

2019 SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship Round 4

Saturday 01 June saw the Enniskillen Motor Club host their 2019 Erne Trophy Sprint at St Angelo Airfield Enniskillen. This year the Erne Trophy Sprint was round 4 of the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship.

As with previous years the event was a bonus point's championship round and it also attracted the biggest entry to date with 90 competitors making the start. As always with this event it attracted a lot of local interest, especially amongst the local rally fraternity. This in its self made for an entry which included a lot of cars which normally aren't seen at sprints. Hopefully some of these will however be seen at future events?

With bonus points on offer for championship contenders the pace was always going to be hot, and due to the wide open airfield nature of the course it was always going to boil down to who could be fast but also who could be tidy and precise through the infamous chicanes. In all fairness to the organising club the chicanes this year were more open than on previous years and this was proof that they had listened to drivers from last year. The course itself was very fast and flowing but you just needed to be precise with your turn in points.

After a slow start, due to circumstances beyond the control of the organising committee, the timed runs got under way around 1 pm. Defending Champion Adrian Pollock set a blinder of a first run with a time which put him well under the previous record. Sadly however he was deemed to have touched one of the chicanes and sadly lost his time. Steven Gault therefore took the lead after the first timed run and set a first run time of 134.73 in his big Reynard 903 single seater and this time was only to be bettered by himself as the day progressed. Ryan McGimpsey piloted his nimble little Mk1 Jedi to third after the first runs and he remained in 3rd for the remainder of the day.

With the chicanes proving to be the place to either make or loose time, a lot of drivers took more cautious second runs to try and put a time on the board before having a more committed third run to try and go for faster times. Indeed in some cases it was the third runs before competitors managed a good clean run to set a time.

Some other notable results amongst the runners were Gerry McGarrity who debuted his new toy, In a bid to stir up the pot in the coveted race for the fastest Mini in the west competition, Gerry purchased a beautiful space framed Mini Traveller with an R1 motorbike engine in it. Gerry had never driven it until the morning of the event and was later heard to say that it just kept revving and pulling until he gave in at 14000 rpm and pulled another gear!! Another debutant was Terry McKay in a 750cc Casmat RX buggy. The sound of this as it circulated was something else and was likened, by a few in the paddock, to a swarm of wasps in a hollow box, but boy was it a sight to see and hear. Terry managed a very respectable 8th overall and class 9b win on his first Motorsport UK event in the buggy. It is hoped that more of these will make an appearance on the Sprint and Hillclimb scene in the future.

In the battle for road going honours Richard Munnis took the coveted Road going win in his class 5 Westfield with Connor Lavery second fastest roadgoing car in his Audi R8. Andrew Robb was third in the roadgoing battle and also was the fastest roadgoing saloon in his BMW M3.

In the modified battle David Hawthorne took modified honours and sixth overall in his Westfield, only a mere 1.67 secs behind his father Andy in the Family Vauxhall Lotus Reynard. Terry McKay was second modified in his Casmat RX buggy and Steven Hawthorne third in this category. All 3 modified drivers were within the top 10. Oliver Cormican set a blistering first run to set 12 overall and take the honours for fastest modified saloon ahead of Ian Howard in his Maguire Mini and Gerry McGarrity (in his new Mini Traveller).

In the historic battle Gerry McGarrity took historic honours in his "usual" Green Mini Cooper with Stephen Strain piloting his Mark 1 escort to second a mere 0.48 seconds behind Gerry. John Golden was third in another mini cooper. As a point of clarification Gerry was competing in 2 minis, his "usual" green Mini cooper and his new mini Traveller (which was running in class 8a)

In the much anticipated battle for the Fastest Mini in the West Gerry McGarrity took the honours in his Mini Cooper (the historic one) with Karl Johnston second, a mere 0.6 seconds behind Gerry. John Golden took third and Gary Milligan was fourth. After a lot of local chatter it was decided not to include Gerry McGarrity's new mini traveller in the battle for fastest mini in the west as it wasn't really a mini. Upon being informed of this decision Gerry response was priceless, and in true Gerry form he said "auch well, (long pause and a wry smile) sure i'll beat them in the old one anyway"

After Saturdays event the overall championship is currently lead by Adrian Pollock who has a 3 point lead over second Place Steven Gault with Joe Courtney third. Both Adrian and Steven have 2 wins each but Adrians second place in Enniskillen gives him the 3 point nod over Stevens 4th place at Kirkistown earlier in the season. With each driver having a non scoring round so far the championship is only hotting up and will definitely be a close run thing over the remaining 5 rounds.

