



“Cultra Young Guns Star”

Jack Brien (20), from nearby Holywood, eclipsed an experienced field to win the John Crosslé Celebration Shoot-Out for Formula Ford cars at Saturdays' 3rd June Cultra Hillclimb Event in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. On his single-seater debut, and that of the family's recently re-acquired Crosslé 16F he edged out Nicholas Gibson's' 40F by just 3/10sec to lift the prestigious award, having already been on the podium as runner-up in the Historics Class in his rare MG Midget Atlantis and won the Formula Fords Class, to boot. Half an hour earlier 21-year-old Roger Gage, from Ballymoney, came within 6/10sec of upsetting the whole NI Hillclimb establishment if he'd won the main, Ards and North Down Council supported, hillclimb competition in his family's venerable 1978 Maguire Mini. He'd gotten to within 3/100ths of the eventual winner, Bangor's reigning NI Hillclimb Champion, Chris Houston's OMS CF08, during the second runs.

Once again this year, Richard McGimpsey, from Newtownards, was the closest single-seater to Houston's 32.33sec FTD but he couldn't get closer than the 3/10ths gap set on his second run, in his self-built RMG/Busa. Reigning Cultra Champion Jaye Nevin, from Coleraine, had to settle for fourth this time, keeping his Lotus Reynard just 1/10th ahead of Roger's father Rudi in his latest version of the Maguire Mini genre. Omagh's John Donnelly couldn't get his Reynard out of the 34sec bracket and finished sixth. Young McGimpsey's neighbour Mark Francis was the top sports car at Cultra once again with a 34.64sec best in his Locost/Honda in seventh, 6/10ths ahead of sports car runner-up, Dungannon's Paul Hamill (Tiger/Suzuki). Jack Brien finished a creditable 9th just 7/100ths ahead of the raucous Escort Cosworth of Mark's dad Davy, who completed the Saloon car podium on the day.

Class winning gaps of hundreds and tenths of a second were the order of the day that entertained just over 2300 visitors to what has become known as “Ulster's Motoring Garden party”, with the exception of one runaway winner. Michael Taylor set a Cultra PB of 43.15secs in his 1935 MG TA racer to take a 4.7sec victory over young Angus Johnson who was having his debut run in a 1933 Alfa Romeo that has now seen four generations of the family compete in it. UVCC Chairman Roger Corry, the closest competitor resident to the event, hustled his 1936 Riley Special to just under the 50sec mark and complete the Vintage Car podium. In the continually growing Historics Class, Gerry McGarrity made the long trip from Fermanagh worthwhile taking the win by less than 2/10ths in his 1965 Mini Cooper from a tie-break of 38.05secs set by both Jack Brien (Atlantis Midget) and Dominic McGowan (Escort Mk1), which was decided in favour of the former by virtue of his quicker other two runs. TSCC Chairman Trevor McIlroy (Sebring Sprite) and local man Jago Bret (Lotus Elan) completed the Historic Sports Cars podium, whilst Crumlin's Olivia Coulter pedalled her 1959 Ford Anglia with her usual gusto to complete the Historic Saloons podium in one of her rare hillclimb outings in her, new for 2017, rally spec car.

Only David Gomes and Groomsport's John Hamill ended up contesting the Under 1600cc Post'74 Sports Car Class where the former's MGMidget had the legs of the latter's Westfield by over 3/10ths. In contrast, the 'big' Road-Going sports cars, Class 3, attracted sixteen protagonists and saw Roger Corry (Midget K-Series) edge out Godfrey McCartney (Lotus Elise) by a mere 2/100ths with his first run marker of 36.72secs. McCartney was chased hard by his AMA team-mate Paul Reaney and Michael Clarke, both also Elise mounted and just 4/10ths apart at the finish. Season long rivals in the NI Hillclimb Championship, Stephen Morrissey (Peugeot 106) and Dennis Watson (Citroen Saxo) continued their “Small Road-Going Saloons” scrap here, with Morrissey winning out by 14/100ths this time and both some two and a half seconds ahead of regular Scottish visitor, Joe Clarke in the Honda Civic Coupe he shares with his brother George in the NI Speed Sprint Championship. The dozen “Big Road-Going Saloons” were headed home by Stephen Strain (Escort Mk1), whose 36.94secs best edged out David Gibson (Escort Mk2) by 4/10ths, with David Wylie in his famous 1975 Donegal Rally winning “Candy-Stripe” BMW 2002, a close 2/10ths behind the squabbling Fords.

