

Whilst the Indian summer, which was forecast for the weekend of 13 – 15 September didn't really come to fruition the hot action which was forecast for the 7<sup>th</sup> Round of the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship round, hosted by Larne Motor club at Kirkistown certainly did deliver.

With a whopping 75 drivers lining up to do battle, whilst also doing some fundraising for the Air Ambulance Northern Ireland, there was a great atmosphere around the paddock as practice commenced.

When the lights went green to indicate the first timed runs defending champion Adrian Pollock set the standard for the day and went fastest, a mere 0.13 secs ahead of second placed Steven Gault. This was a trend that was to continue all day when Adrian went 1.34 secs faster in his second run to set a run of 119.7secs only for Steven to retaliate with a 119.66 second run which put him 0.4 secs ahead of Adrian at the end of the second run. John Morgan, who failed to set a first run time then set a fabulous 120.89 sec run to show his intention to the top 2 as the third runs started.

As always Adrian spent the time between the second and third runs to do whatever Adrian does when the going is getting tough, and he lined up for his third timed run with one thing, and one thing only on his mind – ten points. Adrian left the line like a scalded cat and setting his fastest 64 feet time of the day as he set out to make his mark, which he did with a blinding 118.66 second time. Steven Gault also had a fabulous run and was faster to debtors from the start line than Adrian but he simply had no answer for Adrian who took 1 second out of Stevens's time to set FTD of 118.66 seconds. Steven is clearly becoming more at home in the car as the season progresses and as I've said before Steven will shortly be taking more regular outright wins in this car! John Morgan seemed to have another mare of a day and didn't do a third run although he was safe in third place.

Another brilliantly close battle was seen in class 9A. Gerard O'Connell invited his nephew Tommy O'Connell to try his Mark 1 Escort for the day as Tommy fancies doing a few sprints next season. By the time the second runs were over Gerard was beginning to wonder if his kindness was maybe his weakness as Tommy went 0.22 seconds faster than Gerard meaning that as Gerard lined up for his last run, the pressure was well and truly on him. Gerard set a brilliant last run of 135.99 secs to take the win from Tommy in the family battle. Gerard was heard on more than one occasion to praise Tommy for his efforts all day and for pushing him so closely. However will he lend him the Escort again as Tommy reckons he can find more time??????

There were some other fabulously close battles amongst the classes and one of the closest was seen in class 2 where Michael Clarke set a blinding first run time of 155.67 in his Lotus Elise and everyone else in class 2 spent the day chipping away to try and beat this time. Luckily for Michael they couldn't beat him but Alfred Robb got to within 0.18secs of Michael in his last run. Interestingly of the 8 class 2 competitors, 6 of them set their fastest run in the third run. Proof that practice does make perfect. Alfred's son Andrew Robb who normally dual drives the Family M3 with his father chose to marshal yesterday's event and was seen to hold his breath every time Alfred approached the chicane at which Andrew was marshalling. I've heard of nervous passengers before, but not a nervous spectator.

Some other noticeable drives of the day were Andy Hawthorne who borrowed the family Westfield to win class 7 and go 14<sup>th</sup> overall, Ryan Campbell who steered his formula Ford to a fabulous 16<sup>th</sup> overall just behind Catherine Donnelly who placed her little delta 15<sup>th</sup> overall. Catherine really has come on leaps and bounds over the last couple of seasons and it is great to see.

It was also great to see the re-appearance of some drivers who we haven't seen in a while such as David Francis and David Patton in their awesome Escort Cosworth's, Stephen Nevin in his beautiful (and I mean Beautiful) Mark 1 Escort, Olivia Coulter in her Anglia and Hillclimbers Paul Montgomery, Tony Grady, Paul Taggart and Daniel Campbell. Hopefully all of these competitors will decide to do some more events this season?

There were a couple of incidents on Saturday which show just how friendly the sprint paddock is. I heard of 1 driver whose overalls were turned down at scrutiny due to having a tear in the leg. With the driver facing the prospect of not being able to compete, another driver, who happened to hear what had happened gave the unfortunate driver a brand spanking new set of overalls which he had in his van as a spare set to let him compete again. A second driver had his overalls also turned down and he also was lent a set of overalls to let him compete.