Andrew Robb is now 8 Points clear of Alfred Robb in the BMW M3 with Adam Stewart third in the Roadgoing Saloon category. Andrew is going to be hard to beat in this category run in. Modified Category honours are currently in Oliver Cormicans favour. Oliver has a 5 point lead over Dermot O'Hagan with Gerard O'Connell third in the modified category.

Interestingly Gerard O'Connell was unable to join us in Enniskillen this year as he was competing in St Guenno in France. The St Guenno hill climb is a 3 day hill climb festival in France which attracts the crème de la crème of hillclimbing talent and is also known as the Hill climb masters. Gerard along with Neil Dugan, Bill Blair and several from the Southern Ireland sprint and Hill climb championship have all ventured to St Guenno this year to show the Europeans how quick us boys are.

In terms of the classes:

Class 1 roadgoing production up to 1700cc

Despite Rudy Tate being fastest in practice Andrew Straney took the class honours in class 1 today with a 2.17 second class lead over Rudy Tate in the Mazda MX5 that they share. James Schofield took third in class in his Jordan Honda Civic from local Girl Coleen Barker in her Peugeot 205. Andrew Straney now has a 7 point lead from James Schofield and Rudy Tate who are now tied for second in the class 1 championship.

Class 2 Roadgoing Production over 1700cc

Once again Andrew Robb guided his black BMW M3 to class honours, as well as a 30th overall, roadgoing saloon honours and a new class 2 Record. On this occasion it was Stephen Donnelly who was second in his Clio 4.06secs behind Andrew whilst Michael Clarke piloted his Lotus Elise to 3rd in class a mere 0.58 secs behind Stephen. With a full house of wins Andrew leads the class by 6 points from Michael Clarke who has a further 5 point advantage over third place man Alfred Robb. Andrew also has a healthy 8 point lead over Alfred in the Roadgoing Saloon category.

Class 3 Roadgoing Production Cars 4WD

Conor Lavery took the class 3 honours as well as second in the roadgoing section in his beautifully sounding Audi R8. Conor's very neat and tidy second run time of 160.82secs was sufficient to give him 24th overall in his fantastically sounding Audi R8 which would have been a real handful through the tight chicanes. Fair play to Conor who has had very limited tracktime in his new car.

Class 5 All other Road Going Production cars

Richard Munnis kept up his winning ways and took another class win on the way to finishing 20th overall and being the first roadgoing car home. Richards third run of 159.18secs put him ahead of some quick modified machinery. This win, Richards fourth of the season, gives him a perfect score of 23 points, 16 ahead of class rival Gardiner McIlwaine. Ohh and as well as such a good result he also set a new class record 5.64secs under the previous class record.

Class 6a 8V Modified Production Cars

Everything seemed to be going well for David Strain who lead the class all day until, after his second run, all Davids times were removed for hitting the chicanes in each of his timed runs. As a result David found himself with no timed runs for his day. Whilst this was disappointing for David, his nephew Jonathan wasn't found to be complaining as he inherited the class win from his uncle, lifting Karl Johnston to second and David Evans the third place in class. These results really have shaken the class championship up with David Strain now joint top of the championship standings with Jonathan and Gary Milligan 1 point behind in third. Last years class champion David Evans is a further 3 points behind Gary in fourth. Gary However has scored in all 4 rounds whereas both Davids and Jonathan have only 3 scores each, so dropped scores will come into call in this class before the season is out.

Class 6B 16V modified Production cars

Once again Dermot O'Hagan proved the old Toyota advert to be wrong when he showed his fellow class 6b competitors that the car in front was actually a Honda. Dermot thrashed his little Civic to within an inch of its life to achieve class 6B honours and an incredible 25th overall, a mere 0.25 secs ahead of Vincent Deery's Lotus Exige and Kenny Culbert's Lotus Sunbeam. Dermot's win now gives him a 7 point championship lead over Ken Culbert (who has only scored in 2 of the 4 rounds to date) with Steven Robb and Colin Dines tying for third. With Kenny Culbert previous experience, and a history of winning longer than Inspector Gadgets arm, I predict that this class will go down to the proverbial wire this season.

Class 7 Modified Specialist Production Cars

Once again class 7 was about the battle of the twins. Once again the 2 Hawthornes have proved to be closer than close. They share the same parents, share the same car, they share the same birth day (literally), they share the fact that neither of them completed a run in practice, and again both of them recorded a no timed run but ,for the first time this season ,they haven't shared the same second. David Hawthorne took the class honours today with a best run of 145.67 which put him 6th overall. Yes I will repeat that 6th overall!! Stephen finished second in class and was 10th overall with Tom Devaney finishing 3rd in class a mere 0.30 secs ahead of fourth placed David McMullan. The pace in this class this season, in both the Sprint and the Hillclimb championships has been incredible and the 2 Hawthorne twins have been inseparable. Just to make David Hawthornes day he also managed a new class record taking 5.47 secs off the previous class record.

