



## Hankook MSA Northern Ireland Stage Rally Championship

*It seems there is no stopping Banbridge rally ace, Kenny McKinstry. At Saturday's Modern Tyre Service Mourne Rally, round five of the Hankook MSA N.I. Rally Championship, McKinstry secured another victory, as well as his fifth maximum points haul of the season.*

With Harvey Bell navigating on this occasion, the event saw McKinstry secure an emphatic win of almost one minute, bolstering his chances of securing the 2011 Hankook title. However, he found himself languishing in fifth overall after the second stage.



While McKinstry grabbed the rally lead by two seconds from George Robinson on stage one, an overshoot on stage two saw him plummet down the order.



"I pulled on the handbrake at the hairpin but it didn't work," McKinstry explained. "The car tried to lock the front wheels instead, and we slid into the ditch."

"I thought she would run back down the hill without having to put the car in reverse but it didn't!" McKinstry continued. "I eventually put her into reverse and we got going again but we lost something like 10 or 11 seconds on what was a 1.8 mile stage."

Suddenly, George Robinson and Tommy Speers found themselves leading the event by four seconds from Neil McCance and Anthony O'Conaill, with Damian Toner and Paddy McCague third in their Mark 2 Escort. Reigning champion Stuart Biggerstaff, who had Karl Atkinson calling the pace notes, shared fourth with Kenny McKinstry and Harvey Bell, while Michael Conlon and Aidan Boyle completed the top six. English visitors Ray Brammer and Matt Whattam were also in contention early on, posting an equal fastest time on stage two with Robinson and McCance.

McKinstry started his comeback drive on stage three, fighting his way back to second overall. He was quickest through the test by two seconds from leader Robinson, leaving five seconds between the two crews.

Robinson and McKinstry were joint fastest on stage four, while it was Robinson who extended his lead by one second on the fifth test. Championship leader McKinstry was not having it all his own way, but he pulled out all the stops on stage six to move into a two second lead.

Robinson kept McKinstry honest during the remaining stages but it was the Banbridge driver who edged ahead. Going into the final stage, he was 18 seconds clear of Robinson, and went on to secure the 2011 Modern Tyre Service Mourne Rally spoils.

“After what happened on stage two, it was a case of making no mistakes and keep chipping away at George,” McKinstry said. “In fairness to him, he was on a very good pace.”

“Tyre wear was excessive,” McKinstry continued. “It was very high speed which put a lot of stress on the tyres. Maybe I didn’t have a hard enough compound. I had to borrow tyres from John McGaffin for the final four stages.”



In the end, George Robinson was lucky to seal second overall. He limped through the final stage with clutch troubles, but managed to cling on to the runner-up position.

We were lucky to finish,” Robinson admitted. “The clutch just about packed up but we got out of last stage. There were a lot of noises coming from the car that I didn’t like the sound of by the time we arrived at the finish.”

“It’s been a while since I was on that sort of pace,” he continued. “Maybe doing the Circuit and the Sperrins helped. You need to be out regularly on the roads.”

Drew Stewart and Steven Park completed the top three in their Escort. They had earlier trailed a number of two-wheel-drive crews but managed to pull back the lost time and top the Hankook two-wheel-drive category.

Neil McCance and Anthony O’Conaill secured fourth overall and won the Sunoco Fuels Group N category, while Michael Conlon and Aidan Boyle were fifth ahead of Stuart Biggerstaff and Karl Atkinson.

Biggerstaff had been holding fourth overall until he lost almost 50 seconds on stage nine with a puncture. Neil McCance had slipped off during the stage, and his car pulled a rock on to the road. Unfortunately, Biggerstaff clipped the rock, giving him a rear puncture.



In the Montgomery Motorsport historic category, Andy Johnson and Jim McSherry secured the spoils aboard their Chevette. They finished more than one minute ahead of Dessie McCartney and Maurice Jellie, with Harry Brown and Martin McGrath third.

The Hankook MSA Northern Ireland Rally Championship now enjoys a two month break before returning to action. The series makes a switch to gravel in August with round six, the Dogleap Stages Rally, on 6 August.

## Top 6 Finishers

1. **Kenny McKinstry/Harvey Bell**—Subaru Impreza WRC—45:47.0
2. **George Robinson/Tommy Speers**—Subaru Impreza WRC—46:31.0
3. **Drew Stewart/Steven Park**—Escort MkII— 46:51.0
4. **Neil McCance/Anthony O’Conaill**—Mitsubishi Lancer Evo 9— 46:57.0
5. **Michael Conlon/Aidan Boyle**—Ford Escort MkII— 47:02.0
6. **Stuart Biggerstaff/Karl Atkinson**— Subaru Impreza WRC— 47:14.0

## Provisional Championship Points after Round 5:

Kenny McKinstry **60 points**

George Robinson **41 points**

Donagh Kelly (GpN) **26 points**

Neil McCance (GpN) **24 points** (up 4 places)

Derek McGarrity **22 points** (down 2 places)

Stuart Biggerstaff **22 points** (up 2 places)