

## **Gerard O`Connell shows us how its done**

Saturday 06 November saw the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship paddock assemble for the last time this season as the final round of the year took place at Kirkistown. With rain forecast for mid-morning it was destined to be an interesting day for competitors and spectators alike.

With this being the sixth round of the championship dropped scores were going to be a major factor as many of the class and category championships still had to be decided and therefore a good days sprint was guaranteed.

Practice runs were greasy as the circuit dried after an early start. The officials on the day kept the event going quickly so as to try and get as many dry runs in for the competitors before the impending rain came through.

After 2 practice sessions which seemed to go in very quickly the timed runs started on a now almost dry circuit. With the arrival of a drivers best friend, grip, times were good right from the off as everyone tried their best to get a dry run in before the incoming rain came. Despite a few drips and some very very light showers everyone managed 2 dry timed runs at least. Sadly the rain came just as we lined up for the third runs. As the first car on the track for the third run, I can confirm that the lightest covering of rain turned the circuit from grippy to greasy in literally the time it took to complete the first lap of the circuit. There are photos from Colonial to prove this.

At the top of the time sheets Alan Cassells suffered mechanical gremlins on his first practice run and had to pack up early. Gerard O`Connell took over the mantle from Alan and just disappeared into Debtors from the start line like a man on a mission. His first timed run was also his fastest, however his second and last timed run was also sufficient to win the event. Second place on the day went to Tony Greenan who has been a fabulous addition to the paddock in his F3 Dallara. Despite being slightly down on power to Gerard his car is a lot smaller, lighter and massively more nimble especially in the corners and tight infield section. Tony ran a Gerard a close second overall and just ahead (0.61secs) ahead of third placed John Donnelly who really has got to grips with his Pilbeam. Fourth went to Trevor Roberts who finally had a trouble free day in his Force T2. As predicted earlier in the season, Trevor will be a force to reckon with when he gets the feel of this little pocket rocket. Fifth overall went to Patrick Roche who really mixes it amongst the class 14 cars in his OMS Sports car.

During the morning we also had the first year students from the South Eastern Regional College level 3 Motorsport engineering course in attendance. The first year group of students had a busy and active morning planned including a session on Scrutineering and motorsport safety which was taken by the vent scrutineers on the day Gillian Magee, Stephen McKeegan and Paddy Haveron. They also had a comprehensive session on aerodynamics and car set up with established motorsport engineer Stephen Colbert. Stephen gave them a very informative lesson on aerodynamics, car handling etc using Gerard O`Connell`s World Series car. Obviously his lesson worked as Gerard took FTD in the car. They also looked and worked through the paddock visiting other cars and drivers during the course of the morning and had a hands on session using Tony Greenans ex F3 Dallara as well. I wish I had been one of these students! I just wonder how long it will be until we see

one of these students in an F1 pit lane or with their feet hanging out below a WRC car as they change a gearbox at a WRC event. We also have an ex student from this course who also competes with us on occasion, Ben McKee, so there is proof that this course encourages participation.

Other notable drives on the day include Stephen Colbert who guest drove in Gerard's RSR Mk1 Escort. Despite never having seen the car before, never mind driving it Stephen drove the escort to 6<sup>th</sup> overall!! Stephen also took 15<sup>th</sup> overall in the family sunbeam he dual drives with his father Ken in class 6b – another impressive result.

Catherine Donnelly pulled a belter of a second run to take third in class 14 and finish 10<sup>th</sup> overall. It's great to see Catherine back in the paddock again having taken some time out at the beginning of the season to cycle from Paris to Termon, outside Carrickmore for charity. This is a slightly different type of pedalling hard for Catherine.