It was great to see Mark Hewitt and Michael Heasley having such fun in their Locost but disappointing to see Paul Hamills run of bad luck continuing again when clutch issues sidelined him. In terms of the class Championship David has a 1 point lead over Steven Hawthorne and David McMullan is third. David is also 6th overall in the overall Sprint Championship with Steven 8th overall in the overall championship. Just to prove how close and inseparable these 2 brothers are Steven and David are joint in the overall hillclimb championship as well as in the class 7 hillclimb championship. This is going to be a cracker class to watch as the year unfolds. The only thing to be sure of is that a Hawthorne will beat another Hawthorne at the season end, but chances are it will be by the tiniest of margins. I could even be tempted to predict a tie at the season end. Watch this space!!!!

Class 8A Sports libre Special saloons.

Ian Howard made his first venture of the year to join the fun and took the class win in his Maguire mini. Second place went to Gerry McGarrity in his new Mini Traveller with only 1.24 seconds separating the 2 space framed minis. With some additional seat time I imagine Gerry will be hard to beat in this class. Ian Howard now leads the class championship.

Class 9B Sports Libre Closed Wheel Sports cars

St Angelo proved not to be the place to take a Radical as both Radical drivers Alan Cassels and Lee Kirkwood suffered mechanical gremlins which meant that neither driver completed a timed run. However the class was won by new comer Terry McKay in his Casmats RX Buggy. This fabulous little buggy ended up 8th overall on its maiden Motorsport UK event and was a great spectacle to watch as Terry hustled it round the track. There is talk that more of these Casmats will appear on the speed scene which would be a welcome addition. Alan Cassels continues to lead the class championship by 2 points from Sheryl McBride with Gerard O`Connell a further 2 points behind Sheryl.

Class 10 Rally Cars

This is another class where the chicanes had a big influence in the outcome. Regular championship contender and current class leader Alan Roddy recorded 2 no timed runs as well as a red flag which left him with no times on the board and no championship points. The class win on the day went to hard charging Glen Irwin who drove his little nova hard to win the class by 5.83 secs from Jonni McDaid with Tommi McDaid third. In terms of the championship Alan Roddy still leads the class from

Phillip Gault. Phillip Gault was a spectator at St Angelo after a replacement clutch for his Nova couldn't be sourced in time for him to bring it out.

Class 11 Sports Libre Rally cars

This has been one of the more under supported classes this season however Norman Armstrong stamped his authority all over class 11 and took a clear class win from local man Tony McKenna both in Mark 2 Escorts. Normans time put him 32nd overall which was a great drive. Hopefully Norman, or indeed Tony will make further appearances this season?

Class12 4wd Sports Libre cars

Once again Oliver Cormican was the man to beat in class 12 and once again he took class honours in his Mitsubishi Evo. Oliver who has had a disastrous season with reliability issues only completed 1 timed run, but being one not to waste his track time he plonked himself 12th overall, as well as fastest modified saloon on the day. Whilst life is full of if's and maybe's, one thing that is certain is that had Oliver been able to complete more timed runs he would have been even faster and even further up the time sheets. In terms of the championship Oliver has a 13 point lead over 2nd placed Basil Barnes. Oliver is also 7th in the overall Championship and 5 points clear in the modified saloons championship.

Class 13 Formula Racing cars

For the second time this season Henry Campbell brought his son Ryan Campbell down for a days motorsport, and Ryan continued his winning ways by beating his dad again. Ryan put 4 storming runs together but his best was a 150.02 secs which put him 9th overall in a formula ford! Henry Campbell finished 2nd with Ian Maple third ahead of Paul Mongan. Its great to see Paul and Ian now getting reliability from this car and both guys are always great craic around the paddock. Henry Campbell leads the class championship from Ian Maple with Ryan Campbell third, but with Ryan having 2 wins from 2 starts this season his continued appearances could see things shaken up slightly if he keeps coming out to play. Interestingly both Henry and Ryan Campbell set times under the existing class record so Ryan took class honours and a new class record home with him.

Class 14 Smaller capacity Race Cars.

This class was always going to be an epic fight. Ryan McGimpsey who has had some fabulous results on the Hill climb season this season in his Jedi Mk1 up against Multiple karting champion Trevor Roberts in his Jedi Mk4. Then throw in Lewis Wilson in his Reynard 873 and Thomas Corey in a Reynard SF80 and your guaranteed a close class.

