

## Alans the King of the Cassells

Saturday 01 August saw the re-commencement of the 2020 SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship at Kirkistown Circuit after a covid 19 induced layoff of 4 months.

With a bumper entry of 100 cars including 3 WRC cars and 3 R5 Spec rally cars along with 13 single seaters and a fascinating array of modified cars and roadgoing cars, the day started with the sun splitting the trees and everyone itching to get back behind the wheel. Unfortunately due to covid restrictions it was a spectator free event so sadly only those who were there were able to see what turned out to be a spectacular days motorsport.

Practice started early and there were an awful lot of cobwebs blown off during the first practice run as everyone tried to find the groove again after so long out of the driving seat. It was also great to see so many acquaintances and motor sport family members again after such a long time apart.

Thankfully almost everyone picked up where they left off after the last round with Steven Gault being the fastest driver after practice with a run of 114.97 secs. Sadly Alan Cassells had a moment at the front chicane and had to be recovered to the paddock with a bent suspension arm and a broken front wishbone joint and his front wheel at a far from standard angle. As usual the motorsport family came together to help Alan out and a borrowed rose joint from Richard Munnis`s spare gear selector and some help and assistance from Robert McGimpsey and his dad Alfie, Alan was back out in time for the second timed runs. Alan doesn't believe in doing things the easy way!

With some epic class battles going on right up and down the paddock it was great to see so many "visiting" rally and hillclimb drivers joining in and having a go. Wesley Patterson and Barry Morris brought their Escort Mk2 and Darrian T90 out and had a battle royale in class 11 with Barry doing a 128.12sec run to put him ninth overall. It just goes to show that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree as Barry is the son of multiple sprint and hillclimb winner Seamus Morris who also, by coincidence, used to campaign a Darrian.

Oliver Cormican debuted his beautiful new VW polo which he has had built. It runs the running gear and engine from his extremely rapid Mitsubishi Evo and Oliver, who hadn't driven the car before today, had a baptism of fire in it as he was pitched alongside 10 other phenomenally quick 4wd cars including Ivan McCullough in his Nissan GTR, Paul Montgomery in his rapid Subaru and none other than Kenny McKinstry in A Subaru S14 WRC Car, along with 6 other R5 and WRC Cars. Needless to say Oliver showed just how deft he is behind the wheel and had an epic battle with Gareth Sayers in an R5 Ford Fiesta. Gareth only pipped Oliver to the lead by a mere 1.16secs which is a phenomenal result for both him and Oliver.

Some other new additions to the paddock were John Donnelly who finally rolled out his new Pilbeam MP62 which he assured me he was only "running in". The car got "well run in" as he piloted it to 20<sup>th</sup> overall despite having never driven it before. Tom Devaney debuted his new class 14 Jedi Suzuki which he drove to a mega

impressive 6<sup>th</sup> overall. Roy Coulter debuted his new 1.1OMS PR which he also had never driven before either.

Karl Johnston, who some would say was born driving a mini, finally brought his beautiful new MINI out to play and boy is it nice. As you can imagine there was a fair amount of banter around the paddock, with most of it emanating from a grey haired man in a green mini who was determined that he would be the fastest mini in the west. In fairness to Gerry McGarrity he lived up to his promise and was indeed the fastest mini in the west at the end of the day.

When the timed runs commenced Steven Gault hit the ground running and topped the time sheets after the first run by a 1.24 sec margin from Adrian Pollock with Ryan McGimpsey third. By the time the second timed runs had started Alan Cassells had his car fixed and he was ready to go. Alan launched off the line and immediately took top spot in his new car. Adrian went 1.6 seconds faster than his first timed run but could still only manage second 1.42 seconds behind Alan. Steven Gault slipped into third with is first timed run still being his fastest. Alans dominance continued as he lowered his time in his third run to 109.88 secs which was the Fastest time of the day.