We also can't not include Dan Campbell when discussing drives of the day as Dan once again drove his father Garrys Toyota Starlett and again beat him in it. This time Daniel also managed to finish 11<sup>th</sup> overall in a car he's not used to which is tremendous going. Daniel and Garry were 1 of 3 father and son battles on Saturday. Stephen Colbert beat his father Ken in their family Sunbeam which both drivers have pushed hard all year. We also had Norman and Stephen Harvey in another family battle in their escort Mk2 with son Stephen also taking the win here. Does anyone else notice a trend here? In terms of family battles there were also 2 father daughter battles as well. Sheryl McBride dual drive her little global GT with her father Colin McBride and managed to beat him convincingly and Kathy McDade went head to head with her father Jimmy Heaslip but Jimmy bucked the trend and turned out to be the fastest father having beaten Kathy by a mere 4.37 seconds, although Kathy did indicate that she let him win ..... One last family battle was a brother's battle in 6A where Andrew Strain pipped Jonny Strain in Andrews 205.

So in terms of the championships so far all results are provisional as per Motorsport UK championship guidelines so everything from now on is based on provisional results. However after 5 rounds Alan Cassells won the overall SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship from Gerard O`Connell with Steven Gault third and John Donnelly fourth. All of these results were provisionally achieved after the previous round.

However not all the championships were so easily determined Indeed there are a few that go down to countback on previous results to determine who wins. This is the case in the Road Going saloons category where Phillip Cardy and Conor Hamill were tied on 23 points each after 6 rounds. Neither could be separated as Phillip won 3 rounds and was second on 2 rounds and Connor won 3 rounds and Phillip was second on 2. Third in the road going category went to Aaron Vance who had a cracker of a year in his little Clio 197.

In the modified category Oliver Cormican took another class win a mere 1.28secs ahead of Ryan Murray in their similar class 12 cars. Daniel Campbell was the third modified car home on Saturday in the Toyota Starlett. Interestingly the top 3 modified cars were all in the top 11 places overall so that shows you just what kind of pace the

modified men were on. Stewart Strain who was the early modified category winner finished fourth on the day. Referring to the provisional final points Oliver Cormican has provisionally won the Modified Category from Ryan Murray with Stewart Strain third just ahead of Dan Campbell.

With the main protagonists all opting out of Saturday's event Paul Forsythe took the category win ahead of himself. Well done Paul. With none of the leading specialist category drivers out on Saturday there was no point's amendments and therefore Trevor Allen Provisionally wins the specialist Category from David Hawthorne and Richard Munnis third. With David missing three rounds this year he did superbly well to finish second.

In the ladies Championship Kathy McDade pulled off her second category win of the day narrowly pipping Catherine Donnelly by 0.37secs on corrected time. Third went to Sheryl McBride a mere 0.10secs behind Kathy and fourth went to Emma Campbell who finished 0.01secs corrected behind Sheryl. The top 4 were separated by only 0.48 secs with second third and fourth only separated by 0.11secs. Fifth went to Olivia Coulter who made a welcome return in her Anglia. Hopefully this was a shake down for a full season next year?

The last and most important category is the unofficial fastest mini in the West. Once again Karl Johnstone took the honours there finishing ahead of his only rival Gerry McGarrity. With Gary Milligan not there it throws the whole fastest mini in the west competition up in the air, as no one knows exactly who won it this year. It would be a fair assumption that Karl Johnston is the overall winner but the battle between Gerry and Gary is a whole different argument that I'm not going to get involved in.

After 6 rounds of this year's championship I'm sure you will all agree with me that we had a stonking year of sprinting. Congratulations to all the competitors who won awards from the overall title of sprint champions through all the classes, category winners and the ladies Challenge Trophy.

Massive shout of thanks must go out to all the organising clubs who organised our events. To all the marshals, official's timekeepers, rescue and medical crews ate who officiated at all our events. Without you all no event would be possible and we salute you all.

Lastly the biggest thank you goes out to all the competitors who participated and made the championship happen thank you all.

Now for the class battles:

### **Class 1 – Road Cars up to 1700cc**

Class 1 was very much a 2 horse affair between Mark Brogan and Alan Wallace. Today and Mark Brogan went home with the win but not after having to defend hard from Alan Wallace. In terms of the overall championship provisionally the final class results reflect today's results with the addition on Stephen Donnelly in third.

