

Saturday 19 March 2022 saw round 2 of the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship being held at, an unusually for March, sunny Kirkistown by the 500 MRCI who held their St Patricks sprint.

The event hosted a whopping 78 entrants with a fabulous mix of cars throughout all the classes. Obviously someone had put a good word in upstairs as the weather turned out to be brilliant as well with a dry, but windy day greeting all who ventured to Kirkistown. Which turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

Half way through first practice a competitor managed to leave an oil slick from the start line to Fisherman's which delayed the action for over an hour whilst the marshals and officials, and even a couple of pensioners, worked hard to dress and brush the oil to make the track safe to continue. A massive round of applause has to be given to all the marshals and officials for their actions at dealing with this issue as the event simply would not have run had they not done such a wonderful job when dressing the oil.

As a result, half the paddock got a competitive first practice and the remainder of the paddock had a slower post oil slick practice. In order to make up some of the time lost, the second practice had to be held as a procession run so that everyone could see where the oil was and make themselves familiar its pattern.

So once first the first timed runs started, it really was a case of going for it!!

Robert Dwane once again proved himself to be a class act setting a first run time of 90.99secs. This was 1.76 secs faster than Alan Cassells first timed run and Tim Woodside went third fastest on a 95.67. the oil didn't seem to Phase Robert much as he set a speed trap reading of 146mph which was his fastest speed trap of the day and joint fastest with Tim Woodside, however Tim set his on the third run by which stage the oil had dried.

Sadly Robert Dwane had a mechanical issue on his second run which meant that his first timed run was the fastest run of the day and secured him the event win. Alan Cassells also set his fastest time on his first run as sadly a drive shaft broke on his third run when he was on a serious push for the win, so he finished second. Third place went to Tim Woodside in his pilbeam MP82 with a best run of 95.48s which was 2.73secs behind Alan Cassells. Tim had a massive battle all day with Simon Woodside in his pilbeam and Simon was up to third at one point before Tim pipped him to third by a mere 0.38secs. Fifth went to John Donnelly who put his Nutts Corner misfortunes behind him as he pushed the Woodsides hard all day. John set a best run of 95.92secs which was only 0.06 behind Simon Woodside. So third, fourth and fifth were separated by a mere 0.44 seconds.

Another class with a seriously tight battle was in class 11 where Norman Armstrong and Richie O'Mahoney fought tooth and nails all day in their Escort Mk2's with Norman finishing a mere 0.05secs ahead of Richie O'Mahoney. Richie was having so much fun sliding the mark 2 about that he probably cost himself that time by sliding

about. However any time I saw either Richie or Norman both fellas were smiling and clearly having a ball.

At long last we got 3 RSR`S out together in class 8 and the 3 guys had a ball. Jim Hutchinson took the win from Rory Stephens and Richie O`Mahoney Senior there.

There were a few more new names and faces around the paddock again on Saturday. It was great to see Ruth Nugent make the long run up to compete in here BMW Mini, Aidan Savage washed off his Skoda (well the windscreen anyway) and had a great days craic in class 2 where he managed to pip Ian Thompsons Porsche. Hel be telling all the grandkids for the next few weeks that he beat a Porsche! We also had Albert McClenahan out for some fun in his Sierra. This is a massive car for throwing around and Albert had absolutely no fear of throwing it around. It was great to watch.

The 2 grady brothers Paul and Tony made a very welcome return in their Subaru in class 3 and as usual picked up where they left off. The amount of banter and abuse these boys give each other, and the rest of the paddock is unreal and these 2 larger than life characters were sadly missed last year, but the banterometer is now well and truly back with these 2 fellas out again.

Another lovely entrant to the paddock On Saturday was the Lotus Cortina of Robert Coulter. Robert painstakingly started to build this car several years ago and has been steadily building it on and off since. Mid way through the build he set it aside to build an Anglia for daughter Olivia who we all know well, but during lockdown he completed his lotus and gave it a superb debut outing with a class win. I suspect this will be the first of many. Robert did look a bit lost in his Lotus cortina as it`s twice the size of the Anglia were all used to seeing him in. The big question is whether or not he will allow Olivia to dual drive it with him??

