

Alan goes Nutts at Nutts corner

Saturday 25 September 21 saw the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship make its way to Nutts Corner for its only visit this season as the North Ulster Car Club hosted Round 3 of the sprint Championship.

With the weather reports improving all week in the run up to the event all eyes were looking to see who would be fastest on the day. There were several contenders in the mix for the event win with Nutts Corner being a course best suited to a driver who doesn't necessarily have the fastest car in a straight line, or indeed the most powerful car in the paddock. Don't get me wrong all of the above are essential elements for a fast run at Nutts Corner, but as well as these factors you need a car which handles and brakes very well and also a driver who is a tad Nutts (excuse the pun) and prepared to carry vast corner speeds and be later on the brakes in a car which needs to be set up to handle exceptionally well. Thankfully there were several drivers who met these criteria at the event.

As I looked through the entry list on the Friday evening I picked out 9 drivers who really have a massive chance of a win at this venue especially if conditions were to change to favour the less powerful class 15 cars. Then when you consider the number of other drivers with class 14 and 15 cars who were not out at the event the 2021 SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint championship really has a spectacular pool of top quality cars and drivers. I can't wait to see them all together in the one paddock.

As usual the action was fast and North Ulster Car club ran another gold star event, which was a joy to compete in. After 2 practice runs it was straight into the timed runs where Adrian Pollock set the initial pace a mere 0.21secs ahead of Alan Cassells with Steven Gault a mere 0.25secs behind. Alan Cassells then turned the wick up a bit during the second run to set the FTD of 91.20secs with Adrian and Steven both going slightly slower than their first run. It all went down to the third run and with the track really well "rubbered in" Adrian went faster again and dropped his time down to a 92.10s which claimed him second behind Alan Cassells and a mere 0.55secs ahead of Steven Gault in third place. Fourth overall went to Stephen Colbert a mere 0.09secs behind Steven Gault and 1.16secs ahead of fifth placed Gerard O`Connell.

Both Stephen and Gerard were sharing Gerard's World Series Dallara and both drivers were battling hard all day and were practically inseparable in the time sheets. You must consider that the World Series car is a big car, which was designed, built and set up for racing in multi lap events rather than sprints. So when you compare the size of this particular car against some of the smaller, lighter single seaters which were designed for short sharp speed events, and then throw the tight narrow Nutts Corner layout into the mix, fair play to the 2 fellas for making it sing so well.

Just while I'm mentioning people who can make a car sing you simply cannot leave out Trevor Roberts who steered his little 1400cc Force 9 to seventh overall with a 95.5sec run. This is only 4.3 secs off the FTD time. Sadly Trevor only completed 1 timed run and I know for certain that if he had been able to complete more runs then he would've been even further up the final times.

I could single out nearly every competitor for praise, such is the quality of our paddock but I simply cannot fail to mention George Stevenson who also set a blistering run of 99.39 in his new class 14 Force PT to finish 8th overall. With more seat time in the car George will definitely be following Trevor up the time sheets, possibly even nipping ahead of him?? Watch this space!!

I also wish to mention Jack Boal here as well. Jack drove his super stealthy looking GTR Hyabussa to 9th overall with a 100.74 sec run which was impressive. An extra wee quick mention must also go to

Sheryl McBride who drove the socks off her little Global GT today getting down to a 118.69 secs despite having an “untidy” first run.

It was great to see the Lancashire lads, Ian and Mark, out competing again after a bit of a lay off. They have debuted their new Subaru Imprezza on the hills earlier in the year. Ian told me they were still working at the car and that there was still more to come. If this is the case I can't wait to see it when it gets to where they want it. Not only do the Lancashire brothers bring a bit of competition to class 12 but they also are well known for providing plenty of craic and banter round the paddock too. Talking of returnees to the paddock the 2 Davy`s also made a very welcome return to the paddock today. Both David Patton and David Francis were out in their fabulous Escort Cosworths. David Francis had a great run to take class 9a honours in his escort which was seriously impressive to watch round the bottom half of the circuit and David Patton was second in class 9a in his escort, so it was an escort one two in class 9a.

In the Modified Championship battle, championship returnee Ian Lancashire took category honours in his Subaru Imprezza a mere 0.57secs ahead of Oliver Cormican in his EVO. Stewart Strain piloted his little 205 to third modified car overall and fastest of the 2wd modified men. This is an epic result when you consider that not only is the car 2wd it is also front wheel drive so it's bound to be a real handful round Nutts Corner. No wonder Stewart gets compared to the stig!!