### **Class 2a – Road cars over 1700cc**

Once again we saw a familiar name at the top of the timesheets as Andrew Robb took another convincing class win from Conor Hamill in their BMW M3`s. Third went to Johnny Forsythe who steered his little Fiesta home to third a mere 1.8 seconds off Conors pace in his BMW M3. Once again Johnny drove the fiesta like he was trailering it home. I`m glad I wasn`t his passenger on the long run home to Kilkeel. In terms of the championship Andrew Robb once again refused to take any points so as not to interfere with the class battle. As a result Conor continued his run to the top of the pile and took class championship honours from Aaron Vance with Jonny Forsythe third on countback from Crawford Ewing who finishes fourth but equal on points to Johnny. Of course these positions are provisional until the final points are finalised.

### **Class 2b – Road cars Mazda MX5 challenge**

With only 1 Mazda MX5 competing today Derek Brogan took a well-deserved class win. His win sees him finish third provisionally in the class championship behind the class champion Adam Brogan and second placed George McMillan.

### **Class 3 – Road cars specialist Production cars 4wd**

Barry Griffin took his first class win of the season today after a well-timed second run which saw him beat Phillip Cardy who has dominated the class all year. In the championship Phillip provisionally takes the class win from Barry.

### **Class 5 – Road cars specialist Production cars**

Class 5 was rather under represented today with only Paul Forsythe participating. Paul needless to say took the class win with an impressive 124.19sec run. In terms of the class championship the provisional standings show Trevor Allen as the provisional winner ahead of Richard Munnis.

### **Class 6a Modified Cars – Series Production cars 8v**

Class 6a turned out to be as close a battle as it`s probably ever been before as the championship was to be decided today. Andrew Strain took the class win in his 205 finishing streets ahead of Stephen Harvey in his MK2 escort. Stephen finished 0.6 secs ahead of third placed David Evans in his 205. Fourth went to Championship leader Karl Johnston who finished a mere 0.41 secs adrift of David Evans and 0.86 ahead of Jonny Strain. Now this is where it got interesting, especially with dropped scores. With dropped scores and todays finishing positions Karl and David were equal on 20 points each at the top of the championship but Karl gets the nod and the championship win on countback by virtue of scoring max points in 1 round more than David. Talk about close. Of course these results are provisional.

### **Class 6b Modified Cars – Series Production cars 16v**

Stephen Colbert took another great class 6b win today from his father Ken in the family Sunbeam with Dermot O`Hagan finishing third ahead of Andrew Straney.

Dermot, Ken and Stephen have had a titanic battle all season and in terms of the championship Stephen provisionally takes the win from Dermot O'Hagan with Ken Colbert third. We have seen a few new faces this year as well as the loss of a few familiar faces as well in class 6b. Dara Fay and Nial McMullan have proven to be superfast men in their respective motors. It was also good to see Dessie Martin turn out on Saturday in a new to him car. Dessie has bought the ever quick Honda civic which Brian Fitzmaurice owned. This is a quick car and judging by the smile on Dessie's face on Saturday evening he was having fun with it.

### **Class 8 Sports Libre cars Special Saloons**

Class 8 today saw the return of a car which we haven't seen in a while, with a new driver installed. Stephen Colbert was out for a days craic in Gerard O'Connells Mk 1 RSR Escort. Stephen won the class and finished eighth overall just ahead of second placed Richard O'Mahoney in his similar RSR Escort. Richard is new to the sprint scene up here and has been a welcome addition to the paddock as he, like the rest of us, likes a bit of banter and craic in the paddock. Sadly Richard didn't register for the championship so championship honours provisionally go to Rory Stephens in his similar RSR ahead of Jim Hutchinson. Sadly this class doesn't quite get the support that the class deserves, for one reason or another. The class is suitable for the multitude of Space framed cars in the country such as Maguire minis and there's a couple of racing tigras and a midget which have all shown an interest as well. There have been 5 RSR Escorts which have appeared this season between the sprints and hill climbs but sadly we just haven't managed to get them all together at the same time, but hopefully that will change for next year. I know that at least 2 of them have been back to Sunny Howard for some work and will be back out, and now that Rory has finally got to grips with his, and worked out that it has 6 gears, he is itching to get back out again next year. Richard O'Mahoney has enjoyed himself that he has already been on to find out when entries for the first round next year open!! I'm just hoping that Santa has watched me all year because if he has he will realise that I've been a good boy, and that the RSR Escort I've asked him for, for Christmas really is deserved!!!