If anyone deserved an award for spirit of the meeting yesterday, it was Gary Milligan. Despite being bitter rivals for the last number of years, and often never being separated by very much, David Evans had some very rare mechanical issues in his 205 gti. Gary Milligan was straight down to the help the Evans Motorsport team get the car repaired and even lent tools and equipment to help them repair the car as well as mucking in with some electrical work. Thankfully the mechanical issues were fixed but David, who wasn't feeling too well, didn't have the best of days. What other sport do you know of where competitors are so competitive against each other whilst also being so kind??

In the modified battle Oliver Cormican who currently leads the Modified Championship had mechanical issues which meant that he was unable to set a timed run on Saturday. Whilst he still maintains the modified lead it is now down to 1 point in front of Saturdays Modified winner Gerard O'Connell. Second went to Tommy O'Connell and Third went to Daniel Campbell. This is 1 battle which will go down to the wire, especially if Tommy finds that extra time??

In terms of the Roadgoing battle Michael Clarke was the fastest road going car finishing 0.18 secs ahead of Alfred Robb. Due to the road going Saloon only being open to saloon cars Alfred took category honours from Tony Grady with the venerable Tom Lawther third in his now famous Rover SD1. With both Alfred and Andrew now having marshalled it's safe to say that the Road going title is going to be won by Mr A. Robb. Andrew has 28 points (and has a round in hand) over Alfred who has 23 points with Aaron Vance third with 10 points. There are only 15 points left to be scored.

Historic honours went to Stephen Nevin who finished 28<sup>th</sup> overall in his Escort Mk1. Gerry McGarrity literally held onto his mini to steer it (on 2 wheels on occasions) to second in the historic category but sadly Gerry lost out to Gary Milligan and Karl Johnston who pipped him in the battle for the fastest mini in the west.

As mentioned above this event was a fundraising event to raise some much needed funds for the Air Ambulance Northern Ireland Charity. A grand total of £1300 was raised via this event. Warmflow Engineering Ltd of Lisburn made a substantial Sponsorship donation and a second very generous donation was made by the Pitlane Restaurant n Kirkistown circuit. Those donations coupled with donations on the day and also donations made at the time of entry raised an amount which was higher than anyone expected. A massive thank you must go out to everyone who donated to such a wonderful cause.

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In terms of the classes.

Class 1 Road going Production cars up to 1700cc. Dennis Watson, made a welcome return to the paddock after a bit of a lay off and started where he left off. He took the class honours by a mere 0.61 secs from the hard charging Andrew Straney. Andrew was fastest in the first run but Dennis took the lead in the second and Andrew just couldn't match him. Third in class 2 went to Rudy Tate who, as usual spent most of the day looking out of the side window of his Mazda MX5 with a smile on his face wider than his windscreen. Each time Rudy sets out to do a timed run he does 30% more distance than every other competitor as he slides about the circuit trying like mad to catch Andrew. These 2 clubmen racers who are best friends off the track and bitter competitors on it just sum up the entire clubman sprint scene atmosphere for me. Fair play fellas!!!

Class 2 Road going Production cars over 1700cc. With Andrew Robb taking a day off to marshal he allowed the remainder of the paddock to have a shot at a class win. Michael Clarke set a blinding first run time which simply couldn't be matched by anyone in the class. After 3 runs Alfred Robb got the difference down to 0.18 secs to take second. Tom Lawther took third in his mighty Rover SD1 a mere 0.96 seconds ahead of Andrew Vance. The infamous Hammy took fourth in the flying Corsa 4.83 seconds ahead of local man Alan Finlay in the Corsa they both dual drive.

Class 2b Mazda MX5 Challenge. Paul Magill took class honours in his Mazda MX5. Paul, who has won this class in the ANICC Hill climb Championship set a fastest time of 166.59 secs which would have put him 6<sup>th</sup> in the class 2 battle.

