

Adrian reigns supreme again at Nutts Corner Final Run Show Down

Saturday 19 September saw the now fourth round of the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship take place at Nutts Corner Circuit. The event was hosted by North Ulster Car Club who as usual hosted a superb day and even managed to recruit a Minister to put in a good word with his boss and secure them weather that we simply are not used to at this venue.

As the sun split the trees the action proved to be even hotter than the air temperature as everyone was itching to get back on track and blow off some cobwebs, socially distanced cobwebs I hasten to add.

As well as the usual drivers briefing it was superb to see the entire paddock wishing long term Championship timekeeper Pat McAleer a very happy 90th birthday. After spending the morning setting up the events timekeeping equipment Pat was presented with a championship coat by Championship Co-Ordinator David Evans, on behalf of all the championship competitors, officials, marshals and supporters. Pat then wore the coat all day as he performed timekeeping duties before helping with the packing up at the end of the event. This is tough going for any man, let alone a man of 90 years of age!! Congratulations and Happy Birthday Pat.

With a bumper entry of 95 Starters the first timed run commenced around 1130am and the action was hot and heavy from the off. Steven Gault hit the ground running in his Reynard 903 and lead after the first run by a mere 0.46secs from Adrian Pollock with Alan Cassells third. Previous sprint and Hillclimb Champion Simon Woodside made a welcome return in his Pilbeam MP82 and was fifth behind Mr Carncastle himself Graham Thompson. Indeed after the first runs 9 cars were under the magic 100 second mark which was impressive!

Further down the time sheets there were battles galore as returnee Jim Hutchinson took 4.22 secs out of the class 7 record and still was complaining that he should be faster!! He blamed the lack of an anti roll bar and new Pirelli tyres for giving him under steer where he really didn't need it. Jim didn't quite word it that way but that's the printable version. In class 6a the 205 battle was hot and heavy with David Evans a mere 0.76secs behind Jonathan Strain and David was adamant that he was catching Johnny!! Throughout the David did manage to get under Jonathans first time however Jonathan also managed to lower this time and Jonathan took class honours and retained bragging rights in class 6a.

In Class 16a there were 3 minis battling out for class honours with Bill Blair and Richard Beattie fighting closely all day. There was also an astounding 9 big single seaters in class 15 and 5 in class 14 which was great to see as lately there haven't been as many single seaters out competing. Hopefully these numbers will increase again with rumours that the Morgan's were doing some testing in their Pilbeam last week in advance of a long overdue return to the sport, and then Graham Thompson dusting his GTR Turbo down after Garron Point Hillclimb and doing some sprinting as well. Great also to see Christopher Houston make a return along with Trevor Roberts who finally had a good clean day after some niggling issues of late.

In terms of the Road going battle Andrew Robb again showed everyone why he is boss of the road going category with a fabulous 117.18 run which he then dropped again to 114.84secs. Conor Hamill was second in the category in his BMW M3 V8 2.45secs behind Andrew and 2.51secs ahead of third placed Tom Lawther in his incredible Rover SD1. Andrew now has a 9 point lead in the road going category from Conor Hamill.

In the modified Battle Oliver Cormican took maximum points despite being piped on the day by Martin Cairns. Daniel Campbell took the honours of second modified car with Coleraine's Steven Nevin third in his mark 1 Escort. Oliver's drive was very impressive when you consider he is driving a VW polo with Mitsubishi EVO running gear and Martin Cairns is in a WRC Fiesta and Oliver has only driven his polo twice in anger. The modified championship mirrors today's finishing order.

Jim Hutchinson took maximum Specialist category points in his Westfield GM with Gerard OConnell second and Graham Boyce third. Sadly Gerard only managed to complete 1 timed run as his clutch gave up in the paddock as he stopped beside his motorhome after completing his run. It's also great to see Graham Boyce returning to the championship after his year out. His engine rebuild has proved to be very successful as Graham has hit the ground running on his return. Gerard now ties at the top of the specialist category championship with David Hawthorne and Jim Hutchinson is third. This category will go down to the wire.

In the ladies award Emma Campbell still leads by 2 points after her and Sheryl McBride both took an 8 point, points haul, on Saturday. This Award is going to go down to the wire and dropped scores will definitely be a deciding factor at season end.

In terms of the fastest mini in the west that honour went to Karl Johnston with Gary Milligan second and Gerry McGarrity third. In fairness the 3 minis were, at the end of the day, only separated by 0.53secs after 3 runs, so the action was close and tight. Karl Johnston was rumoured to have removed not only his rear brake light wire, but also the bulbs and perhaps that's how he managed to nip the win from Gary and Gerry. Anyway that's 1 conversation I'm more than happy to start and then run from as I'm sure there will be a lot of friendly banter over that one amongst the 3 mini men.

