly country (he tests his cars here) and MacHale was pleased as punch although the lead was only a few seconds. Then came our stage at Lisnamuck where MacHale was just half a second up. By the end of the second run over Slieve Gallion Eugene had pulled back some time and the gap was now just POINT FIVE OF A SECOND with one stage left, SS 14 the eight miles of Lisnamuck. Derek McGarrity had by now settled for third after falling back slightly. Donnelly knows the roads of Lisnamuck very well; he used to live on the stage, so a flat out run was required. He was first on the road so he had to give it his best shot and hope MacHale would slip up. In fact that is exactly what happened, Eugene flashed through our finish beam and my printer burst into life to record a time of 7mins25.1seconds. As we waited for MacHale who had started one minute behind I knew he was slower when the seconds passed the 25 mark, "39.7" I called out to J.C. who in turn relayed the time to Julie on the stop line. It transpired that Gareth had an overshoot at junction four and had to reverse out of a gravel lane, as he gave it everything to catch the flying Skoda, "I knew it was Eugene's home stage so I had to go flat out to win, but it wasn't to be" he said later. So Eugene Donnelly had won his third Ulster Rally by 14 seconds in a SKODA for goodness sake! Another first for the surprising little Fabia WRC which has been transformed since Derek McGeehan got his expert hands on the machine which never really worked on the world scene nor indeed anywhere else! With just the Cork 20 Rally to go next month Donnelly need only record a top three finish to secure a record equalling fifth Irish Tarmac title.

**RallyBuzz.com** has a full report on the Ulster Rally plus all other recent events; log on now for all the details.

### **MEEKE CONTINUES TO LEAD IRC**

Dungannon's Kris Meeke had a fantastic result on the tarmac Barum Rally Zlin in the Czech Republic when he came back from 33rd after a stage one puncture to finish an unbelievable second in his Peugeot 207 S2000 one minute behind local hero Jan Kopecky driving a Skoda Fabia S2000. It marked a fabulous double for SKODA (same weekend as the Ulster) and the win was the first for a Czech driver in a Czech car since the event started many years ago. Meeke and co-driver Paul Nagel still lead the Intercontinental Rally Challenge, but Kopecky is just three points behind with three events to go. The tarmac events of Spain and Italy are this month then the final round is the gravel Rally of Scotland in November.

# Looking Back

## THE ULSTER RALLY

My memories of this great event over the years:

### 30 YEARS AGO..... 1979

My first ever event as a motorsport marshal started when my next door neighbour, former BMMC /BRMC member, Neil Boulton asked if I would like to help him with Timekeeping on the two days of the Ulster Rally. I recently came across the programme and the memories came flooding back. Held in October that year the entry list showed no less than 130 cars listed. Just one event of course, not like the current multi events or different categories which "Joe public" will never understand, but MSA rules dictate must prevail (don't get me started) Top seed was Pentti Airikkala driving a works Vauxhall Chevette at number two was Stig Blomquist in a Saab 99 Turbo then Jimmy McRae in the second Chevette followed by no less than six Escort RS1800'S driven by Russell Brookes, Brian Nelson, Malcolm Wilson, Bertie Fisher, Henri Toivonen and Ernest Kidney. There were 26 special stages all used just once. The rally, sponsored by the Belfast Telegraph, started on the Friday night at 6pm from Craigavon Liesure Centre and finished in Larne at 4pm on Saturday with just a three hour break between 1am and 4am. The route took competitors right round the province and used all the classic stages such as Tardree, Glenoe, Mares Tail, Orra Bridge, Torr Head, Slieve Gallion, Knockmany Forest, Syonfin, Glenelly River and Davagh. We were on the finish and stop of stage three, Kilcross near Nutts Corner on day one then moved to SS24 Carnanee near Ballyclare on Saturday. Vauxhall scored a one-two with Pentti first and Jimmy second. COC was Roy Sloan while Chief Timekeeper was Bill Reilly.