### **Class 9a Sports Libre cars Saloons and GT's**

Contrary to popular belief this class isn't purely restricted to those with the name Campbell although you would think that it was this year. Daniel Campbell once again took the class win ahead of his father Garry in their Toyota Starlett. David Patton took third and Emma Campbell was fourth in her little Peugeot 106. Class 9a has seen a bit of a drop off of late but it's good to see it getting a bit of a reprieve again. Championship wise Emma Campbell secured a lot of points at the start of the year which made her impossible to catch as the season progressed and the class increased in size. She provisionally has the class title won ahead of Daniel Campbell with David Frances third and David Patton and Garry Campbell finishing further back in that order. I hear rumours of a couple of cars returning next season for class 9a and another local well known competitor having purchased a car which will also go well in the class. Next year promises to be good.

### **Class 9b Sports libre Closed wheel sports racing cars.**

Really I could just copy and paste the previous reports into this section as it was pretty much a carbon copy of the last day out, but to do that wouldn't give those in the class the credit they deserve. Patrick Roache once again took another class win and finished in the top 10 overall (5<sup>th</sup> this time) and again Sheryl finished second behind him. However this is only half the story. Patrick really has got to grips with his little OMS and is punching some cracker times in which put him on a par with the class 14 and even class 15 cars. Whilst Sheryl doesn't have the pace to catch Patrick she really is driving the wheel nuts off her little car and is getting progressively faster on each day out. In fact Sheryl was on such a roll that it's almost a shame to see the season end for her. She joking told me on Saturday that she was now coming after my times, and truthfully she is. Sheryl also had a bit of extra competition on Saturday when her dad came out to play in her little Global GT however Sheryl continued her run of form and convincingly beat Colin hands down. In terms of the championship Patrick provisionally wins it with 6 straight wins and Sheryl is second with 6 straight second places, making this an easy class to calculate.

### **Class 10 Sports libre Cars – small capacity Rally cars**

Once again this class is almost a copy and paste from previous events as once again Alan Roddy took the class win, however on this occasion we had a couple of extra drivers champing at the bit. Norman Harvey took second in class after a battle with Alan Griffith who steered his Escort Mk2 home in front of Derek Robinson in his Toyota Corolla. Championship wise Alan Roddy provisionally takes the championship win again for the umpteenth time ahead of Derek Robinson with Norman Harvey third. I know I've said it before and I will say it again, but sadly this class does not get the support it deserves as for some unknown reason not all the rally cars seem to wish to compete in the rally car classes. Yes the pace is hard here but when you check down the results there are other cars in other classes who would be equally as competitive in the rally car classes as they are where they currently run. Perhaps next year we will see a few more rally cars migrating to the rally classes?

### **Class 11 Sports libre Cars – large capacity Rally cars**

Class 11 is a unique and famous class in the championship as it's the only class which in which "the stig" competes. Naturally "the stig" once again won class 11 but he was trying hard and indeed tried a couple of new lines in the process. He had obviously received some form of advice from another competitor on Saturday regarding the best line to take through the inner loop. I won't name the advising competitor, who is a horse fanatic, but I will question the wisdom of taking advice from someone who drives so bad that passengers refuse to sit with him, even when he pulls up and offers them a lift. Anyhow, the said competitor was so impressed at seeing the stig taking his advice that he was heard to say "who says you can't teach an old stig new tricks" For those of you who are lost by this conversation the stig in question is Stewart Strain aka "the bald stig" and Stewart took another class win on Saturday in his venerable little Peugeot. This is his 5<sup>th</sup> win from six this season. Runner up to the stig was Peter Bennet in his beautiful Escort MK 2 which really was a delight to see and hear as he pushed it on. Third went to another Escort, this time an F2 Escort owned and driven hard by Roy Haslett who narrowly pipped fourth placed Noel Strain. Class 11 was a close affair on Saturday with only 2.03 seconds separating second to fourth

and had the last run been a dry run I suspect that times would've tumbled further. In terms of the Class championship Stewart Strain (the bald Stig) was provisionally crowned class champion, however no one is sure how he intends to keep his crown secure on his head. Second went to the hard charging Michael Boyle who wasn't out on Saturday unfortunately and third in the class championship now goes to Noel Strain after his result saw him leap frog Jaye Nevin who is already well under way to being ready to go next season.