Back now to the overall results and going into the last run it was all to play for. Steven Gault lead the way with a fabulous 91.88 sec run with Alan Cassells second and Adrian Pollock third. Adrian, as usual, did whatever Adrian does whenever he needs to find time and he took a blinding last run of 91.59 secs. Adrian however couldn't celebrate as he, like the rest of the paddock stood and watched Alan Cassells try his best to take the win. Alan also went faster but sadly was only fast enough to take third on the day with a 92.13 sec run which was 1.08secs ahead of 4th placed Simon Woodside. At the end of the Day Adrian took the win from Steven Gault, with Alan Cassells third and Simon Woodside fourth.

The next event is scheduled for 10 October at Kirkistown and will be hosted by the Ulster Automobile Club. As with other events to date this event will be held behind closed doors due to the current covid restrictions in place.

Class 1 – Small Road Cars class. Stephen Wishart made a return to the championship in his 106gti and took class 1 honours with a 6.19sec lead over second placed Alan Wallace in his Honda Del sol. Stephen also managed to take 1.43 seconds out of the class record which was held by Garry McClurg since June 2017. Hopefully Garry will make a return to reclaim his record? Third in place went to Mark Brogan on his sprint debut in a Citroen Saxo. Mark is the third Brogan to compete in this championship as his father Derek Brogan campaigned a Ford Fiesta for years and his brother Adam was competing in, and won class 2b in a Mazda MX5. Fourth went to Gareth Whiting in his MG. Fourth was quite an ironic place for Gareth as he had gearbox issues in his MG on the drive to the circuit and only had fourth gear as his car stuck in fourth, before he managed to fix it in the paddock with a little help from those around him. Alan Wallace has a 2 point lead from Stephen Wishart with Mark Brogan now third in the class championship battle.

Class 2 – Large capacity Road Cars class. Andrew Robb started where he left off and once again won class 2 with Conor Hamill second and Tom Lawther third. Conor was lucky to make it to the circuit after suffering a wheel blow out on his transporter lorry on his way up. This is a great class and it was great to see Tom Lawther thrashing his rover SD1 about showing the BMW boys how to drive fast in an old school V8 that with throttle operated traction control!! In the class championship Andrew has an 8 point lead over Conor Hamill with Tom Lawther third 2 points behind Conor. Conor also has a round in hand so when dropped scores are considered it is still possible for Conor to upset the Robb applecart!

Class 2b – Mazda MX5 Challenge Adam Brogan made his class 2b debut in his Mazda MX5 took class honours with a 125.07sec run which was a mere 0.8 secs ahead of Paul Magill. Third place on the day was George McMillan in his mazda MX5 with a best run of 128.40 secs. Paul Magill retains the lead at the top of the class championship.

Class 3- 4WD Road Cars. This class is turning into a 2 horse race with Barry Griffin taking class honours in his Subaru over Tony Grady in his Subaru. At the end of the day there was only 1.09 secs between these 2 hard charging pilots and their third timed runs were only a mere 0.43 secs apart. Championship wise Barry has a 3 point lead over Tony Grady with Jimmy Heaslip third and Paul Grady fourth.

Class 5 Specialist Production Road Cars. On the day Trevor Allen, took class honours in his Westfield with Richard Munnis second and Steven Robb third. It's good to see that finally Richard has found someone to play with after having to play alone frequently over the last 2 or 3 years. Sadly for Richard the 2 guys who came to play on Saturday made him work very hard for a result. Championship wise Richard has a 10 point lead over Steven but Steven has 2 scores less than Richard so it's all to play for with 3 rounds remaining.

Class 6A – Modified series production Cars 8v As usual class 6a was dominated by Peugeot power with Jonathan Strain taking class honours 2 secs ahead of second placed David Evans. Karl Johnston steered his new Mini to third in class a mere 0.72 secs behind David with Gary Milligan fourth a mere .032secs behind Karl. In total there was only 1.04 seconds between second, third and fourth in class. Fifth went to newcomer Andrew Strain

who debuted his new car on his first ever Motorsport UK event. Andrew set a comfortable 122.58 second run and will be 1 to watch in the future. Jonathan now has a healthy 7 point lead over joint second placed David and Karl with Gary fourth. However David has 1 score less than the others so countback and dropped scores will make this a tight championship battle at the end of the year.

