

2019 SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship Round 3

Saturday 6th April saw the North Ulster Car Club host the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship visit Nutts Corner for the second time this season. With lots of heavy rain on the Friday everyone thought that a re-run of the extremely wet first round was on the agenda however thankfully this wasn't the case.

With the Northern Ireland Hill climb season seeing its opening round next Saturday at Croft Hillclimb and the upcoming Easter Stages Rally it was great to see several competitors using this sprint event as a test session ahead of both of these events. Indeed the event attracted 68 starters.

With the sun splitting the trees at Nutts corner , practice got underway and defending Champion Adrian Pollock started where he left off from the last round and powered to the top of the time sheets, a mere 0.16 seconds ahead of 7 time (in a row!!) Northern Ireland Hillclimb Champion Graham Thompson in his GTR Turbo with Gerard O`Connell third in his Radical SR8.

From a personal point of view I was delighted to see the return of 3 time Northern Ireland Sprint Champion Simon Woodside as well as well known local competitor Ken Colbert. Simon who last won the championship in 2008 hadn't sat in his 2008 Sprint Championship winning Pilbeam since the last round of the 2008 championship so it was great to see him going so well all day. For someone who said he felt a bit rusty in the car, it didn't appear to be the case from a spectator's perspective. Many of you will remember Ken Colbert in his venerable rear engine Peugeot 205 which he had numerous successes in rallying, sprints and indeed hillclimbs over the years. Ken purchased a Lotus Sunbeam last year which he has now decided to sprint in. He did advise that his good friend Alan Jardine had been a major force in encouraging his return. To show his appreciation of this Ken beat him by a mere 1.08secs. I predict a few more close tussles between these 2 Dungannon men before the season is out.

As temperatures increased so did the action on the track. Adrian Pollock set the fastest time in run 1 which put him a mere 0.31 sec ahead of hard charging Graham Thompson with Gerard O`Connell third. Adrian then went faster again in the second run before setting FTD in run 3 with a stunning run of 90.65 secs. Graham Thompsons whopping first run time was sufficient for him to retain second overall with Simon Woodside taking third with a blinding third run time of 93.4 seconds, a mere 1.15 secs ahead of championship leader Joe Courtney.

The 3 class 14 drivers all had fabulous results with George Stevenson taking eighth overall with Lewis Wilson 9th overall a mere 0.15 seconds ahead of Catherine Donnelly who was tenth overall. This was a stunning result for Catherine who seems to get faster every event she does in her Delta. Catherine was also the fastest female competitor.

Some other notable results amongst the runners were Tom Devaney who took the class 7 win and 12th overall after an epic battle with Paul Hamill all day. David Strain continued his giant killing season and placed his little 205gti 19th overall. You may recall that at the wet first round here David was 6th overall!!! David is now third in the Modified Category standings. Dermot O`Hagan placed his little civic 20th overall after a brilliant first run and Rally man Nicky Caughy put his mark 2 Escort 22nd overall.

In the battle for road going honours Richard Munnis was the fastest roadgoing competitor in his westfield whilst Andrew Robb continued his winning ways and took the honour of fastest roadgoing saloon in his BMW M3 with Michael Clarke next .

In the modified Battle Roger Gage was fastest modified driver in the family Maguire Mini with Oliver Cormican second and Alan Roddy third modified saloon. Sadly for us Roger is focusing on the Hillclimb Championship this year, as his giant killing, flat out driving style and hugely impressive onboard footage is currently missed by all the sprint competitors and spectators.

In the historic battle Alan Jardine took the historic honours from Arthur Ovens and Mervyn Getty.

In the much anticipated battle for the Fastest Mini in the West Karl Johnston took a last gasp last run go at the title and managed to pip Gary to the title, despite all of Garys efforts including fitting new slicks to try to keep Karl at bay.