Both Steven Gault and Adrian Pollock drove like legends in their older, heavier and less powerful cars but neither driver had any answer to match Alans newer super lightweight OMS 25 which is rumoured to be just over 500bhp. The car itself is a work of art with a carbon fibre tub where everything is designed to be super lightweight as you expect from an ex works OMS car. Fair play to Alan for such a superb final time in such a quick car that he is still getting used to. Don't also forget the unfortunate start he had to the day which is bound to have dented his confidence. There is so much more potential still to come from that package as Alans experience of it grows. This was Alan`s first ever overall win and FTD and he is the third different winner this season.

With the top 3 places being Alan Cassells, Adrian Pollock and Steven Gault in that order it leaves Adrian Pollock still at the top of the overall championship with a 6 point lead over Alan Cassells with Steven Gault a mere 3 points behind in third and Hard Charging Ryan McGimpsey fourth 1 point behind Steven. This will be an epic run in.

As always the road going class battles were tight and like in previous years the fastest road going car was driven by a Robb. However in this instance it was the younger brother Steven Robb who was fastest. Steven has bought himself a Westfiled Suzuki which he runs in the Specialist road going class. Steven is another driver who has bought a new car which he is still getting to grips with, and with experience he will only get faster and faster. Richard Munnis was second road going car home whilst Andrew Robb was third road going car and fastest road going saloon on the day with a 139.63 sec run which put him 41<sup>st</sup> overall on road tyres in a road going saloon. In the Roadgoing category Andrew Robb extended his category lead to 7 points from second placed Tom Lawther who is a mere 1 point ahead of hard charging Conor Hamill in another BMW M3. This will be a great battle as the season progresses.

In the modified battle Barry Morris took modified honours in his Darrian T90 with a stunning 128.12 sec run which put him 9<sup>th</sup> overall. Second modified was another "visiting" rally driver Gareth Sayers in a Ford Fiesta R5 car with Oliver Cormican third in class in his beautiful new VW Polo. To show just how quickly these modified cars are in comparison to the remainder of the field all 3 of them were placed in the top 13 overall. The modified category sees Oliver Cormican extend his category lead to 5 points over second placed Daniel Campbell who is 5 points ahead of Steven Nevin with Alan Roddy fourth.

The specialist Category battle was very good to watch with returning racer Jim Hutchinson and Gerard O`Connell going nose cone to nose cone all day. Over the 3 timed runs there was never any more than 1.42 seconds between the 2 of them. Gerard set the initial pace in run 1 and Jim retaliated in run 2 to set his fastest time of 124.80. Gerard then went for it on his third run and set his fastest time of 125.02 secs which was only a mere 0.22 seconds off Jims time. As the season develops this is going to be an epic dice between these 2 competitors, and then when you throw third placed Graham Boyce and 4<sup>th</sup> placed David Hawthorne into the mix it just gets more interesting. After this round David Hawthorne leads the category by 2 points from Gerard O`Connell who is 2 points ahead of Steven Hawthorne who has Graham Boyce snapping at his heels 1 place behind in fourth. I predict this battle to go to the wire at the last round, and it really will be the best man who wins.

In the historic Classes Steven Nevin retains the title of fastest Historic (and Im referring to the car) after he took a fabulous 45<sup>th</sup> overall in his ford escort mk1 with a 140.84 sec run. Alan Jardine was second with a 145.35 sec run but Alan is still having carburation issues with his escort. Apparently a trip to Dr Webber is on the cards. Third placed historic was Gerry McGarrity in his mini. Gerry also wins the highly sought after title of fastest mini in the west after winding all the other competitors up all day about this one. Perhaps we should look about making "the fastest mini in the West" an official championship category?