Class 6B – Modified Series Production Car 16v – In class 6b the car in front was a Suzuki, and that Suzuki was being steered by Dara Fay. Dara set a winning time of 110.6secs which was 1.53secs off Steven Gault's class record set in June 17. Dermot O'Hagan was second a mere 0.67 seconds ahead of Ken Colbert. Ken had been ahead of Dermot all day until the last run when Dermot set his best time to pip Ken. Having spoken to both competitors during the day both of them were having some serious craic winding each other up, which just highlights the banter amongst the fiercest of competitors in the paddock. Fourth went to a high flying Hugh McEvoy who managed to launch his Clio over a kerb and was so high that Aldregrove granted him permission to take off!! In all seriousness Hugh was extremely lucky to get away with the move and Gary Craig was even luckier to be able to catch the moment with his camera! Championship wise Ken Colbert has a 3 point lead over Dermot O'Hagan with Hugh McEvoy third. Both Dermot and Hugh have a score in hand over Ken so again this is going to be another close call at season end.

Class 7. Modified Cars, specialist production cars. On Saturday Jim Hutchinson proved to be the man to beat in class 7. On his practice run he did a 99 sec run but he was unable to dip below 100.38secs in the timed runs. This was 4.22 sec under the original class record and 3.57 secs faster than second placed Graham Boyce. Graham really was trying, and trying hard to catch Jim and tried so hard in one of his runs that he had a spin after the finish line. David Hawthorne and his brother Steven had their usual titanic battle between each other and were only separated by 0.87secs at the end of the day in David's favour. Scott McMullan had another tight battle with his father David and pipped him by 1.77 secs at the end, and at long last Rudy Tate managed to Beat Andrew Straney in the Locost Megablade Andrew and Rudy both dual drive. Hopefully Rudy has now broken his duck and will top the time sheets more regularly. In terms of the championship David Hawthorne retains a 4 point lead from Graham Boyce with Stephen Hawthorne third 1 point behind Graham and Jim Hutchinson a further 1 point behind in fourth. With dropped scores this class will also be tight come the end of the season.

Class 8 Sports libre car special saloons and Space framed cars. Despite only managing 1 run Gerard O'Connell again took class honours in his SHP Escort. Gerard's 103.36 sec run put him 12 overall which made him the fastest man with a roof on Saturday. Second went to Rory Stephens who debuted his new SHP Escort Mk1. This car, is the same basic car as Gerard's but Rory has opted to fit an ex BTCC BMW engine into his which is a beautiful and well finished car. Before Saturday Rory had not driven the car and therefore was using this as

a shake down session and all seemed to be going well. Obviously with more mileage and development this car will only improve. Third in class went to Gary Cunningham in a turbo charged Mini Z Car. This car was awesome to watch and had a turbo the size of someone's head attached to the side of its motorbike derived engine. Gay told us that the car originated in Malta where it was winning its class with ease. Fourth in class 8 went to Ian Howard who sadly hasn't been competing as much of late due to work commitments Great to see him back out. In terms of the SHP escorts, there are now at least 4 of these in Ireland with Richie O'Mahoney and Jim Hutchinson also having 1 each. I know Jim intends to sprint with his next year and hopefully Richie will also do the same. It would be great to see four of these in class 8 swapping tenths of a second! Championship wise Gerard OConnell tops the class 8 championship with an 11 point lead over Ian Howard.

Class 9a Sports libre cars / saloons Neil McMullan made another appearance at Nutts Corner in his Seat Leon Supercopa and took a dominating class win 31.27 secs ahead of second Placed Emma Campbell in Her Peugeot 106. Phil Robinson sadly was unable to set a time having ventured slightly off line and dropping his front right hand wheel into a hole just off the track line. This hole ripped the front bottom arm out of his car and did quite a bit of damage. It was unfortunate for Phil who really wasn't that far off line, however during the day a few competitors were complaining about holes in bad places around the circuit. Sadly Phil fell, fowl of this one. Hopefully Nutts Corner will fill these holes before the next event? Championship wise Emma maintains the class 9a championship lead.

Class 10 Sports Libre rally cars. Alan Roddy once again took class honours in class 10 after a clinker of a run saw him set a 113.14 second run. This was enough to secure him the class win with Jack Cairns second in his fiesta and Enniskillen man Derek Robinson third in his ex TTE corolla . Class 10 also sees some fraught competition but has sadly been lacking in rally car entries of late. Alan Further increases his class championship lead to 13 points over Derek Robinson

Class 11 Larger Sports libre rally car class. Daniel Campbell returned to winning form and took a solid class win 3.15 seconds ahead of second placed returnee Michael Boyle. Michael hasn't been out in a while but proved that he hasn't lost his touch during his lay off. Third in class went to Nicky Caughey who had a day long monstrous battle with fourth placed Neil Dugan who finished up a mere 0.75 secs off Nicky at the end of the day. I spoke briefly to Neil Dugan at the end of the day and Neil said that in the few years he has been away from the championship he has now noticed a huge step up in pace, the quality and size of entries and also the general buzz around the paddock. For a man who is as well travelled as Neil Dugan I take this as a huge compliment for our championship! In terms of the class Championship Daniel has a 3 point lead over Neil Dugan with Nicky Caughey third. The battle is on for class 11 honours.