### **Class 12 4WD sports Libre Cars**

Class 12 has seen a rejuvenation this season with 5 cars competing over the course of the year. For a while Oliver Cormican had it his own way but not this year. Oliver had a rocky start to the season but once he found his feet he never looked back. We saw the return of Ryan Murray and the Lancashire brothers this season too, after both took some time out to rebuild and go faster. Both Lancashire's and especially Ryan Murray gave Oliver a hard run all season. Today was no different but only Ryan was out against Oliver and he pushed him hard. Oliver took the class win by a mere 1.28 secs over the hard charging Ryan Murray. As this was a championship deciding round only those 2 competitors were out. In terms of the championship Oliver provisionally takes another class 12 win, as well as the modified category win, with Ryan Murray finishing second and Ian Lancashire third.

### **Class 13 Formula Racing cars**

Henry Campbell returned to the championship again this week and returned to the top of the class time sheets as well. Stephen Wishart finished second behind Henry today in what turned out to be only a 2 horse race.

In terms of the championship Stephen Wishart becomes the first man in my memory span to topple Henry off the top of the tree as he takes the Class 13 championship, provisionally from Henry Campbell. Basil Barnes rounds the season off in third and John Whitley finishes fourth provisionally. Sadly class 13 has seen a bit of a decline this year, as there are at least 3 other competitors who I can think of who have raced, successfully in class 13 over recent years. Hopefully we will see them return again. I have also heard rumours of another former champion who is looking to purchase a formula ford again to relive his youth and I would be very pleased to see him return to the sprint paddock in his formula ford. I know for a fact that if he did he would be pushing for the top results which is a big boost for everyone in the class and on the spectator banks too.

### **Class 14 small Capacity Racing Cars**

If I was in a position to fit into a single seater I'd be looking to enter class 14 as this class is, in my opinion, one of the best classes in the paddock. Class 14 cars, in the right hands have the potential to take outright wins, but there is also a huge calibre of machines and drivers out there all of which are competitive. Trevor Roberts was the man to beat on Saturday in his little pocket rocket force. It was great to see him finally get a full days racing in in the little car. I always said that when Trevor was dialled into the car that he would achieve outright results and he proved me right on Saturday

finishing up 4<sup>th</sup> overall and only 6.25 seconds behind FTD of Gerard O`Connell. Whilst 6.25 seconds sounds like a big margin, it certainly is not a big margin in this game especially if you tried to compare the cars like for like. This is a stonking good result for Trevor but I predict there is more to come. Second went to Mr Consistent aka Brian Fitzmaurice who has also had a clinker of a year. Brian Fitzmaurice finished seventh overall Catherine Donnelly finished third in class and 1.51 secs in front of Fourth placed Thomas Corey who has also had a brilliant season. In terms of the Championship Brian Fitzmaurice has been provisionally crowned class champion ahead of Trevor Roberts and George Stevenson in that order. This is an impressive result for Brian as Brian is in far from the fastest car in the class. Indeed Brian didn't win an event all season however he consistently finished in strong seconds and thirds and racked up points all season. What makes this even sweeter is that Brian is in one of the first OMS chassis built and he is running a completely bog standard engine as well and for anyone that watches him you will see that he drives very very hard indeed. He also had to jump through hoops to make it to the penultimate event as he works off shore in the middle of the North sea and had to come home specially for the weekend just to compete. Over the course of the year there were 3 different winners in this very closely matched class and next season promises to be a better year as there is already a lot of talk of new cars and driver combinations.