In terms of the categories now Stephen Colbert took the modified category win from his father Ken in the family Talbot Sunbeam. Dermot O`Hagan took third in the modified category. Stephen only did 1 timed run as he had to dash off quickly to support his son who was doing his first ever Kart Race at Nutts Corner!! I did hear that the youngest Colbert had made the final, but didn`t hear how he got on. It sounds like we have another Colbert star in our midst. With Daniel Campbell and Oliver Cormican having mechanical issues this event could shape the outcome of the modified title from now on in

In the specialist category David Hawthorne took maximum points after a frantic last run which deprived Jim Hutchinson of the lead he had. Third went to Steven Hawthorne who also fought hard all day with round 1 winner Scott McMullan. Interestingly it shows how hard these guys were all pushing as Jim, Scott and at least 1 of the chuckle brothers all attempted a bit of gardening at some point in the day. I did see Jims little excursion and it was impressive. Torville scored him a 9.5 and Dean rated him a 9.3 so a little room for improvement there Jim! I`ll not repeat what The grass maintenance attendant said lol

The road going category reverted to a bit of a retro look today when Andrew Robb topped the time sheets for the first time in a while. Even with a bit of time off Andrew showed that he hadn`t lost any of his flair as he pushed hard all day. Conor Hamill

was also pushing very hard and finished a mere 1.63 secs behind Andrew. As an indication of the pace these 2 lads were on Andrew Finished 19th overall and Conor 20th overall!!! Third in road going went to the hard charging Crawford Ewing who has taken to the new Meganne like a duck to Water. Its great to see our road going category so closely fought this year.

In the Heaslip Ladies Challenge Catherine Donnelly took her maiden Category win as she pedalled her little delta to 15th overall. With the ladies times being calculated using a factor, determined by the ladies performance it was great to see that when factored times were calculated there was only 0.54 secs between Catherine in front and second placed Sheryl McBride, and a further 0.36secs between Sheryl and third placed Amy Hawthorne who pipped Emma Campbell to fourth by a mere 0.65 secs corrected. Ruth Nugent finished 5th ahead of Cathy McDade but both these ladies have only ever done 2 sprints in their respective cars so their factors are still to be fully calculated. In total the top 3 ladies were separated by a total of 1.55 secs on corrected time!!! Now that's close.

Catherine's win now means that every registered Heaslip ladies Challenge competitor has now won at least 1 event which is great to see. It also shows that no matter whether you're in the fastest car in the paddock or the slowest car, the factored times brings everyone together against each other which leads for a level and close battle. So close in fact that 3 of the ladies are now tied on the same number of points in the overall ladies challenge, and when you consider that Catherine did 1 round less it's even tighter. Dropped scores are going to make a massive difference here at year end and rest assured whichever lady wins this really really deserves it as they will have driven their socks off all year to win it!!

For some the most important category is the fastest mini in the west. Once again this went to Karl Johnstone who, is driving the wheels off his little mini. Gerry McGarrity finished second and Gary Milligan was not out to play so sadly there was no one for Gerry to wind up on Saturday. Whilst mentioning Gerry, it was great to see him back out again after he missed the last round. Keep well Gerry and see you in a fortnight!!

Well, as I've mentioned above the next round is scheduled to take place at Nutts Corner on 02 April, hosted by North Ulster Car Club. Entries filled very quickly and it's a capacity entry plus reserves so is shaping up to be a good day. North ulster are also planning on using their "longer loop" circuit which includes a very technical infield section so this will sort the men from the boys and the ladies for the girls.

See you all on 02 April.

Now for the class battles:

Class 1 – Road Cars up to 1700cc

Class 1 continued to be a close battle again today and again Mark Brogan was in the middle of the battle. Today however Alan Wallace took the class win a mere 1.54 secs ahead of the hard charging Mark Brogan. Kathy McDade took third in her civic which she is struggling to come to terms with, although she is improving steadily. Speaking

to Cathy she is still learning the need to carry speed in the bends as the Honda doesn't have as much straight line grunt as her previous Leon had.