Phillip Cardy remained at the top of the Roadgoing category taking the category win ahead of Conor Hamil and Aaron Vance in that order. It's great to see Phillip out again in his Subaru, he has clearly picked up from where he left off before.

In terms of the specialist Category we had a different name at the top today when Jack Boal took category honours ahead of Trevor Allen with Richard Munnis third. Despite not competing in his Westfield David Hawthorne was still driving. He dual drove the family Clio with his daughter Amy and both father and daughter had a belter of a day. David had a smashing day and proved to be only slightly faster than the hard charging Amy but he proved that he is nowhere near as mechanically sympathetic to the little Clio as Amy. I'm told that Amy has now banned him from driving the little car.

In the Heaslip Ladies Challenge Trophy Emma Campbell took her maiden Challenge trophy win today after piping Sheryl by a mere 1.04secs (corrected time). Third place went to Kathy McDade who simply had no luck on Saturday and couldn't get a good clean run strung together. Fourth went to Amy Hawthorne who has now completed 3 events so will now have a more accurate conversion factor. I suspect that this will see her chasing the other ladies a little more closely from now on.

Lastly, and for some, more importantly is the fastest mini in the west. Today Karl Johnston takes this honour after a fabulous drive to set a 118.08 sec run. Second went to Gary Milligan with Gerry McGarrity third. Despite this not being an official category it does see some of the closest rivalry amongst the 3 main competitors, Gerry McGarrity, Karl Johnston and Gary Milligan and there is always plenty of banter afterwards, none more so than after this event when Gerry told me that he had only lent Karl the title of fastest mini in the west as he hadn't enough room in the van to take the trophy home!!

Our next event will take place at Kirkistown on 09 October and will be hosted by the Ulster Automobile club. See you all there folks!!

Now for the class battles:

Class 1 – Road Cars up to 1700cc

Stephen Wishart had a very busy day on Saturday as he was driving 2 very different cars in 2 very different classes. Stephen was double driving his 106 in this class with his father Arnie, who was allowed another run in the car today. Stephen was also double driving the SERC Formula Ford in class 13 with Basil Barnes. Stephen turned out to be the fastest in both cars and took a class win in both class 1 and class 13. However Mark Brogan pushed Stephen hard in class 1 to finish a mere 1.08secs behind Stephen third went to Alan Wallace in his Honda Del sol a mere 0.64secs behind Mark. Newcomer Dessie Martin drove his little Toyota Starlet to fourth ahead of 5 placed Arnie Wishart. Marks second place still keeps him at the head of the class 1 pack ahead of Arnie Wishart and Stephen Donnelly

Class 2a – Road cars over 1700cc

In this class the car in front is a BMW AS Conor Hamil has taken over the Robb mantle and is now taking class wins in his V8 BMW. Conor drove the wheels of the car to take the class win ahead of the Clio's of Adam Vance and Crawford Ewing in that order. Mervyn Johnston took fourth ahead of David Hawthorne who dual drove the family Clio, but not without having his issues in it! David is definitely not as mechanically sympathetic to the car as Amy is, but Amy definitely showed him how to grab the car by the neck and make it go!! Connor's win brings him to within 1 point of class leader Adam Vance in the class championship with Crawford Ewing 3 points behind Conor. This is going to be a tight class run in!

Class 2b – Road cars Mazda MX5 challenge

Adam Brogan took class 2B honours again today in his wee MX5 with a 1.24s lead over George McMillan after 3 tied runs. Ian Howard took third in the class having swapped his usual mini for his MX5. Ian had a ball in the car but wasn't overly complimentary about sprinting on road tyres, having been used to the super sticky slicks on his mini. It was also good to see regular auto tester and lanes rally competitor Malcolm McQueen out at the event in his Mazda MX5 and also historic competitor (the car that is not the driver) John Hamill also out in an mx5. Adam Brogan marched further into the lead of the class championship ahead of George McMillan with Derek Brogan, who was marshalling today, third in the class championship.

Class 3 – Road cars specialist Production cars 4wd

Phillip Cardy once again proved to be the man to beat in class 3 finishing ahead of Barry Griffin. Phillip was very consistent on each run with all 3 runs being in the 117 sec bracket. Barry was also pushing hard and managed to keep all 3 of his runs to within 0.61s of each other. This just confirms that both these fellas drive these cars to the max. This Consistent finishing order this season sees Phillip Cardy lead the class championship ahead of Barry Griffin.