Class 3 Road Going Series Production Cars 4WD. Finally someone came out to sprint in class 3 this season and like busses 2 of them came at once. Paul Montgomery took class honours from second placed Tony Grady. Both of these drivers are regular hill climbers in their road going Subaru`s. Pauls fastest run of 144.32secs saw him finish 20<sup>th</sup> overall and he was the fastest road going saloon although sadly he isn't championship registered. Had Paul been able to complete more than 1 timed run I know for sure that he would have finished even higher up the time sheets as Paul is more than committed when behind the wheel.

Class 5 Road Going Specialist cars. Regular Auto tester Ashley Lamont brought hi Westfield SEW out to play today and was the first man all season to beat Class 6 Championship winner Richard Munnis. Richard finished second a mere 0.85 seconds behind Ashley and 4.6 seconds ahead of third placed Gardiner McIlwaine. Richard now has a 22 point lead in this year's class 5 championships and with 15 points remaining he can safely call himself class 5 champion, providing he marshals a round of course.

Class 6a. Modified Series Production Cars 8V. David Strain continued where he left off and took another, and his 5<sup>th</sup> class win of the day in his 205 gti. His Nephew Jonathan took second in his 205 gti, although Jonathan was having gearbox and drive shaft issues later in the day which didn't seem to hamper his progress. Third in class went to Gary Milligan in his mini. With dropped scores still to be factored in the battle for 6a is still open although it's certain that a Strain will top the 6a table at the end of the year.

Class 6b Modified Series Production Cars Multivalve. Dermot O`Hagan has shown that in class 6B the car in front is definitely a Honda. Dermot finally had a good day with no mechanical issues and took the class honours again in his flying Civic. Dermot finished up 31<sup>st</sup> overall and 3.92 secs ahead of Kenny Colbert in his Sunbeam. Andrew Kernohan took a superb 3<sup>rd</sup> in class taking 3 seconds out of his personal best to finish a mere 2.7 secs ahead of Brian Hutton's Citroen Saxo.

Class 7 Modified Specialist Production Cars. Andy Hawthorne took class honours in class 7 in the family Westfield which is normally driven by the chuckle brothers (Stephen and David Hawthorne). The pressure was on Andy to perform as the car he was in is the car that has first and second place in the Sprint class 7 Championship and has taken first and second in the hillclimb championship in class 7. Andy led from the outset and finished up a fabulous 14<sup>th</sup> overall. Scott McMullan took second in class and top championship points with a fabulous run which saw him pip Tom Devaney by a mere .56 secs. Scott has steadily improved all season and is definitely one to watch for the future. His dad David McMullan finished 4<sup>th</sup> in class a comfortable 1.35 secs ahead of Samuel Buick. For anyone who has access to facebook there is a superb sequence on the Sprint Championship page by photographer Jimmy Graham of Scott McMullan testing for the grip parameters!!

Class 8b Sports libre saloons over 1400cc. Daniel Campbell who scooped the 2019 Class 11 Hill climb Championship took class 8b honours today with a healthy run of 144.27 secs which put him 19<sup>th</sup> overall. Mark Madine took second in class 8b with a fabulous 159.7 sec run in his mini.

Class 9A Sports libre saloons Sports and GT cars. This is class should have been re-branded the Escort class on Saturday as only escorts had entered. Gerard O`Connell took class honours a mere .45 secs ahead of nephew Tommy O`Connell. I`ve mentioned about this drive above. Third place went to Sprint stalwart David Francis who brought his famous Turbo charged Escort out again after a bit of a lay off. Fourth in class went to David Patton in another Turbo charged rallycross Escort. The sound of these 2 turbo charged escorts in full tilt is wonderful to hear.

Class 9b Sports Libre Closed wheel Sports racing cars. The radical class as its now known saw Alan Cassells take class honours and fourth overall with a time of 124.66 seconds in his Radical SR8. Alan finished 3.08 secs ahead of Lee Kirkwood who finished second in class in his supercharged Radical SR3. Alan told me on Saturday evening that his telemetry shows that he was doing 140mph and pulling 3G. Fair play to him, it's too fast for me.