Class 12 4WD Libre cars Martin Cairns made another appearance in his WRC Fiesta and was superb to watch as he took class 12 honours 2.29 secs ahead of Oliver Cormican. Martin

also took 0.56 secs off the class record as well which is good going. Second went to Oliver Cormican in his beautiful polo with hard charging Paul Montgomery third in his Subaru a mere 2.18 secs behind Oliver. When you consider the level of pace and the quality of the cars in this class this was a superb finish and times by both Oliver and Paul Montgomery. After being a 1 car class for the last couple of years class 12 is now finally starting to flourish again.

Class 13 – Formula race cars. This was another all family battle between Henry and Ryan Campbell with John Whitley also getting involved in the family battle. As has been the recent trend Ryan took class honours over his father Henry by 2.29 secs with a time of 102.28 secs which placed Ryan 22nd overall! John Whitley finished third in class. Saturday's results mean that Henry maintains his class championship lead by 2 points from Ryan with John 2 points further back in third. When dropped scores come into effect it will tell a tale as Ryan as already missed a round.

Class 14 Small racing cars. Class 14 is another class which has come on leaps and bounds this year although with only 5 cars entered it was one of the smaller grids of the year in class 5. Ryan McGimpsey took another class win with an astounding 96.58sec run which left him 6th overall. That is impressive and Ryan has certainly got to grips with his Jedi. It would be great to see Ryan in a bigger class 15 car as overall wins would surely be within his grasp. Second in class went to Trevor Roberts who finally got a good clean days racing on his way to an overall run of 98.2 secs. Both Ryan and Trevor managed to shatter the existing class record of 100.55secs which Michael Roche had held since 2016. Third in class went to Tom Devaney who has taken to his new Jedi like a duck to water. There are still a couple more class 14 cars out there – Richard Munnis and Brian Fitzmaurice spring immediately to mind and on a day when all these cars are out together class 14 will be a great dice and one which I do not fancy predicting a winner from. Championship wise Ryan McGimpsey has an 11 point lead over Thomas Corey with Trevor Roberts third. This class is like the flu in that it just keeps giving so watch class 14 closely at the remaining 3 rounds.

Class 15 – Big Single seater racing cars. Class 15 saw one of the biggest entries I have seen in a long time with 9 cars entered. The main class battle is discussed in more detail above within the main context of the report but it was superb to see Simon Woodside returning to the paddock along with Graham Thompson and Christopher Houston. Also I was speaking to John Donnelly who was smiling like the cat who got the cream as he gets the hang of his Pilbeam MP62. When I asked him if he was enjoying his new car his eyes answered the question for me long before he'd even spoken a word. It's safe to say John is having a ball in the new car. In terms of the championship Adrian Pollock still leads from Alan Cassells with Steven Gault third and John Donnelly fourth. With dropped scores and the next 2 rounds being at Kirkistown, this order could well change before the season is over. Watch this space.

Class 16A Roadgoing historic. Gerry McGarrity again proved to be the man to beat in this class in his superb little mini. Gerry as always drove the wheels off it and took a healthy class win from Bill Blair with Richard Beattie third in his mini. It was therefore a mini 1,2,3 in class 16a. The short sharp turns of Nutts Corner didn't really suit the heavier more powerful less nimble cars of Mervyn Getty or Vincent Rodgers but expect them to be in the middle of it at Kirkistown in 3 weeks. Championship wise Gerry McGarrity now has a 7 point lead from Bill Blair with Vincent Rodgers third and Richard Beattie fourth.

Class 16b Non- Roadgoing Historic Stephen Nevin picked up where he left off and took another class win in his BDA Escort Mk1. His time of 112.78 put him 38th overall. Second place went to Robert McGimpsey who brought his Turner Ford out for a run. Robert ended up as the meat in an escort sandwich as third place went to Alan Jardine in his BDA Escort Mk1. Championship wise Stephen leads the way from Alan Jardine with Robert McGimspey third.

The next and fifth round of the championship is, Covid dependant, scheduled to take place at Kirkistown on 10 October and will be hosted by the Ulster Automobile Club. Unfortunately it is likely that this event will be a spectator free event.