Lastly the overall championship is currently lead by Joe Courtney whose consistent start to the championship (a second and two thirds) sees him 5 points ahead of runner up Adrian Pollock. Adrian has won 2 of the 3 rounds to date but missed the first round. Third overall is currently held by Gerard O`Connell who ties on points with Adrian Pollock. Again Gerard`s consistency has helped him no end this year and first round winner Steven Gault is fourth.

In terms of the classes:

Class 1 roadgoing production up to 1700cc

Andrew Straney took the class 1 honours from Newcomer Stephen Wishart with Richard Beattie third. Anyone watching Andrew in the little MX5 would have been entitled to think they were at some form of drift fest as Andrew drifted the little mazda round the circuit with a smile on his face that was almost bursting out of his helmet. Andrews` commitment was great to watch and Rudy Tate who double drives the little Mazda with Andrew was left bemused as to how Andrew could be so quick yet so sideways. Newcomer Stephen Wishart had a fabulous third run to jump from 4th in class to second and narrowly pip third placed Richard Beattie by a mere 0.61 seconds. Richard Beattie was another who was having a fabulous days fun in his mini and could be heard saying that he was on the limit and had no more to give in his little mini. This entire class of 7 were split by a total of 3.55 seconds with only 1.82 seconds separating the top 6 after the first run. Close racing and close classes like this are great to watch and compete it. Andrew Straney now heads class 1 from James Schofield with Richard Beattie third.

Class 2 Roadgoing Production over 1700cc

Andrew Robb continued where he left off to take the class win with a run which put him 18th overall. Michael Clarke was second after an epic battle all day with Alfred Robb who was third. Michael Invested heavily between the second and third rounds and fitted a new set of spark plugs to his lotus Elise and it was these spark plugs which gave him the edge and a mere 0.82second advantage over Alfred Robb. Stephen Donnelly was fourth in his clio a further 0.62secs behind Alfred. Rumour has it

that a few more class 2 competitors will be changing their spark plugs after seeing the difference it made to Michael. For anyone who likes to dabble in stocks and shares perhaps Spark Plug companies are the way to invest? In terms of the championship Andrew Robb now has a 5 point lead from Michael Clarke with Alfred Robb third.

Class 5 All other Road Going Production cars

Richard Munnis took the class honours again and continued with his season long tradition of putting in great performances. Richard finished 3.38 seconds ahead of Gardiner McIwaine in his 8v Westfield with Colin McBride third in his Sylva Leader. In championship terms Richard now has an 8 point lead from Gardiner with Kenny Wylie third.

Class 6a 8V Modified Production Cars

David Strain continued his class domination in his Peugeot 205 with a time of 114.19secs which put him 19th overall 3.82 secs ahead of Karl Johnston with Gary Milligan third. Gary Milligan who was having a good run out managed to dip under his personal best in practice and was second in class right up until the last runs. In a bid to try to catch David Strain, Gary pulled a brand spanking new set of Avon Slick Hillclimb tyres out from under the back seat of his BMW and tried quietly to bolt them on before anyone else noticed. However with Karl and William Hutton helping him to fit them under the watchful eye of fellow class 6 competitor David Evans, his secret didn't stay a secret for too long. On the last run of the day Karl Johnston pulled a blinder final run to pip Gary to second by 1.12 seconds. After the second timed runs there was only 1.3 seconds between Gary, Karl and William. Emma Campbell had a steady drive to 5th in class but was severely hampered with a gearbox which kept jumping out of gear on her. From a championship perspective David Strain has a 6 point lead from Gary Milligan with Jonathon Strain third. With neither Jonathan Strain or David Evans competing class 6a is shaping up to be an epic class battle as the season continues.