Once again no timed runs made a huge effect in this class. Ryan McGimpsey only managed 1 practice and 1 timed run yet took the class honours by 0.09 secs from Trevor Roberts, who only managed 1 timed run and a failed practice run. Lewis Wilson took third from Thomas Corey. Ryans class win took him to third overall with Trevor finishing fourth overall and both men were under the existing class record. With some more seat time in their cars both drivers will surely be up amongst the bigger single seaters especially at Nutts Corner when we go there again in September. Its also interesting to see if Ryan will follow in the family footsteps and fit a turbo charger to his Jedi. His dad is, after all, the famous " Turbo Sam" and big brother Ricky is known to dabble with turbo's as well?

In terms of the class championship Trevor Roberts leads the class from Lewis Wilson with Ryan McGimpsey third and Catherine Donnelly fourth.

Class 15 All other Racing Cars.

Class 15 saw a fight like no other with Adrian Pollock, the defending champion, having no luck at all with the chicanes. Adrian ended up with 2 no timed runs which meant his fastest and only run of the day netted him second behind a hard charging Steven Gault. Steven, who has now well and truly caught the "winning bug" put in 3 very neat, precise and tidy runs to go faster in each of his timed runs, however interestingly Stevens fastest run of the day was actually his practice run! Steven also managed to go under the existing class record twice as well. Andy Hawthorne took 3rd in class ahead of Brendan Flynn who is still learning his new Megapin.

In terms of class 15, and indeed the overall championship Adrian leads Steven Gault however both drivers have 2 wins each. Joe Courtney's absence from the event means he has dropped to third with Simon Woodside fourth.

Class 16A Road Going Historic Saloons

Gerry McGarrity took class honours in his old, usual mini with a 2.71 sec lead over John Golden in his mini. Mervyn Getty took a comfortable third in class ahead of Vincent Rodgers with class championship leader Ian McCullough fifth. Gerry McGarrity's class win was also under his previous class record and he managed to steer the little green mini to 36th overall which was also the fastest historic car as well. In terms of the championship Ian McCullough continues to lead the class championship with a 1 point lead over Mervyn Getty. Vincent Rodgers is third and Gerry McGarrity is fourth however he has only completed 1 event so don't expect him to stay in fourth for long.

Class 16b Non Road Going Historics

Stephen Strain took class honours in class 16B in his Escort MK1 ahead of Arthur Ovens in his midget. Stephen ended up a mere 0.48 behind Gerry McGarrity in the battle for the historics. Every time Stephen was observed during the day he had a huge grin on his face as he was apparently trying to re-create a Ken Block Hoonigan display as he drifted and threw his beautiful Mk 1 Escort around like a toy. Stephen doesn't really need a windscreen in this car as he spends most of his time looking through the side windows.

Class 18 – small capacity Rally Cars

Raymond Johnston took the class win despite a slow start which actually saw him third in the class after his first timed run. Marc Johnston took second from William Armstrong who was third with all 3 being in Ford Escorts. Raymonds class winning time saw him 15th overall in the main standings.

Class 19 – larger capacity Rally Cars

In order to succeed in this class it appears that you need to have a "fit Mark 2" as the top 4 cars were all Mark 2 Escorts. Andrew Bracken took class honours from Fabian McAleer with George Elliot third ahead of Frances Morris. All of whom were in escorts. Andrews time was sufficient to put him 23rd overall. It would be great if some of the class 18 + class 19 drivers could be convinced to participate

in more sprints over the course of the season as there were some beautiful cars amongst the classes and some very quick drivers who would be extremely competitive in the championship.

Class 20 4WD Rally Cars

Gareth Sayers brought his WRC Subaru out to play in class 20 and it was great to see how WRC machinery could compare against the sprint cars on offer. Thankfully Gareth didn't fail to impress as he steered the Subaru round to 11 overall to take the class win. Gareth was only 1.3 secs ahead of Oliver Cormican in his 4WD class 12 car, but it would've been interesting to see how Oliver and Gareth would've ended up had Oliver been able to complete 3 times runs.

Overall the Erne Trophy Sprint was a superb event which attracted a lot of positive comments amongst drivers and spectators alike. The fast and flowing nature of the circuit as well as the ample run off areas allow people to really test their cars out in all gears. However due to the nature of an open airfield chicanes have to be used which inevitably will cause some competitors more concerns than others.

Massive thanks are due to everyone who made the event happen and to all the marshals, organisers, officials and everyone who made the event a success.

The next and 5th round of the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship takes place at Kirkistown on 03 August when the best of the British Sprint Championship contenders come to Kirkistown to try their hands against us.

Until then, keep the revs up!!