Class 2a – Road cars over 1700cc

As I mentioned above Andrew Robb returned to the championship again and also returned to the top of the class with a steady run to 19th overall and a class and category win. Conor Hamill however didn't make it easy for him and pushed him hard all Day. Conor seems to be more comfortable in this BMW M3 which is a lot lighter and more manageable than the BMW M3 V8 he campaigned last year. I also note that Conor did his fastest run on his third run which is just after I spoke with him in the pit lane obviously me angering him in the way I did helped him on the timesheets?? Only joking Conor. Third went to Crawford Ewing in his Renault Megane which is new to him this season. The Megane is heavier than his Clio and a lot different to drive but Crawford doesn't seem phased by it. As we worked our way down the class results it's clear that things are close in class 2a. Third to 11th in class were all separated by only 13 secs and no one was any more than 2 secs faster than the person behind them. This is great to see and great to watch as it shows that there's plenty of competition up and down the class.

Class 2b – Road cars Mazda MX5

Paul Magill returned to his winning ways today in the Mazda MX5 class taking the class win by a mere 0.87 secs from George McMillan and Kevin McNamee a mere 0.17 secs behind George. The Mazda class is another close which sadly doesn't get as many entries as it should which is surprising when you consider the number of Mazda MX5's in the country.

Class 3 – Road cars specialist Production cars 4wd

Alfred Robb picked up where he left off from Nutts corner in his stunning Yaris to take another class win. This time however he had someone to play with, in fact 2 of them as team Grady made their season debut in their Subaru Imprezza. After a lot of inter family banter, abuse and craic Paul took the family battle win over Tony with only 1.46 secs between them at the end. Had Tony only eaten the 1 fry for breakfast, and had the beans, it may have been a different outcome!! (That's me in line for a slap)

Class 5 – Road cars specialist Production cars

Up until a couple of days before the event class 5 was going to be a Richard Munnis only affair until Ashley Lamont secured an entry. Sadly Ashley's day didn't go to plan and he didn't set a timed run. Richard however did and finished up 18th overall and first in class. Last year class 5 was massive but for whatever reason it has dropped off again. Andy Hawthorne will return for the next event at Nutts corner to keep Richard honest and these 2 fellas will have a clinker of a battle between themselves as the season continues!

Class 6a Modified Cars – Series Production cars 8v

Class 6a was low on entries today with some of the regular drivers not being out for various reasons, however those who were out were on form. Special congratulations has to go to Karl Johnstone who celebrated a milestone birthday with a clinker of a result. Karl finished up 31st overall and won the class. I won't mention his age but his car needs to be in second gear to achieve that speed and it would be equal to the speed limit if towing a trailer on a single carriageway (no he's not 90). Karl has now reached the age where he needs to start slowing down a bit. Anyway, now that I've slagged poor Karl off Chris Nicholl continued his run of great form to finish second a mere 4.01 secs behind Karl. Chris has really got to terms with his wee mini and with the kind of times he's been posting this year, he will be smack bang in the middle of the class 6a battles all year. Third went to James Schofield on his little 205 gti. This is one of the smartest 205's I've seen in a long time and James is getting to grips with it after upgrading to it from his class 1 Honda civic. James is another who will slot right into the middle of any class 6a battle.

Class 6b Modified Cars – Series Production cars 16v

Class 6b was all about the Colbert's today as both Stephen and Ken topped the class. Stephen only completed 1 timed run then had to leave to go to Nutts Corner but that 1 run was more than sufficient to take the class honours by 4.5 seconds from his father Ken in the family Sunbeam. Stephens winning run of 112.56 also clinched him the modified category and 16th overall which is impressive going. Third went to impressive newcomer Gareth Blaine in his ford focus ST who is finally getting to grips with this car which was much better suited to the large open straights of Kirkistown than the tight twisty confines of Nutts corner. Gareth pipped Martin by a mere 1.19 secs as Dessie gets faster and faster in his Honda Civic. Andrew Kernohan, James light body and Ruth Nugent rounded out the class in that order

Class 7 Modified Specialist Production Cars 2WD.