Lastly, but certainly not least was the Heaslip Ladies Challenge trophy which, as always was hotly contested. Catherine Donnelly finally got her season underway and finished as the fastest of the ladies with her 139.3sec run netting her a superb 39<sup>th</sup> overall. However the Heaslip Ladies Challenge Trophy is set up to promote competition amongst the ladies based on how they finish against their class peers. Emma Campbell took top honours on the day from Catherine Donnelly with Kathy McDade third. Emma now has a slender 2 point lead over Sheryl McBride with Olivia Coulter third in the Heaslip Ladies challenge trophy contest.

Despite a 100 car entry the event was wrapped up by 1615 hours on Saturday and only a handful of drops of rain were seen all day. The next and now fourth round of the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship is scheduled for Nutts Corner Circuit on 19 September when the North Ulster Car Club are hosting the event.

A massive thank you is due to the 500MRCI and all the marshals, officials and everyone else who made this event happen under such stringent covid restrictions.

And now the classes

### **Class 1 Road going up to 1700cc**

Alan Wallace took his first class win of the year in his Honda Del Sol with a fine 158.8 sec run which saw him finish 11.68secs ahead of second placed Gareth Whiting. Coleen Barker took third in class with Billy Nutt fourth. Alan's win puts him 3 points ahead of the class championship with Stephen Wishart second and Billy Nutt third in the class title chase

### **Class 2a Road going over 1700cc**

For class 2 see all previous rounds for the last 2 seasons. Once again Andrew Robb took class honours in his BMW M3. His fastest run of 139.63 was 4.85 secs faster than second placed Conor Hamill who also was in an M3. However Conor has a 4.0 BMW M3 V8 which sounds surreal at max revs. Sadly Conor was having some issues with the car on Saturday so was relieved to take such a stonking time on his second run. Stephen Donnelly took a strong third place with a 146.87sec run in his Clio a mere 0.53 secs ahead of Michael Clarke. Andrew retains his lead at the top of the class 2 standings 7 points ahead of Conor Hamill who has Tom Lawther breathing down his neck a mere 1 point behind.

### **Class 2b Mazda MX5 Challenge**

Class 2b is slowly increasing in popularity as 4 competitors competed on Saturday. Paul Magill took the win 5.38secs ahead of George McMillan and Gerard Larkin a mere 2.88 secs behind in 3<sup>rd</sup>. Trevor McIlroy rounded out the class in his wife's road car. Let's hope he told her he was borrowing it!!! George McMillan was doing his first ever sprint and the car he was driving used to belong to my mother in law and I can confirm that she never ever drove it anywhere near as fast as George did. Championship wise Paul Magill now has a 10 point lead in the class 2b title chase.

### **Road Going 4WD Cars**

Paul Britton took class 3 honours with a 140.45 sec run 17.94secs ahead of Barry Griffin. Tony Grady was third with a best run of 160.46 with Paul Grady fourth on a 161.52sec run. All four drivers were driving 2l Subaru Imprezas. The battle between second third and fourth was very close all day with Barry setting his best time in run 1 which gave the Grady boys a target which they chased hard all day. Barry leads the class championship by 2 points from Tony Grady with James Heaslip a further 2 points behind Tony. Paul Grady is propping the other 3 up at the bottom on equal points with James Heaslip.

### **Class 5 Road going Specialist cars**

Class 5 today saw Steven Robb finally unveil his new Westfield which he has been itching to compete in since lockdown started. Steven had a great drive to take class honours from second placed Richard Munnis. Richard was delighted to have someone to play with at long last in class 5 however I don't think he wanted a playmate who was just as quick as Steven has proven to be. Richard has however

purchased a Jedi so will be doing some events in class 14 in the not too distant future, leaving poor Steven all on his own again.

Richard was disappointed not to win the class which was understandable however he was delighted to have some of his car take FTD. Now let me explain .... Richard dis-assembled his spare gear linkage set up to give Alan Cassells a rose joint that Alan needed to repair his car. So Richard was delighted to say that part of his car took FTD but he didn't appreciate me saying that it would be the closest he'd ever get to an FTD. In terms of the class championship Richard Munnis has a 9 point lead over Steven Robb.

