

Robert's Rally Round-up

McGARRITY TAKES HIS FIRST ULSTER RALLY WIN

Derek McGarrity and James McKee driving their Subaru Impreza S12C, claimed victory on last month's Toddsleap.com Ulster Rally. Although Derek has won the Circuit of Ireland four times and been Irish Tarmac Champion on three occasions, this was the first time that he had been victorious on his "local event" which this year was totally based in Co.Antrim.

It wasn't an easy run for the Glengormley man, Gareth MacHale saw to that. The Ford Focus driver was Derek's only challenger, but what a fight he put up. Having lost out to Eugene Donnelly on the final stage last year the Dubliner was determined to be first over the finish ramp this time. It wasn't to be though. Gareth was 10 seconds in the lead after Friday's six stages, but on Saturday McGarrity fought back and when they crossed the finish line of the final 14th test, the 6.54 miles of Langford Lodge, our timing beams would show that Derek and James had won by just 1.1 seconds! This was the closest ever result in the Ulster's thirty five- year history. There were only FOUR competitors in the WRC Ulster Rally or Class A8 section, the others being Aaron MacHale in a Focus and a somewhat unknown Dutchman, Arjen de Koning driving a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo.7. A sign of the times then. The writing is surely on the wall for these World Rally cars as regards rallying in Ireland.

For our part, we were timekeeping as usual for Margaret Kelly. The BMMC/BRMC Rescue Unit was also on duty as indeed were club radio operatives.

Day one Friday; and Goff, David, J.C. and Julie were on starts while Victor, Colin, Fel and Billy joined me to cover the finish controls of SS 2/4 at Glendun. Then on Saturday the same crew (apart from Fel and Billy, who were replaced by John and Anna) covered SS10/14, the Langford Lodge tests.

The weather was surprisingly dry for the whole event, which made our job a lot easier. All seven stages would be run twice. On both of the nine mile Glendun tests we had very few retirements and just a couple of minor incidents.

There were five different sections to this year's Ulster Rally.

First on the road were the four WRC competitors, then 42 cars in the International Rally Northern Ireland section which catered for the British Rally Championship plus the Gp.N competitors in the Irish Tarmac Championship (WRC cars are not permitted to compete in the B.R.C.) After that the 45 competitors in the Historic Rally came through followed by 37 in the National Rally and finally a Challenge Rally which consisted of just eight cars.

Needless to say by Saturday afternoon there were a lot fewer cars than those listed above to put through the first Langford Lodge stage. An extremely slippery final corner here, in full view of our flying finish location, caught out various competitors who spun backwards into a high wire fence surrounding a pumping station. Despite wiping out the fence most of them managed to carry on, but Alastair Cochrane, running fifth in the National Rally, crashed out of the event when he hit a telephone pole head on, which broke in two. Thankfully neither he nor his co-driver Gary McElhinney were hurt. Unfortunately, a Fiesta in the following Challenge Rally crashed into Alastair's stricken Mk.2 causing more damage, despite being given a clear warning to slow down. The second running of the stage proved uneventful, for us anyway.

Twenty-year-old Waterford driver Craig Breen co-driven by Gareth Roberts, dominated the Rally NI section in his Ford Fiesta S2000 from Keith Cronin in his Gp.N Subaru Impreza N15 (who now just needs a top seven finish in Yorkshire to retain his British title) Alastair Fisher was third in his Evo.9 which leaves him just four points behind Gareth MacHale in the ITRC with just the Cork "20" Rally to come early next month, where double points are available.

Behind Adam Gould, who finished fourth in the BRC section in his N11 Subaru, was French driver Brian Bouffier, who took the brand new Citroen DS3 R3 to a strong fifth overall and top 2-wheel drive finisher on the cars worldwide rally debut.

George Robinson won the National Rally in his Subaru P2000 WRC, but only after Declan McNaughton crashed his Mk.2 on the final stage. Second here was Fintan McGrady in the Mk.2 and Sean Haveron took third in his Escort Cosworth.

In the Historic Rally, Ray Cunningham brought his Mini Cooper S home in first place in Category One ahead of Jonathan Gale's Sunbeam Tiger (despite a spin on our final corner). Dessie Nutt was third in the Porsche 911. Category Two was won by David Stokes in his Mk.1 Escort whilst fastest overall was Manxman Connor Corkill who finished top of Category Three in a Mk.2 Escort, ahead of Will Onions also driving a Mk.2 and Rob Smith's Chevette.