Class 5 – Road cars specialist Production cars

Class 5 today had a slightly smaller class than we have been recently used to as only 3 others turned up to play with Richard Munnis. Last year Richard dreamt of having a play mate but this year he has so many that he doesn't know what to do with them all. Trevor Allen showed us again that he is the current maestro of the class with a class win ahead of Richard Munnis. Third went to Darwyn Young with Gilmore Murphy in fourth place. Trevor managed to set a 106.97 run which posted him 15th overall – on road tyres!!

Trevor's win today extends his lead over Richard in the class to 5 points with Andy Hawthorne third 2 pints behind Richard and four ahead of fourth placed Gardiner McIlwaine.

Class 6a Modified Cars – Series Production cars 8v

Whoever wrote the script for class 6a today was bound to be delighted with the way it turned out. As usual Jonny Strain took the class win on his way to finishing 32nd overall. Stephen Harvey however really upset the applecart. Having had a mediocre day running in an around the 122 second mark Stephens third run was stopped due to an on track incident. Stephen then got a rerun which saw him drop to a staggering 117.85 sec run which put him second behind Jonny. Karl Johnstone drove the wheels off his mini and finished third ahead of a hard charging Stephen Jess. Gary Milligan had lady luck shine on him as he set a blinding second timed run to Pip David Evans to fifth by a mere 0.01 secs and then as he started his third run he suffered a mechanical woe. During a friendly banter filled chat in the paddock Evans was heard to say, “could you not a have broken it a run earlier Gary” to which Gary replied “sure that would be no fun” William Hutton finished 7th a mere 0.98 secs behind David Evans. Interestingly there was 2.91secs between Stephen Harvey in second and William Hutton in seventh in this class. Third to fifth inclusive were separated by a mere 0.8secs This is further testament to just how tight this class is.

In terms of the overall class Championship Jonny Strain tops the class ahead of David Evans. Karl Johnston and Steven Harvey. All is definitely to play for in 6a as the season continues.

Class 6b Modified Cars – Series Production cars 16v

Dermot O`Hagan returned to the top of the class 6a time sheets after a short time away. Dermot drove well to do a 112.4 sec fastest run which put him 24th overall. It was great to see Dermot back out in a car today and also completing the full course after his recent exploit in a buggy where he thought he was sprinting!! Second in class went to Neil McMullan in his Renault Clio cup car with Stephen Colbert third and Seamus Murray fourth. Incidentally Stephen was also driving the Class 15 World series Dallara with Gerard O`Connell. Stephen finished fourth overall in the world series narrowly pipping Gerard. Championship wise Stephen still tops the class list with Dermot O`Hagan very close behind. Ken Colbert is third ahead of fourth placed Niall McMullan. This will be a very tight season run in.

Class 7 Modified Cars Specialist Production

Class 7 cars were very few and far between today. Without the Hawthorne twins and Scott McMullan as well the rest of the class 7 crazy gang there were only 2 cars out to play. In fairness it didn't matter how many were in the class as Jack Boal was on form. Jack set a new class record on his way to a best run of 100.74 secs which saw him finish ninth overall. Second in class went to the hard charging David McMullan who cut his times down to 111.01 sec run. Championship wise David Hawthorne is still the fastest Hawthorne with Slower brother Steven in second. David McMullan`s superb drive leap frogs him to third ahead of Jack Boal.

Class 8 Sports Libre cars Special Saloons

_Today we had 2 RSR Escorts out to play as both Richie O`Mahoney and Rory Stephens made the trip north to compete but sadly Rory was unable to start the event leaving Richard to take the class win with an impressive 122.3s run. Championship wise Rory still leads the championship table from Jim Hutchinson

Class 9a Sports Libre cars Saloons and GT`s

Saturday saw a slightly bigger entry than we have been used to of late in class 9A when the flying Davys (Francis and Patton) brought their Escort Cosworths out to play. David Francis took class

honours ahead of David Patton with Emma Campbell rounding the class off in third. It was great to see the 2 escorts back out again and both the drivers and the cars are a welcome return to the paddock. Hopefully we can persuade both Davy's to do a few more events? And maybe we can entice some more out to play alongside them all? Championship wise Emma Campbell still tops the class championship in her wee 106 ahead of David Francis and David Patton

Class 9b Sports libre Closed wheel sports racing cars.