### **Class 6a Modified Production cars 8v**

Jonathan Strain's day started well with a super first timed run which placed him top of the class pile. Despite his best efforts David Evans tried his utmost to try to topple Jonathan's times but was unable to do so finishing a mere 0.34 secs off Jonathan in second place. David drove the wheels off Betsy to try and catch Jonathan but was unable to do so. Sadly Jonathan had a slight engine issue during his second timed run which meant he only managed 1 full run. Stephen Harvey finished third in class after a superb battle all day with Karl Johnston, Gary Milligan William Hutton and John McDowell. At the end of the second timed run these 5 drivers were separated by under a second with John McDowell leading this pack of drivers. Stephen Harvey and Karl Johnston both pulled off blinding last runs to re-align the time sheets in their favour. Indeed at the end of the day places 3 to 7 inclusive were all separated by a mere 2.96 seconds. That just goes to show just how close class 6a is. Saturday's results now mean that Jonathan Strain has a 5 point lead over Karl Johnston who is 1 point ahead of David Evans with Gary Milligan a further 1 point behind David. David has only scored in 2 rounds whereas everyone else has 3 counting scores so this class is still very much up in the air.

### **Class 6b Modified Production cars multivalve**

Dermot O'Hagan and Ken Colbert started the day with the same thing on their mind – to beat the other person. Ken Colbert set a blinding first timed run of 141.83 secs to take the early advantage over Dermot but Dermot Retaliated in the second timed runs to pip Ken by 2.02 secs. Ken then went out but was unable to beat Dermot despite going faster. As the cars both lined up for the final run Dermot and Kens friendly rivalry spurred the other on as both went faster again but still Dermot was fastest despite Ken's best efforts. At the end of the day Dermot lead Ken Colbert home by 2.15 secs and Andrew Kernohan steered his flying Renault clio home in third a mere 1.95 secs ahead of fourth placed Alfred Robb. Alfred, who usually double drove the BMW M3 with his son Andrew was out instead in the white Clio which was previously driven by his other son Steven. All in all there were 3 Robb's out Alfred and his 2 sons Andrew and Steven. This is a real family affair. Ken Colbert still leads the class championship with a 3 point lead over Dermot O'Hagan with Colin Dines third, 3 points behind Dermot.

### **Class 7 Modified Specialist Production cars**

Jim Hutchinson proved to be the man of the moment in class 7 as he wheeled his SBD engine Westfield out for the first time in several years. Jim proved to be the

man to beat all day as he lead after all 3 timed runs. David Hawthorne was the first to take the challenge to Jim and was second after the first timed run a mere 2.15 secs behind Jim with Graham Boyce third in his Dax. After 2 more spirited runs Jim was still top of the tree however Graham Boyce had closed to second With David Hawthorne third and Steven Hawthorne having an unusually quiet day in fourth, 1.6 seconds off Brother David's time. It was great to see David and Scott McMullan back in the mix again on Saturday. Both David and Scott drove extremely well but David was finding chunks of time every run as he eased himself back into the driving seat. One of the best battles amongst class 7 was the battle between Rudy "Roundabout" Tate and Andrew "Straight-line" Straney. Once again Andrew proved that the straight line is far faster than the "roundabout way" that Rudy likes to drive. Not only did class 7 provide some superb racing all day but it also gave me the best laugh of the day. As everyone was packing up the Hawthorne family were discussing if they were ready to leave or not and David could be heard quite loudly boasting "go you on home now if you want, I'm the only one with a prize to collect" David Hawthorne still leads the class 7 championship by 4 points over Steven Hawthorne with Graham Boyce third and Jim Hutchinson fourth.

### **Class 8 Sports Libre Saloons**

Gerard O`Connell again took class 8 honours in his beautiful Escort MK1. This was hot on the heels of his double race win the previous week at the Kirkistown races. Gerard sadly was the only one in class 8 today however there are more cars out there which will hopefully join Gerard in class 8 before the season is out. Gerard also leads the class 8 Championship.