Colin McDowell and Ian Evans won Class 1 in their Mini Cooper S despite running on a tight budget.

Good to see Dessie McCartney and Derek Boyd out in the Historic section, 30 years after their great Ulster Rally battle (See Looking Back) Dessie brought the 911 home fifth in Cat.2 but Derek unfortunately retired his beautiful Mk.1 with mechanical woes.

Victor and I would like to thank Goff and Jennifer for their hospitality over the weekend, it was very much appreciated.

SUPRISE DOGLEAP WIN FOR DONAGH KELLY

Kenny McKinstry made his first appearance of the year in the Hankook NI Championship last month on the Dogleap Rally, and promptly took a slender lead after the first 6-mile test..... he was destined though, to finish second by the end of the eight stage Maiden City MC event, based in the forests around Limavady.

Driving the same Subaru S8 he used on the previous weekend's Lurgan Park Rally, McKinstry and co-driver Harvey Bell arrived with Victor and myself at the finish of SS1 in Benevenagh, just one second ahead of event sponsor, Richard Hogg who was with Mark Hanna in a Gp.A (clubman's spec.) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo. 6. Already in trouble with fuel starvation problems were No.2 seeds Raymond Johnston and Rodney Hicks who retired their Evo.9 on the road section after stage one. Amazingly, all 50 starters made it through Benevenagh which most described as very rough, slippery and challenging, possibly because the stage hadn't been used since 2001. One Escort Mk.2 driver almost bowled Victor and I over as he seemed, despite all the warning signs, to be unaware where the stop line was. Needless to say he got it right the second time and offered apologies all round. I can honestly say that this was the closest both of us have been to a flat out sideways rally car...EVER!

Kenny was fastest again on the second stage Springwell, but all was not well and a broken driveshaft had to be changed before SS3 Cam. The Subaru crew picked up 40 seconds in penalties and although fastest over that third test, they dropped to fourth place.

When the rally came back to us on stage four, to start the second loop, things changed yet again. New leader Jonny McKenna rolled his Lancer into retirement and then Donegal driver Donagh Kelly and Kevin Flanagan took over at the top of the time sheets. Although Hogg was fastest with us this time round, he had lost time in stage three and then later eventually exited the rally with a roll on the second visit to Cam.

All this left Kelly leading, 17 seconds ahead of McKinstry with just two stages remaining. On the penultimate test, a re-jigged Springwell, Kenny gave it everything he had to pull eight seconds out of Donagh's lead. On the final stage, run over a new version of Cam, McKinstry took another seven seconds out of Kelly but it wasn't enough and, just as in Lurgan, Kenny had to settle for second place, two seconds behind the winners Donagh Kelly and Kevin Flanagan.

As well as this being Kelly's first victory, it was also the first time for quite a number of years that a Gp. N production car had won a round of the NI Rally Championship. Third place saw Mark Donnelly, in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo.9, close the gap at the top of the NI Championship to leader Stuart Biggerstaff, who, on his first gravel rally, finished an impressive eighth overall in the family Subaru S9. A small off at a chicane on stage three was his only mistake of the day.

The Top Five NI Rally Championship standings after the Dogleap are;

1. Stuart Biggerstaff 49 pts.
2. Mark Donnelly 38 pts.
3. Derek McGarrity 36 pts.
4. Cyril Doherty 32 pts.
5. George Robinson 27pts.

An interesting aside..... Dogleap Rally sponsor, Richard Hogg's Limavady Gearing Company, now owns the former Seagate computer components factory which was built for around 38 million pounds. Apparently Hogg paid a knockdown price of 1.5 million for the plant, which among other things now produces gearing for wind farms. The venue made an excellent base and service park for the Dogleap.

LOOKING BACK

Marshalling memories

30 YEARS AGO..... Sept. 1980

As far as I can recollect, Neil Boulton and myself were covering various time controls on the Belfast Telegraph Ulster Rally. In between times I remember trying to navigate Neil as he flew round NI in an effort to see as many stages as we could. Dessie McCartney was driving a then state-of-art Vauxhall Chevette HSR, similar to the car driven by pre-event favourite, Jimmy McRae.