Business resumed for David Hawthorne as he returned to the top of the class 7 time sheets, but it wasn't made easy for him. Scott McMullan and Steven Hawthorne both pushed him hard but David took the class win by 2.63 secs in the end. However this does not tell the full tale. Scott set the leading time in run 1 with a clinker of a 109.72. Stephen went second with a 110.25 sec run and then, whilst trying to catch them David got bored and decided to do a bit of auto testing and did a 360 around an invisible cone on his way to the finish line!! The 3 boys fought hard all afternoon and Scott set off on his last run with 1 thing on his mind and he was well on his way to achieving his second class win in a row until he went off at the chicane and tried his hand at silage contracting. So if anyone owns a lawnmower business, Scott's the boy to promote it for you. In the end David won the class from Steven Hawthorne with Scott McMullan third. Graham Boyce kept them all honest to finish fourth a mere 1.58 secs behind Scott. Trevor Roberts debuted his new car but sadly a mechanical issue side-lined him during practice so we didn't get to see how Trevor could mix it with the class 7 boys

Class 8 Sports Libre cars Special Saloons

At last on Saturday we had more than 2 RSR Escorts out at the same time. We had Rory, Stephens, Richie O`Mahoney and Jim Hutchinson all out in their cars. There's at least 2 more of these in the country and I reckon that if we could get Gerard out to play in his and Pat Roche out in his at the same time as these 3 then we would have an almighty battle. Anyway we didn't have them all out but we still had a good battle. Jim Hutchinson took the class with a 105.25 which saw him finish 7th overall, first car with a roof and only 0.12secs behind the Specialist category winner. Rory Stephens snaked his way to second in class and 12th overall in his RSR finishing 5.01 secs behind Jim and ahead of third placed Richie O`Mahoney Snr in his RSR. All in these three lads had a ball of craic on Saturday and if there was an award for the best presented cars in a class their class would win it. Obviously, and for the record this is based on the cars and in no way reflects the drivers lol

Class 9a Sports Libre cars Saloons and GT`s

On Saturday morning Daniel Campbell would have been the bookies favourite to take class 9a again and continue his dominant run however things never go to plan and a rare mechanical issue meant that Daniel only did 1 slow timed run. Whilst this was unfortunate for him it gave others a chance to shine and Damien Corey jumped at the opportunity in his little mini. Damien took a class win 4.3 secs ahead of Emma Campbell, who was 0.51 secs ahead of Jason Fraser in his metro. Daniel rounded the pack out and still managed to bag some much needed championship points into the bargain. Looking at the times there was never any more than 0.6 secs between Emma and Jason all day as Jason learns the car at every event. I predict a close battle between these 3 drivers as the season progresses. Hopefully Daniel gets his issues sorted before the next event in Nutts Corner in 2 weeks.

Class 9b Sports libre Closed wheel sports racing cars.

Once again poor Sheryl was left alone in class 9b as no one came out to play. However this doesn't bother Sheryl as she progressively went faster all day dropping down to a 124.82 sec run in the end. After Nutts corner, it's good to see Sheryl's confidence increasing again as she piloted her little global to 37th overall and second in the Heaslip Ladies Challenge

Class 10 Sports libre Cars – small capacity Rally cars

Class 10 saw something of a rarity today when Dermot O`Hagan managed to beat Alan Roddy's long time unbeaten run. Dermot and Alan pushed hard all day but Dermot's first run of the day proved unbeatable for Alan. So far both these drivers have raised their game, and dropped their times as a result of the close competition between them. This can only be good for us. Third went to Andrew Strain who has completely transformed his 205 since his slight off at Nutts Corner 2 weeks previously. The car now looks stunning in white and Andrew was going well to beat fourth placed Brian little who spent all day laughing in his Escort G3. Brian, for this event transformed his car from Forestry spec to tarmac spec and put some new tyres on and had a ball. It's great to see someone coming to the sport and having so much fun. He tells me that John Donnelly persuaded him to start sprinting!! Alan Griffith

was also out in class 10 in his escort but was sadly side-lined after a mechanical issue. It's great to see class 10 having a bit of a resurgence as rally cars now come to play in the rally classes and hopefully we can attract a few more.