The 28 car field of Non Road-Going Saloons and Sports Cars were sub-divided on this occasion, based on their specification and past performance at Cultra. Tenth Overall Davy Francis, with a 35.41sec best, won this Class 6A by 4/10ths from the Raw Striker kit sports car of Paul Thompson, while former Cultra Escort Shoot-Out champion Gerard O'Connell had an uncharacteristic quiet day in completing this podium. Class 6B on the other hand saw the brutal fight for Saloon Car honours end in mechanical failure for both Roger Gage and his father Rudi as they each failed to complete their final Timed Runs, but still ahead of young Francis. One can only speculate the potential outcome of the Overall Result had either Ballymoney man completed the day, given that father had earlier edged son by 1/10th on the first Run of the day.

The moniker, “All Other Single-seater Racing Cars” Class 7, could almost be considered derogatory, given that it contained the reigning NI Hillclimb Champion, the reigning Cultra Champion and two 2017 NI Championship event Class winners. Chris Houston, Jaye Nevin, John Donnelly and Richard McGimpsey, respectively. McGimpsey's, best of his day, 33.05secs on the first Official Runs stunned NI Champion Houston in to action, resulting in him improving on the next two whilst the Newtownards man was unable to make any further progress from that first attempt as Houston went quicker and quicker. Nevin was a second off his 2016 winning pace all day and finished 3rd in Class 3rd on 33.67secs. Even though they ran at the head of the field, the Vintage brigade had been designated as Class 8 due to a simple admin error, spotted too late for the official paperwork.

Class 9 was what Cultra 2017 was really all about, 60 years of Crosslé racing cars and the 50th anniversary of the launch of the, now worldwide, Formula Ford Categories. Eight Crosslé, two Mondiale from the former Bangor constructor and a pair of Reynard from the multi-championship winning Oxfordshire concern founded by F1 design guru Adrian Reynard contested this Formula Ford, and their derivatives, class. As reported already, Shoot-Out winner Jack Brien topped the times here followed by Nicholas Gibson, but it was Jack's father Simon who claimed the final podium step in the hillclimb class, generously sharing his latest “toy” with his son despite being 8/10ths adrift at the end.

The event closing FFord Shoot-Out was a real nail-biter, as the cars ran in reverse order from their earlier Class 9 encounter. First blood went to Mike Todd (Mondiale 84S), who sliced a whole second off his Class 9 time but Ian McCulla really threw the gauntlet down with a 35.11sec pass that bettered young Jack's Class winner by 2/10ths. Next up Simon Brien improved by 0.8secs to now lie second, only for Nicholas Gibson to go faster again and leapfrog both of them to lead with just Jack to run. Having only done two competitive miles in the car, the youngster punched in a three-quarter second improvement to leave the FFord mark at an impressive 34.62secs and claim his first ever major trophy, presented in honour of the man who designed and built the car he was sitting in, 48 years ago – Dr. John Crosslé MBE.

Club and Event Secretary John Gardner said afterwards :- “We delivered another brilliant Cultra event today and it's only the dedication of our Committee and Members that allows us to do this year on year. I'd like to thank all who contributed to today's success, along with the support from the competitors and the Medical & Recovery/Rescue services who thankfully had a quiet day. Without the British Motorsport Marshalls Club and Club volunteers, events like this couldn't run and they certainly had a busy day, what with the skiffs of rain making the track conditions changeable but only entertaining for all, with the numerous spin-outs but little or no damages. Our unique partnership with the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum enables us to have an international grade event with an enjoyable club atmosphere and we thank them and their staff for their ongoing co-operation and support, especially the Transport Museum and its curator Mark Kennedy. Thanks also to the local media and press who increased their coverage further again this year, working well with the Event PR Team. The inaugural “Friends and Family Lunch” in the Cultra Manor was a particularly successful addition to the Event this year and Catherine Craythorne and her Manor Staff should be congratulated on the quality of both the food and the service. All being well we'll see you all here again on Saturday 9th June 2018”.

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