### **Class 9a Sports Libre Saloons**

Despite what the entry suggest this class is not a Campbell only class. Davy Aitken was the only non-Campbell in class 9a in his beautiful Rallycross Nova. Daniel Campbell and his father Garry Campbell both drove their seriously fast Toyota Starlet`s and Emma Campbell was out in her Peugeot 106. Daniel proved from the outset that he was the fastest Campbell (Sorry Garry) with a stonking 134.77 run which he then topped in his second run to take it down to a 133.97 to go 23<sup>rd</sup> overall. Garry Campbell was second 4.99 secs behind Daniel with Davy Aiken third and Emma Campbell fourth. Championship wise Emma still has a 2 point lead over Garry Campbell and John Murphy is third.

### **Class 10 Libre rally cars**

Class 10 was dominated by "visiting" rally drivers with Dean McDowell taking class honours in his remarkable 2l Nova. Matthew McGaffin was second in his 2.1 Escort with regular sprinter Alan Roddy third in his Citroen Saxo with Jack Cairns fourth. Again this class was hotly contested all day and at the end of the day only 1.75secs separated the top 3 with a gap of 1.03 seconds being the biggest gap all day between Dean McDowell and Matthew McGaffin. It was great to see so many cars entered in class 10 at long last as it has been sparsely populated of late. It was also great to see Chris Byers making a return to motorsport after some time off due to ill health. Chris, who is a neighbour of the Circuits, finished a very commendable 5<sup>th</sup> in

his immaculately prepared Escort mk2. In terms of the championship Alan Roddy now has a 9 point over Norman Harvey with Derek Robinson 1 point behind Norman.

### **Class 11 Libre Rally cars over 1650 cc**

Again this class also had a lot of visiting drivers and was probably one of the biggest class 11 fields of recent years. It was good to see so many rally cars running in the rally car class and hopefully the competition will encourage more to follow suit. Barry Morris topped the timesheets in his DarrianT90 from the outset and simply could not be beaten. Barry's fastest run of 128.12secs placed him 9<sup>th</sup> overall and 4.92 secs ahead of second placed Wesley Patterson who is known for being an extremely quick mark 2 pilot. Local sprint veteran Neil Dugan guided his Peugeot 205 home in third a mere 1.5 secs ahead of Local man Nicky Caughey in his DS3. It was great to see the former regular drivers William Morgan, Micheal Boyle and Noel Strain also making a comeback. Hopefully they enjoyed themselves enough to come back. In terms of the championship Daniel Campbell, who opted to run in Class 9 on Saturday, leads the championship chase by 1 point from Neil Dugan with Nicky Caughey third and Noel Strain fourth.

### **Class 12 4wd sports libre cars**

Class 12 had a monstrous entry of 11 cars on Saturday and there wasn't a slow one amongst them. Not only did class 12 have Oliver Cormican in his new VW Polo but it also had a returning Ivan McCullough in his scarily fast Nissan GTR along with multiple rally champion Kenny McKinstry in a Subaru S14 WRC car. In total there were 3 WRC cars and 5 R5 cars entered in class 12. Hopefully more of these drivers will return as they added a real spectacle to the event as the best of modern Rally cars was pitted against the best of 4WD libre cars.

Oliver Cormican set the early pace in his VW polo with a first run of 129.97 secs and this was Oliver's fastest run. Gareth Sayers and Kenny Mckinstry had a real go for the second timed runs and Gareth set a 128.81 sec run and Kenny managed a 130.23sec in all three cases these were their best times of the day. 2.77 seconds separated the top 5 in this class and Gareth Sayers took top spot with what could only be described as a stonking run, especially when you consider that he was driving a 1600cc R5 Spec fiesta amongst the bigger cc and higher spec WRC cars. Oliver Cormican continues to lead the class championship from Adrian Kielt with Ivan McCullough third.