### 25 YEARS AGO..... 1984

This was the year of WALTER ROHRL and his short wheelbase Audi Sport Quattro. The two times World Champion coolly stepped out of his 500bhp supercar at Belfast City Hall after winning the Rentatruck Ulster Rally by over 4 minutes from Russell Brookes' Opel Manta. He was over an hour and a half ahead of the last of the 46 finishers, John Steven's Mazda RX7. There had been 70 starters and 27 stages (Rohrl was fastest on 20) which covered a 500 mile route visiting all 6 Counties. We were marshalling at Scrutineering and then timing.

### 20 YEARS AGO..... 1989

Gwyndaf Evans won the British Midland Ulster Rally ahead of Russell Brookes; both were driving Ford Sierra Cosworths. I remember being on the finish of the final of the 21 stages to offer my congratulations to the Welsh superstar in the pink Sierra, the name of the stage....Tobermore (a version of Lisnamuck). David Llewelin was third in his Toyota Celica GT4.

### 15 YEARS AGO..... 1994

Malcolm Wilson completely dominated the Stena Sealink Ulster Rally for the second year in a row. This time he had Stephen Finlay as a team mate, both were in identical Michelin Pilot Ford Escort Cosworths. Wilson was fastest on 16 of the 19 stages and finished one minute and 47 seconds ahead of Finlay. Kenny McKinstry was third in his Kaliber Subaru Legacy. A certain Tommi Makinen won the F2 section of the event in his Nissan Sunny GTI.

## **10 YEARS AGO.....1999**

A surprised Neil Wearden driving his Vauxhall Astra F2 won the Stena Line Ulster Rally from Gwyndaf Evans in a Seat Ibiza. We were timekeeping as usual, but using electronic equipment for the first time. I was spectating close to the big accident on SS1 involving Toni Gardemeister. Nine people including co-driver Paavo Lukander were injured when the Finn's Seat Ibiza slammed into a wall.

## **Rally Diary**

### **SAT. 5<sup>TH</sup> SEPT.                    LAFARGE CEMENT STAGES RALLY**

Cookstown MC promotes this the fifth round of the Pacenotes ANICC 2WD Rally Challenge. I am Chief Timekeeper and would like to thank all club members who have offered their services. The Rally starts from its base at Loughry College and uses stages here and in the Davagh Forest complex.

### **SAT. 12<sup>TH</sup> SEPT.                    FISHER ENGINEERING LAKELAND STAGES**

We have been asked by COC George Ogle to supply a team of timekeepers for this the seventh round of the Hankook NI Championship, held in the forests near Derrygonnelly, Belcoo and Garrison. Expect a good entry. I see Keith Cronin intends to use this event as a shakedown for the final BRC round in the Yorkshire Forests next month. Derek McGarrity still leads the title race but he missed the last round, the Dogleap (so did I, due to holidays) where Kenny McKinstry finished second to Sean Devine and so closed the gap slightly, Derek has 60 points while Kenny has now 43. The nearest challenger is Gp.N leader Donagh Kelly way back on 28 points.

One interesting driver caught my eye last month. Enniskillen's MATTHEW CATHCART, son of Roy and younger brother of Richard, won the Magherafelt MC's Sunset Rally held over 4 stages AT NIGHT in Banagher and Glenshane forests. Driving a Gp.N Subaru the 18-year-old was on HIS DEBUT rally! A name to watch in the future I think.

### **SAT. 26<sup>TH</sup> SEPT.                    THE BUSHWACKER RALLY**

Omagh Motor Club's classic gravel rally, round 8 of the NI Championship, is usually nicknamed "The Tyrone G.P." and is set in the fast forests of Killeter, Carrickaholten and Lough Braden. We will of course be helping Declan McAleer with the timekeeping although at this stage I don't know on which stages. Let me know if you can help please.

### **SAT. 3<sup>RD</sup> OCT.                    ENNISKILLEN CLUBMAN STAGES**

This is the sixth round of the Pacenotes 2WD Rally Challenge and usually takes place mainly over the tarmac forest drive in the Lough Navar forest complex near Derrygonnelly. Organised by the Enniskillen Motor Club, no further details were available as I wrote this, but I am sure Declan McAleer will be asking for our help with the timing as usual. Here's an interesting fact; Alastair Fisher scored his first rally win here last year in the Fiesta. That same young man currently leads Gp.N in the Irish Tarmac series and is third in the British Championship after the Ulster Rally where he came home in sixth place overall.