Class 10. Sports Libre Rally cars. Alan Roddy once again took class honours in his immaculately prepared Citroen Saxo with a 153.92 sec run. Second in class went to Portaferry man Chris Byers in his rapid Mk2 Escort. Phillip Gault took third (but championship points for second) in his immaculately prepared Nova. Phillip, who had an unfortunate start to the season, is finally coming to grips with his lovely wee Nova and with some new found confidence is setting some competitive times.

Class 11 Sports Libre Rally cars Stewart Strain took not only the class honours but also family honours today in his 205. Stewarts run of 146.57 secs saw him finish 21<sup>st</sup> overall but most importantly for him 2.85 seconds ahead of older brother David Strain in the overall listings. Scott Singleton took third in his Escort Mk2.

Class 12 4WD Sports Libre cars. This class had on paper 2 of the fastest saloons present but unfortunately neither Michael White in his famous Subaru Legacy or Oliver Cormican in his flying Mitsubishi Evo managed to complete a timed run due to mechanical issues.

Class 13 Formula Fords – Ryan Campbell once again showed father Henry a clean pair of heels as he took the class win by 1.73 secs from his father and finished 16<sup>th</sup> overall. Henry finished second and 18<sup>th</sup> overall, ahead of John Whitley who made the long trek north from Dublin. Sadly Ian Maple and Paul Mongan had an unfortunate day after Paul suffered a slight off at the chicane during practice. Both drivers are now finally getting to grips with their little Mondiale and Paul especially was coming on leaps and bounds. Hopefully both drivers will return before the season end as a championship position is achievable for both drivers.

Class 14 Smaller Racing cars. In class 14 the car to have seems to be a Jedi as the top 3 cars were Jedi's. Ryan McGimpsey took class honours and 6<sup>th</sup> overall from Trevor Roberts who finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in class and 17<sup>th</sup> overall a mere 0.08 seconds behind Ryan. When you consider just how fine a margin 0.08 seconds is, it is probably less than the blink of an eye. Both drivers showed superb commitment into the back chicanes, and I personally watched Trevor Roberts run and didn't think that it was possible for a car to take the rear kart chicane so fast. His commitment was incredible. George Stevenson finished third 6.04 secs behind Trevor Roberts with Lewis Wilson 4<sup>th</sup> exactly 1 second off George's time. This really is a fabulously close little class and always is entertaining to watch.

Class 15 All other race cars. As mentioned above Adrian Pollock took class honours exactly 1 second ahead of Steven Gault with John Morgan third in his Pilbeam. Richard McGimpsey steered his little RMG turbo to fourth in class. Sadly the ever smiling Richard missed out on this year's Hill climb championship this year, at the last event for the second year running. Having twice been the bridesmaid, he would be my tip for the 2020 Hill climb championship. You heard that here first!!

Class 16a Road Going Historic was dominated today by Gerry McGarrity who still hasn't learned to treat that beautiful wee mini nicely. Gerry is amazing to watch as he wrings every hundredth of a second from the car. It is both fabulous to watch, and also a shame to see such a beautiful little car being driven so hard. Perhaps I've got this whole racing thing wrong?? Second in 16A went to Vincent Rodgers in the MGB GT he shares with Mervyn Getty. Mervyn was at Knockhill at the BTCC so Vincent took full advantage of this to draw equal with Mervyn and Ian McCullough in the championship standings. Thankfully Vincent spent all day "behind the cones" and has set up a fabulous championship run in with Ian McCullough and Mervyn Getty.

Class 16B for non-road going Historic cars saw Stephen Nevin debut his newly built Mark 1 Escort to the sprint family. The car is beautiful and Stephen showed that he knows how to take the most out of it as he steered it to 28<sup>th</sup> overall and class honours. Paul Taggart who usually competes in hill climbs came out for a day's sport as well as the opportunity to support the Air Ambulance charity and took a fabulous second in class. Paul, who gets married shortly, had previously promised the bride that his season was over for 2019 but the smell of Castrol R and the thought of a final day's craic whilst he still owned a complete Mark 1 proved too much for him as he completed a late entry. I do suspect that we may see him out again before the seasons over??? Third in class 16B went to Olivia Coulter as she drove her fabulous little Anglia to 64<sup>th</sup> overall. Hopefully we will see more of this popular car and driver combination before the seasons over.

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