### **Class 13 Racing Cars**

Class 13 had a smaller than usual entry of only 2 competitors with Henry Campbell and John Whitley battling it out for class honours. Henry took the class win from John Whitley and in the process takes control of the class championship again with a 3 point lead over Ryan Campbell and John Whitley is third on equal points with Ryan.

### **Class 14 Small Racing Cars**

Class 14 seem to be the real class that everyone wants to be in with 3 new class 14 cars being purchased this year by Roy Coulter, Tom Devaney and Richard Munnis

so this class is definitely on the up. Its super close nature is the reason that so many wish to be a part of it. Ryan McGimpsey proved to be the man to beat as he set a blistering 119.42sec run to put him fourth overall in his little 1.3 Jedi. Ryan, who is one of the famous McGimpsey clan was more than impressive to watch as he tried to take the mix to the bigger class 15 cars. I would love to see what Ryan could do if he had a bigger class 15 car as his super-fast driving style would be hard to beat. No doubt he will appear in something in the future (probably with a turbo) which will allow him to challenge for overall victories which are well within his grasp. Tom Devaney took second in class 14 a mere 0.27 secs ahead of third placed Brian Fitzmaurice with Thomas Corey fourth and Roy Coulter fifth. Tom Devaney was debuting his new car so second in class is a superb debut. Bran Fitzmaurice suffered clutch problems all day which hampered him substantially. With Tom Devaney getting the hang of his new car and Richard Munnis having purchased a Jedi along with Roy Coulters new OMS and Thomas Corey and Trevor Roberts also having a Jedi class 14 is a superbly close class to be in with very little time separating the class competitors. Class 14 seems to be the class to be in. In terms of the championship Ryan McGimpsey leads George Stevenson by 8 points and Thomas Corey is third with Trevor Roberts fourth.

### **Class 15 Large Racing Cars**

Alan Cassells took the class 15 win from Adrian Pollock with Steven Gault third. I've detailed this battle further up the article so I wot dwell on it here. John Donnelly took fourth in the class and 20<sup>th</sup> overall in his new Pilbeam MP62 which he was just "running in" or so he told me. Over his runs John managed to shave a massive 7.93 secs of his times as he became more confident in his new car. His daughter Catherine pushed him on also as she finished 5<sup>th</sup> in class in her Delta. Adrian leads the class championship from Alan Cassells with Steven Gault third which is a mirror image of the overall championship listings as well.

### **Class 16a Historic Road Going cars**

Gerry McGarrity once again dominated class 16a in his flying Mini with Bill Blair second in another mini and Groomsport's John Hamill third in class. Mervyn Getty unveiled his new MGBGT which he has been building for the last season or so and he finished fifth behind Vincent Rodgers in the 1.8 MGBGT which he and Mervyn double drove for the last 2 seasons. It's great to see another new car into the class, especially one which is so well turned out. As Mervyn grows in confidence in this car he will become more competitive. Gerry McGarrity's class win takes him to the top of the class championship where he is tied on points with Vincent Rodgers. Robert Coulter is third in the class standings.

### **Class 16b Historic cars non roadgoing**

Stephen Nevin picked up where he left off and took another class win with Alan Jardine second. With both drivers driving Mark 1 Escorts which really are too nice to be raced. I stood for a while at the start line and watched most of the paddock leaving the line. I can safely say that Alan Jardine was the best of all the cars that I saw leaving the line. I'm not sure how he managed to do it but he leaves without any wheel spin and doesn't bog the car down or do anything aggressive, but he also



manages to launch it like a rocket down towards Debtors. I guess a start like that comes hand in hand with the experience Alan has behind the wheel of fast cars. Stephen Nevin leads the class championship by 7 points from Alan Jardine with Olivia Coulter third in her Anglia.