Class 6B 16V modified Production cars

Dermot O'Hagan continued on his winning ways and set a time of 114.57 which saw him 20th overall. Ken Colbert finished 2nd in class a mere 1.97 secs behind Dermot in his Talbot Sunbeam. Colin Dines took third in class a mere 0.64 seconds ahead of 4th placed Steven Robb. From a championship perspective Class 6b is the tightest contested class in the championship with the top 3 drivers Dermot O'hagan, Steven Robb and Colin Dines all equal on 10 points. Dermot gets the nod with 2 wins but Colin and Steven will prove hard to separate at the season end. Ken Colbert, who hadn't been at Nutts Corner to compete in over 25 years, was heard at the end of the day saying that it was coming back to him!! With some more seat time in his new car Ken will surely be a force to reckon with. All of the long term sprint championship followers will remember Ken Colberts previous exploits in his rear wheel drive Peugeot 205.

Class 7 Modified Specialist Production Cars

With the Chuckle brothers (Steven and David Hawthorne) missing from the event Tom Devaney took class honours after a great battle with Paul Hamill. Tom finished a mere 0.82 ahead of Paul with Kevin McNamee third in his Megablade. The pace in class 7 today was intense with Tom finishing 12th overall and Paul 13th overall. It would have been interesting to see how the Chuckle brothers would have fared as both Tom and Paul were in great form and going well. Hopefully we will get the

chance to see this battle occur during the season. David McMullan took fourth in class narrowly pipping son Scott by 0.65 seconds. Scott has been faster so far this season in the family Locost and this is another family class battle which will be interesting to watch as the season continues. Will Scott's youthful exuberance master David's experience at the end of the year? In terms of the championship Steven Hawthorne, David Hawthorne and Scott McMullan are all tied first on 9 points with David 2 points behind in fourth. This really will be a family battle in class 7 and if Tom Devaney and Paul Hamill choose to do more sprints this could be an exceptionally close class at the end of the season.

Class 8A Sports libre Special saloons.

Roger Gage made an appearance in his dad Rudi Gage's Maguire Mini in preparation for next week's Croft Hillclimb. Roger had a lonely drive to class honours but proved to us all that he hasn't lost any of his fearless approach to the track or any of his flair as he chucked the little Mini round Nutts corner like a rollerskate.

Class 9B Sports Libre Closed Wheel Sports cars

Hot off a successful weekend racing his RSR Escort at Kirkistown last weekend Gerard O'Connell wheeled out his 2018 Northern Ireland Hillclimb Championship winning Radical SR8 to give it a shake down before he starts to defend his Hillclimb Championship next week at Croft. Gerard hit the ground running and set his fastest run of the day on his first run with a whopping 96.00. To put this in perspective FTD was 90.65 secs. Gerard also set the speed trap record with a 118mph pass on his second run. Gerard took the class win from hard charging Alan Cassells who was second in class a mere 3.58 secs behind Gerard and 7th overall. This was an impressive run from Alan who had never driven the Radical before at Nutts Corner, so he had a massive learning curve yesterday morning. Alan, with some more runs in the car, will undoubtedly be able to reduce that 3.58 sec gap to Gerard. Sheryl McBride smiled her way to third in class with a 127.43 sec run in her Global GT. Sheryl who concentrated previously on hillclimbs in a class 1 Saxo is getting to grips with her new Global and plans to do a lot more sprints this season.

Class 10 Rally Cars

Alan Roddy continued his winning ways in his little Saxo although second place man Nicky Caughey didn't make it easy for Alan. Nicky who was using the event as a shake down for the UAC Easter Stages rally chased Alan hard all day and got the deficit down to 0.76 seconds on his last run. Third place went to Phillip Gault in his lovely little Nova who got his time down to 119.65secs. Speaking to Phillip he was telling me that he was delighted to finally get a dry day to learn the car. Alan Roddy continues to lead the class from Phillip Gault.

Class 11 Sports Libre Rally cars

Bryan Jardine had a lonely drive in class 11 in his Mark 2 Escort. Regular sprint and Hillclimb competitors will recognise the car as the car his father Alan competed in for 3 seasons previously.