Class 9b was a 2 run only class today as both competitors pushed hard. Sheryl McBride had an "untidy" first run but more than made up for it by setting a stonking 118.69sec second run. Patrick Roche also set his best run in his OMS SC on his second run but sadly he pushed a little too hard on his third and managed to see the back of his own head as he came out of the bottom corner. Patrick still managed a 103.84 sec run which put him twelfth overall and watching his third run, he would've been faster again had he managed to complete the run. Championship wise Patrick has a 3 point lead over Sheryl McBride.

Class 10 Sports libre Cars – small capacity Rally cars

Class 10 was again under subscribed and had only 3 participants. Alan Roddy, picked up where he left off and took the class win in his Citroen Saxo ahead of Norman Harvey in his Escort with Derek Robinson third in his Toyota Corolla. This genuinely is a good class with some top machinery in it but sadly drivers seem to shy away from the class. As the class is a libre class you do not need to have your car taxed or MOT'd to compete, and your belts and harnesses do not have to be in date either so if this is the misconception that puts people off then surely this redresses the issue?

Class 11 Sports libre Cars – large capacity Rally cars

Again only 3 competitors entered class 11 today and whilst the entry was not big in terms of quantity it was massive in quality. All 3 cars were separated by a mere 3.21 secs. Stewart Strain took class honours on a 111.69 sec run with Michael Boyle second and Thomas Lowry third. Thomas was in a lovely wee Talbot Sunbeam and it was great to see him out having a day's motorsport. Championship wise Stewart Strain remains top of the class list ahead of Jaye Nevin with Michael Boyle third and Wesley Patterson fourth. Sadly Jaye was unable to compete on Saturday after a slight off at Craigtlet but hopefully he will be out again at the next sprint

Class 12 4WD sports Libre Cars

Class 12 has gone from a 1 horse race to a full stable of horses with the return of the Lancashire brothers, Ryan Murray and Nicky Caughey all coming to flex their muscles against Oliver Cormican. Oliver had an unfortunate day in his Evo and only had 1 good run which saw him lead the class initially and still end up 19th overall. Ian Lancashire however topped the class with a 109.00 s run, a mere 0.57 faster than Oliver. Third went to Ryan Murray who set a blinder of a third run to take a 111.97s run. Ryan was Flying (do you like that pun) as he crossed the line but had a slightly unusual line out of the last bend after the finish line which saw him make a stop off at the dry cleaners on the way home. He was lucky. Fourth in class went to Nicky Caughey in his rally Evo 9 on a 112.45s run. When you consider that Nicky still was in rally spec, so had a second seat, harness foot plate, a forest spec sump guard kit etc fitted and was running on rally tyres, not full slicks, this was no mean feat. I did suggest to him that he should strip this extra weight out and run on slicks, but he didn't seem keen at the time, however with Nicky you never know.....Last in class and only just over a second behind Nicky was Mark Lancashire who is getting to grips with his new car. Championship wise Oliver leads the field ahead of Ryan Murray and Ian Lancashire.

Class 13 Formula Racing cars

With the Martin Donnelly trophy race being held at Kirkistown we didn't have a full grid of Formula Fords as per usual as they were competing at the Martin Donnelly Trophy. However what we did have was Stephen Wishart duel driving the car with Basil Barnes. This car is prepared and run by the students of SERC as part of their continued learning in their motorsport course. Stephen was also doing some continued learning on Saturday as he switched between a front wheel drive road going car and this formula ford rear wheel drive race car. Stephen won the class by a mere 3.1 seconds from second placed BASIL Barnes, who was sharing the car with Stephen. Third on the day went to John Whitley in his swift 95. This result move Stephen up into second place in the championship standings between championship leader Henry Campbell and third placed Basil Barnes

Class 14 small Capacity Racing Cars

When I initially looked at the class 14 entry and saw Trevor Roberts and George Stevenson had entered, and then saw the weather which, a week before the event wasn't looking favourable I like many others would have given good odds on either of these 2 drivers really mixing it in between the bigger class 15 cars and causing an upset. The weather turned out to be fantastic on the day but both these fellas drove better than the weather. Both Trevor and George went under the existing class record with every run, and Trevor smashed it by taking 5.05secs off it. Bear in mind that Trevor only did 1 practice run and 1 time run as he suffered a mechanical gremlin to finish top of the class and seventh overall. I can safely predict that had Trevor been able to complete runs two and three he would have made the top five amongst the bigger class 15 cars. Mark my words this car and driver combination is capable of a top 3 finish this season!! George Stevenson pushed hard and got down to a 99.39 to finish eighth overall after an epic run. George also is learning the car and is tipped to go faster with more seat time. Third in class went to Brian Fitzmaurice in his older OMS PR. Brian got down to a 102.12 to finish tenth overall, which is some going considering he is also still learning his single seater having had a successful tin top career. Another man learning a new Car is Steven Robb as he appeared in a Jedi MK4. Steven, who had only done Craigtantlet Hill climb in the car before finished a fine fourth in class and eleventh overall with a 103.31 sec run despite having learners "L plates" firmly attached. Steven is another man who can only get faster with seat time. Tom Devaney was next up and fifth in class ahead of the vastly improving Roy Coulter and seasoned pro Thomas Corey. I have said it before and I will say it again, class 14 is a belter of a class with some superb drivers amongst the paddock. There were a few noticeable names missing as well and any one of these class 14 folks has the capability to upset the bigger class 15 cars on any given day! If I could fit in a single seater I'd be looking to race in class 14!!