On stage three near Dungannon, Dessie got a puncture and stopped right where we were spectating. He couldn't get the jack to work on his newly purchased ex-works Chevette, so we and others lifted the car while the crew changed the wheel. Neil then lent a grateful McCartney the jack from his rare little Suzuki coupe. Thankfully it wasn't needed and we got it back when the rally finished at the Kings Arms Hotel in Larne.

McCartney recovered from falling outside the top ten following that time consuming puncture, to set fastest stage times. He then went on to win the rally by 31 seconds because McRae, who was

leading at the time, fell off the road and got stuck in a bog on SS 17 Orra Bridge (a longer version of the present nine-mile Glendun stage). Derek Boyd and Robin Lyons were second and third in their Sunbeams. There were 25 stages covering 5 counties starting in Larne at 4pm Friday 22nd August and finishing at 3.30 on Saturday.

25 YEARS AGO.....Sept. 1985

Russell Brookes won the British Midland Ulster Rally when GM Dealer Sport used team orders to manipulate his "win" over Jimmy McRae, both were in Opel Manta 400's. Brookes was driving the new lightweight ADZ 31 for the first time. Third was Mikael Sundstrom in the Peugeot 205 T16.

Meanwhile Kenny McKinstry took his second Burmah Rally win in Lurgan Park. Driving a Mk.2 Escort and co-driven by Brian McNamee he finished ahead of Bertie Fisher in his Manta 400. A big crowd of 10,000 paying spectators turned out to watch the popular event in perfect sunlit conditions. Formula Ford Champion Joey Greenan took a big Volvo 240 Turbo, making its debut in Ireland, to a class win. There were two big accidents that year in the park when Vincent Bonner in his Ascona and Steven Emerson with an Escort Mk.2 hit the same tree very hard indeed, thankfully without any injuries to the crews. James Cullen hit "many trees" which badly damage his Escort.

20 YEARS AGO.....Sept. 1990

David Llewelin was the victor by two minutes in the 1990 British Midland Ulster Rally driving his Toyota Celica GT-Four. Conditions were very wet from the start which suited the four wheel drive car. Bertie Fisher and Graham Middleton were second and third in their BMW M3's. There were 21 stages in counties Down, Armagh, Derry, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Antrim. Of the 67 entrants only 42 made it to the Belfast finish. We would have been timekeeping as usual.

Derek McGarrity won the Mourne Rally in a rear-wheel-drive Nissan engine Peugeot 205. Co-driven by Ian Beasant, the pair were 37 seconds ahead of second placed Mervyn Hill and Kevin Shaw in a Ford Escort MK.2 while David Greer/Mark Crowe brought their Toyota Corolla home in third. This was yet another outing for us as BRMC timekeepers.

15 YEARS AGO.....Sept. 1995

On the Stena Sealink Ulster Rally, Bertie Fisher and his co-driver Rory Kennedy scored a start to finish victory in their Subaru Impreza 555. Fisher was fastest on all but one of the 17 special stages to beat Steven Finlay/Phil Mills in an Escort Cosworth to win by one and a half minutes. This was the first year that the BRC F2 cars appeared and the British press gave the impression that Alister McRae, who was actually fourth overall, had won in his Nissan Sunny GTI. Altogether 80 cars started and 53 finished. The rally stages took in counties Down, Armagh, Tyrone and Derry with the start and finish being in Belfast.

10 YEARS AGO.....Sept. 2000

The 21st running of the Lurgan Park Rally, this time sponsored by SEAT, proved to be one of the best to date. A record crowd of 13,000 people payed a tender each to see Kenny McKinstry take his ninth win, this time with Noel Orr along for the ride in the Impreza 555. Denis Biggerstaff/Robin McCandless were second in the Metro 6R4 while Frank Meagher/Michael Maher came third in their Escort WRC. We were on fire point duty and some twenty five club members signed on to help. Derek McGarrity hit a tree and rolled his Subaru WRC. Gwyndaf Evans in the SEAT Cordoba WRC won the £6,000 Challenge Time Trial held after the main event, SEAT then donated the prize to local charities.