Class 12 4wd Sports Libre cars

With the 6 Nations over for this year Oliver Cormican returned to motorsport and dominated class 12 in his flying Mitsubishi Evo. Oliver set a time of 111.08 which was enough to give him 15th overall and fastest modified car yesterday. Oliver had slight oil retention issues which didn't slow him down at all as he extends his lead in the class championship and reeled Gerard O'Connell in, in the Modified Category Championship. Bill Arbuthnott was second in his Subaru Impreza.

Class 13 Formula Racing cars

Henry Campbell re-took control of class 13 with a great 110.83 second run which saw him finish 14th overall. Second place in this class went to Ian Maple in his Mondiale with Paul Mongan third in the Mondiale he shares with Ian Maple. In the class Championship Henry leads Ian Maple by 3 points with Paul Mongan third 3 points ahead of Ryan Campbell. After such a fabulous run out at the last event it would be great to see Ryan do some more sprints.

Class 14 Smaller capacity Race Cars

George Stevenson took the class win and 8th overall in his Jedi from Lewis Wilson in his Reynard. Catherine Donnelly took 10th overall and third in class a mere 0.14 secs off Lewis, despite having some technical issues along the way. Thankfully her father John was only too willing to perform some running repairs to get Catherine back out again. All 3 class 14 contenders had brilliant runs yesterday with all of them finishing inside the top 10. Sadly class leader Trevor Roberts had technical issues which meant he was unable to complete any runs today. Trevor still leads the class Championship with hard charging Catherine Donnelly 2nd in class ahead of George Stevenson.

Class 15 All other Racing Cars.

Now for the big boys. Adrian Pollock took the class win and FTD in his Dallara F301 from Graham Thompson with Simon Woodside third overall. 2nd, third and 4th in this class were separated by a mere 2.08 secs which goes to show just how close this class is. Sadly Steven Gault suffered a broken driveshaft as he left the line in first practice.

This has to be one of the best class 15's we have seen in the championship in many years with so many potential outright winners registered for this year's championship. Steven Gault has already won a round, Adrian Pollock has won 2 rounds, John Morgan was second at the first round and everyone recalls how close he pushed Adrian last season. Then add 3 times sprint Champion Simon Woodside to the mix along with Hillclimb ace Richard McGimpsey and then mix in a large dollop of Joe Cortneys consistency and Rory Stephens outright speed and this is going to be a whopping class and a superb Championship run in. In terms of the class championship Joe Courtney leads the class from Adrian Pollock with Steven Gault third. I suspect that later this season when dropped scores start to take effect that this class is going to finish up extremely close and I for one wouldn't want to be working out the odds!

Class 16A Road Going Historic Saloons

North Ulster Club members Mervyn Getty and Vincent Rodgers have finally swapped to the dark side and have given up marshalling at their club sprints to winning classes at them. Mervyn took the class win from Vincent by a mere 1.06 seconds with Ian McCullough third in his lovey wee Lotus Elan. Somehow I suspect that these 2 ex marshalls will be donning race suits more than marshals bibs over

the remainder of this season as both of them had a ball yesterday in the ex Robbie Davidson MGB GT. Ian McCullough still leads the class championship but Mervyn is only 3 points behind and has got the bit between his teeth.

Class 16b Non Road Going Historics

Alan Jardine piloted his beautiful BDA Escort Mk1 to take class honours and 30th overall. Alan gave me a great insight into why he runs number 37 as his competition number and to be fair the luck that number 37 gave him way back then is still obviously there. For anyone who wants to learn how to drive a rear wheel drive car to the limits but smoothly and quickly Alan is the man to teach him. Back to class 16b and second place went to Arthur Ovens in his MG Midget. Alan is out in front in the class Championship.

We now have a bit of a mid season break as the next round will take place on 01 June in St Angelo when Enniskillen Motorclub host the Erne Trophy Sprint. During this off season who will make some modifications, who will just park the car and forget about it and who will turn to the hills for a bit of Motorsport Medicine??

See you all at Enniskillen on 01 June.