Class 11 Sports libre Cars – large capacity Rally cars

Unusually we had a rather large entry in class 11 today as well with 5 cars starting. Norman Armstrong made a welcome return to the sport in his escort Mk2 and Richie O'Mahoney Jnr brought his Escort Mk2 out as well, to bolster the entry of Derek Robinson in his new Talbot Sunbeam, Albert McClenaghan in his Sierra and Kevin McLaughlin in his nova. Norman and Richie pushed hard all day and Richie ended up runner up to hard charging Norman by a mere 0.05 secs at the end. Richie had been having fun all day and sliding about and perhaps this is where he lost that 0.05 secs? Third in class went to Derek Robinson who is still learning his Sunbeam and getting faster each time out, Abert McClenahan finished fourth and sadly Kevin didn't make the timed runs due to another mechanical issue. I hear round the paddock that the class 11 numbers should be swelling again soon as Both Stewart Strain and Jaye Nevin are nearing the completion of the winter fettles and both hope to be out again soon. If class numbers keep up, as they are at present class 11, like class 10 will continue to grow as rally cars hopefully will continue to populate the rally car classes making the action even tighter and the fun even better!!

Class 12 4WD sports Libre Cars

Again class 12 has taken a bit of a drop off in numbers after a very busy class in 2021. None the less Olive Cormican continues to be the constant in class 12 as he took another class win today. However Oliver had a mare of a day as his alternator packed in and he only managed 1 slow run to bag points. Fair play Oliver. Unfortunately Oliver has had poor luck lately and hopefully his run of bad luck will end soon.

Class 13 Formula Racing cars

Mike Todd once again came to play and threw everything on its head. Mike took an emphatic class win over the hard charging Henry Campbell by a mere 2.09 secs. Third went to Nicholas Todd, who I see heeded the polite warning that it was considered cheeky to borrow someone's car and then beat them in it. However I suspect it's only a matter of time before we see Nicholas at the top of the class times. Fourth but no means least went to the hard charging Stephen Wishart who was there with his SERC Motorsport students who run the swift for him.

Class 14 small Capacity Racing Cars

Class 14 has really turned the wick up for 2022 and George Stevenson has really pushed this forward. George took his second class win on Saturday with a 106.44 sec run which put him eight overall. Thomas Corey secured a superb second a mere 1.44 secs ahead of third placed Catherine Donnelly. Sadly neither Brian Fitzmaurice nor John McNamarra managed to complete a timed run but hopefully both will be back out again soon. I do know that when Brian and George go head to head class 14 will be very close as both drivers are brilliant pilots and both will push each other on. I not even attempt to predict a winner here.

Class 15 large Capacity Racing Cars

Class 15 has once again been rehearsed in the main body of the report but Robert Dwane took the class win and FTD by 1.76 secs from Alan Cassells. Third went to the hard charging Tim Woodside who pipped Simon Woodside by a mere 0.38secs and Simon snatched fourth ahead of John Donnelly by a mere 0.06 secs, which shows just how close class 15 was. It's great to see 2 Woodside's on the timesheets again in Pilbeams. It's been a long time since this famous livery graced the start lines and both Simon and Tim are keen to do as full a season as they can. This can only be good for the championship!!

Class 16a Historic Road Cars

Gerry McGarrity took class honour again in his mini ahead of Bill Blair in another mini. Ian Paget pushed his mini to third in class just ahead of Mervyn Getty in the big Sebring MG. David Cochrane had mechanical woes all day and finished fifth ahead of Ian McCullough in his Lotus Elan. As always class 16a has an emphatic mix of cars and the pace is unreal. Some of these fellas need to remember just how nice their cars are as they are just too good to be being driven like hooligans. However as they would all tell you, they're race cars not display cars. Built to be raced not looked at and that's very true too!

Class 16b Historic Saloons and Sport scars

Robert Coulter debuted his newly built Lotus Cortina on Saturday and took the class win. Robert has never competed in a full championship in any form of motorsport so hopefully this class win on the cars debut will be sufficient to encourage him to break hi championship duck in our fabulous championship!!