LATEST NEWS ; from RallyBuzz.com

LOEB CLAIMS EIGHTH RALLY GERMANY WIN

Superstar SEBASTIEN LOEB has won Rally Germany for a record-breaking EIGHTH time in a row. No other driver has ever won a WRC event eight times. The current World Champion is the ONLY driver to win here since the rally became part of the WRC in 2002! Not only that but this was his 59th WRC victory and sets Loeb for his SEVENTH World crown, which in theory he could seal with victory in the next event in JAPAN on 10-12 September, providing his Citroen team-mate and nearest challenger Sebastien Ogier fails to finish in the top five.

More likely though is that Citroen would rather wait for Loeb to win the title on RALLY FRANCE which follows from Sept.30-Oct.3rd. This brand new tarmac event, which replaces Corsica on the calendar, takes place in Loeb's home region of Alsace and finishes with a SuperSpecial in his home town. Sounds to me like the perfect scenario for a 60th career win plus title number seven for the greatest rally driver there has ever been. Oh and Citroen had a 1-2-3 in Germany which virtually assures them of the Manufacturers award once again ahead of struggling Ford.

FAST FREDDIE WINS THREE IN A ROW FOR SKODA

Belgian driver Freddy Loix won the Barum Rally Zlin in the Czech Republic, the latest round of the Intercontinental Rally Challenge. This was his third victory in succession and puts him right in contention for this year's title. Championship leader Juho Hanninen was second consolidating his position.

The Skoda Fabia S2000 once again locked out the podium with local driver Pavel Valousek Jr. finishing third.

Unfortunately for Kris Meeke and Paul Nagle they could only manage fourth in their Peugeot UK 207 S2000 virtually ending once and for all any chance they had of retaining the IRC crown this year.

It has been both disappointing and frustrating for Meeke to know that he hasn't really stood a chance this year against the might of what is effectively a "works team" in Skoda. He has "rung the neck" of the now-elderly privately entered 207 in an effort to beat the latest Facelift Fabia, but to no avail. STOP PRESS; Apparently Kris Meeke will be present at the Cultra Hillclimb on Sat.11th Sept.

Naill McShea and Keith Cronin were both in Zlin to drive the Proton Satria Neo S2000, but retired on the second day, McShea with mechanical woes while Cronin had an off.

Next round of the IRC is the mixed surface Rally Sanremo 23-25 Sept.

TOYOTA AND VW POISED TO JOIN WRC

Following on from the confirmation that MINI are joining the WRC with a Prodrive built car late next year, comes the news that both Toyota and Volkswagen are thought to be on the verge of announcing World Rally programmes in the very near future. Toyota may contest five or six events in 2012, followed by a full factory involvement in 2013. VW are aiming for a full WRC programme starting in 2013 depending on the marque's bosses giving the final green light to the project. This is great news for the World Rally Championship, and there is also the possibility that Saab may be considering entering at some stage.

Rally Diary

SAT. 4TH SEPT. LAFARGE CEMENT STAGES RALLY

We are timekeeping and manning radio points on this Cookstown MC event. This will be Round 4 of the Pacenotes ANICC 2WD Rally Challenge. The rally is of course on sealed surfaces and features various stages in the Davagh Forest complex. The Loughery College stage is not being used this year.

SAT. 11TH SEPT. FISHER ENGINEERING LAKELAND STAGES

The seventh round of the NI Championship will use the normal forest stages near Derrygonnelly with service centralised in Garrison. Organised by Enniskillen MC, we have been asked to cover timing and radio on one of the four stage locations. The rally starts at Fisher's in Ballinamallard and finishes at the Killyhevin Hotel, Enniskillen.

SAT. 25TH SEPT. McKelvey Asbestos Removal Ltd. BUSHWACKER RALLY

Round eight of the Hankook NI Championship, the Omagh MC event takes place in the West Tyrone forests of Killeter, Carrickaholten and Lough Braden. The new COC for the Bushwacker is Louise Hannan and I expect we will be asked to provide timekeepers. The rally is based at the Silverbirch Hotel in Omagh and service is centralised at Aiken's Caravans, Garvetagh, near Castlederg.

SAT. 2ND OCT. SYSTEM SIGNS STAGES RALLY

This is round 5 of the Pacenotes ANICC 2WD Rally Challenge and is based in Derrygonnelly. The rally takes place over two tarmac venues, the five mile Lough Navar Forest Drive stage and the short mile long Bothwells test. Each stage is used three times, and then in the reverse direction. Declan Gannon of the organising Enniskillen MC is the man to contact, we are providing timekeepers.