### **Class 15 large Capacity Racing Cars**

I'm not going to delve too deeply in to class 15 as it's covered above in the main text. Gerard O`Connell took the class win ahead of Tony Greenan and John Donnelly in that order. However what I will say is that having watched Tony in his little ex F3 Dallara and it's a cracker wee motor and Tony's not afraid to push it on especially in the corners where it seems to be stuck to the road like the proverbial soot to a blanket. You do have to remember that both Gerard and Tony are out in race cars which are designed to do multiple laps and which take 2 or 3 laps to properly heat their tyres. This therefore makes them almost unsuitable for the short sharp nature of sprinting as they are heavier, wider and carry bigger fuel tanks etc. However both of these guys are pushing them to the limit and pulling fabulous results in cars which aren't designed for the job they're doing. This just shows how well both these fellas are going. John Donnelly also showed on Saturday just how well he had got to grips with his Pilbeam and he is coming on leaps and bounds. Championship wise Alan Cassells took the outright win as well as the class 15 title. Gerard O`Connell secured second ahead of Steven Gault with John Donnelly rounding out the top 4 just ahead of Adrian Pollock. I do suspect that next year will see even more fast drivers in class 15. Tony Greenan has been a very welcome addition to the paddock, he drives superbly well and enjoys it so hopefully he will continue to sprint in 2022. We also saw Eamon Matheson out at the last round and when Eamon competes he's hard to beat. One thing which is well known is that everyone left the last round to go home to make improvements to their motors to find more time for next year. Rest assured that Alan Cassells, Gerard O`Connell, Steven Gault, John Donnelly, Tony Greenan and all the other people in this class will all work hard over the winter to find that extra few tenths. Next year promises to be a belter already, and that's before we mention the new cars which the rumour mill is circulating already. Watch this space in 2022!!

### **Class 16a Historic Road Cars**



Class 16a once again was an opportunity for Gerry McGarrity to show us all how to throw a beautiful mark 1 mini about faster than they were ever intended go. Gerry once again took the class win but he was pushed hard by David Cochrane in his Escort Mk1. David, who is an autotest expert has really got to grips with his escort and is a great addition to the paddock. He pushed Gerry hard and may be the first man to beat Gerry in a while. Third place went to the hard charging Mervyn Getty who has spent the year engineering, fine tuning and sorting out his MGB GT to a level at which he is happy with it. Indeed Mervyn Has gone really well of late.

In terms of the championship the provisional results show that Gerry McGarrity has been crowned class champion again. After that it gets awkward. In the battle for second Trevor McIlroy and Mervyn Getty tie on a total of 21 points each before dropped scores, and 18 points each after dropped scores are calculated. Both drivers have 3 second places and both have 3 third places each, making them inseparable. Who says that historic racing is boring? I do know that as the season went on Trevor and Mervyn both got faster with each event as they spurred each other on. Mervyn was definitely on a roll and had serious momentum built up. Next year will be interesting to watch, but I for one don't fancy predicting a winner between these 2 as I'd only end up lynched lol.

### **Class 16b Historic Saloons and Sportscars**

Paul Taggart dominated class 16b today in his little Escort MK1. Being the only car in the class today Paul had no one to battle with on track so decided instead to go head to head with a cup of tea in the paddock. Sadly the cup of tea won that particular battle and left Paul feeling thirsty lol. Interestingly Paul, or Harry as he is affectionately known around the Evans Motorsport camp (think Harry Hogg from the film Days of Thunder) has now competed for 37 years in various forms of racing. He has competed in Rally cross, raced in the Kirkistown Metro series, sprinted, hill climbed raced the occasional bus and done some 2 wheeled events as well over his 37 year career. Paul is already looking forward to competing next season now and may even be tempted to use top gear next season?

Paul had a great run out and his result on Saturday saw him finish runner up, provisionally, to Steven Nevin in the class 16b Championship battle. Once again class 16b was a little underwhelmed this year but hopefully things will change a bit for 2022 as there are several fast motors there which fit perfectly into class 16b.