In terms of the championship standings today's results put Trevor Roberts ahead of Brian Fitzmaurice with George Stevenson 1 point behind in third with Ryan McGimpsey Catherine Donnelly and Thomas Corey all still chasing in the background too.

Class 15 large Capacity Racing Cars

I've mentioned the main points of class 15 above in the main body of text so I won't repeat it here but Alan Cassells took the class win and also the event win from Adrian Pollock with Steven Gault third. Stephen Colbert just pipped Gerard O'Connell on his last run to take fourth despite these 2 fellas having an epic dual all day. John Donnelly also drove well and is finally getting to grips with his Pilbeam mp62 and Ben O'Brien topped out the class with his Formula Opel Lotus Reynard. To show just how quick the pace is the top 6 in this class were separated by only 3.8 seconds!! Whilst that's a

big margin in speed events you must consider the vast array and differences in the cars in the class, from an ultra-modern, specially built for the job OMS to a larger and less nimble purpose built multi lap racecar. Honestly this is an epic class which will, like a good wine, only get better with each event.

In terms of the class championship Alan Cassells leads this, as well as the overall championship too from Gerard O`Connell. Adrian Pollock is third in class ahead of Steven Gault although this order is reversed in the overall championship. The grape vine would indicate that there is at least 1 more class 15 car to appear however until this appears we will have to guess!

Class 16a Historic Road Cars

How many of you, when you think of the film "The Italian job" immediately think of the famous line "your only supposed to blow the bloody doors off" For those of you who are wondering what I'm on about, I will explain. Trevor McIlroy was fortunate enough on Saturday to be photographed exiting the horse shoe trying to close the door on his sprite after it opened mid turn. There were some contrasting explanations to what happened here. One is that his head is so big that the door wouldn't close, another was that there was so much grip that the shell flexed causing the door to open. Whereas the most believable theory was that he used the door as an air brake to slow him down as he was braking extra late everywhere, doing his best to stay ahead of Mervyn Getty. Either way only Trevor knows the real reason.

Once again class 16a proved to be a very close class on Saturday. Gerry McGarrity made two epic runs to win the class with a 120.83sec run but all the fun was behind him. Trevor managed to pip Mervyn Getty by a mere 0.16secs in the end (the air brake must've worked) as both these drivers fought tooth and nail all day. David Cochrane finished fourth in class just under 2 seconds behind Mervyn and in front of Vincent Rodgers in his MGBGT. Ian McCullough completed the class 16 battle in sixth.

Saturdays results mean that Gerry Still leads the class from Trevor McIlroy with Mervyn Getty third and Vincent Rodgers fourth.

Class 16b Historic Saloons and Sport scars

Once again Stephen Nevin took class honours in his beautiful Mk1 Escort. Stephen got down to a 112.82 which saw him 27th overall in the final timesheets. Second in class went to Arthur Ovens in his little mg Midget. In terms of the championship, Stephen Nevin has a substantial lead over second placed Paul Taggart.

Heaslip Ladies Challenge Trophy

As detailed above in the main body of the report Emma Campbell took the class win finishing a mere 1.04 secs ahead of Sheryl McBride on corrected time. Third went to Kathy McDade with Amy Hawthorne fourth. The new ladies challenge trophy is working well and is certainly seeing the girls pitched a lot closer together in the time sheets now with the use of the corrected times system which is now in use. Championship wise, Emma Campbell has a 1 point lead over Sheryl McBride, who leads Kathy Mcdade by another single point. Amy Hawthorne is fourth ahead of Catherine Donnelly who has so far only done 1 round this year. It is very tight at the top of the ladies challenge this year and it will be one to watch as the season progresses, especially with dropped score possibly being involved depending how many rounds are run!

