

Saturday 16 March saw the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship visit Kirkistown as the 500MRCI hosted the second round of the 2019 Sprint Championship. Heavy rain overnight cast an early doubt over the event as the only people relishing the conditions were the family of ducks who had taken up residence at the approach to colonial. However those in charge had other ideas. A brave decision was taken to delay start times for an hour before which a working party was dispatched to clear the standing water which they successfully did.

After the initial delay practice commenced just after 11 am and once the event started it continued like an express train with the paddock marshals keeping the competitors coming thick and fast.

The first timed runs saw some very interesting times as Steven Hawthorne went fastest overall with a blinding run of 111.92 secs in his little Suzuki powered Westfield. Trevor Roberts was second in his bike engine Jedi with Jo Courtney third in his Dallara. With conditions improving the second timed runs saw a large drop in times as Joe Courtney went top with a run of 101.39secs – 11.17 faster than his previous run. As the track continued to dry the third runs commenced and Alan Cassells took a radical sized lump out of everyones time and went top of the time sheets. Unfortunately for Alan both Joe Courtney and Adrian Pollock had different ideas and both drivers set blinding runs to take the lead away from Alan.

2018 Northern Ireland Sprint Champion Adrian Pollock set a final run of 93.77 secs which gave him the event win with Joe Courtney second with a run of 96.57 secs and Alan Cassells third with a 99.87 sec run. Alan however claimed the bragging rights for the fastest speed trap speed of 136mph. This is impressive when you consider that this was his first event in his new car in which he has had very little seat time.

Gerard O`Connell took the modified Category win in his RSR Escort with a fastest time of 103.99 seconds which put him 7<sup>th</sup> overall with Thomas Purdy being the next “tin top” behind Gerard in 11<sup>th</sup> overall. In the battle for road going honours Andrew Robb piloted his M3 to another class and category win with a final run time of 116.7secs and 17<sup>th</sup> overall. The most impressive thing was that Andrews first timed run was only 1 second slower and after the first timed run he was 7<sup>th</sup> overall and 5<sup>th</sup> fastest through the speed traps in the damper conditions. You must remember that Andrew runs in the Road going class and therefore was on road tyres.

Some other noticeable drives during the day were those by Dermot O`Hagan who placed his swift little Civic 15<sup>th</sup> overall, Ryan Campbell who took 10<sup>th</sup> overall in his Reynard FF89 formula ford and Scott McMullan who piloted his dads locost to a stunning 12<sup>th</sup> overall with his fastest run being his first timed run.

The next round of the championship will take place at Nutts Corner on 06 April and it promises to be a fantastic event as Adrian Pollock will be looking to take another win as he tries to close in on the current championship leader Joe Courtney. Steven Gault who won the first round at Nutts corner will also be one to watch as he trails Joe by only 1 point currently and with a win at Nutts Corner in the bag already this year Steven will be hard to beat. There are a few others who could also put the cat amongst the pigeons on 06 April.

In terms of the fastest Mini in the west, Karl Johnston took the honours today from Gary Milligan so with a win apiece its all square in that little contest with bragging rights in Karls favour this weekend.

Class 1 production cars up to 1700cc – James Schofield took the class win in his Honda Civic from Andrew Straney and Rudy Tate was third in the MX 5 they share. Its safe to say that Rudy and Andrew were having great fun as they threw their mx5 about and revelled in the greasy conditions. James and Andrew are now joint top of the class 1 championship

Class 2 – Production cars over 1700cc. Andrew Robb continued his winning form in his BMW M3 and finished 2.32 seconds ahead of Stephen Donnelly in his clio. Michael Clarke was third in his Lotus Elise. Class 2 also saw John “Hammy” Hamilton duel enter his car with Alan Finlay and Newcomer Adam Stewart doing his first ever sprint in his little 1.3 Toyota Starlett. Andrew Robb now has a 4 point lead over Michael Clarke with Chris Rogan third in the class 2 championship.

Class 5 – Specialist Roadgoing Richard Munnis had a lonely drive to take the class win with a time that placed him 14<sup>th</sup> overall. Richard now has a 6 point lead at the top of the class 5 championship.

Class 6a – Modified Series Production cars 8v. David Strain continued his winning form with a class win ahead of Karl Johnston and Jonathan Strain was third. David also managed another giant killing performance to finish up 18<sup>th</sup> overall. David now has a 3 point championship lead from Nephew Jonathan Strain with Gary Milligan third. Sadly David Evans had to retire his 205 after first practice after a small tear was luckily spotted in his timing belt.

Class 6b – Modified Series Production Cars 16v – Dermot O`Hagan took 15<sup>th</sup> overall on his way to the class win finishing ahead of Colin Dines and Steven Robb in their clios. Steven Robbs third place was enough to give him the class Championship lead by 1 point from Colin Dines with Dermot O`Hagan third.

Class 7 – Modified Specialist Production Cars – David Hawthorne took the class win as well as the title of fastest Hawthorne, as he beat his brother Steven with Scott McMullan proving that youth can, on occasion, beat experience as he finished third ahead of his father David McMullan. As usual with the Hawthorne twins there is nothing between them at the top of the class championship and they are both tied on 9 points with a win and a second place each. Scott McMullan Is third.

Class 9a Libre Saloons saw Gerard O`Connell continue his winning ways as he took another class win in what turned out to be a lonely drive for him in his RSR Escort. Gerard`s fastest run of 103.99 put him 7<sup>th</sup> overall and fastest saloon and fastest Modified car.

Class 9b Closed wheel sports libre – Alan Cassells took the class win on his first event in his new radical. Alan who lead the event for a while finished up third overall and leads the class championship from Sheryl McBride who debuted her new Global GT yesterday and took second in class.

Class 10 – Small rally car class. Alan Roddy took class honours in his Saxo from Phillip Gault in his Nova. Phillip, in his first season Sprinting is getting the hang of his lovely wee Nova and hopefully will get a dry event soon. Alan Leads the class Championship from Phillip.

Class 11 – Large Rally Class. Thomas Purdy took class honours in his escort from Stewart Strain and his 205. Its good to see Stewart back out again after a lay off of 3 seasons.

Class 12 – 4WD Rally cars. Basil Barnes took class honours in his Mitsubishi Evo which is prepared and run by Students from SERC `s Motorsport Course. Basil had a lonely drive as regular competitor Oliver Cormican was at the Ireland Rugby Match. Oliver and Basil are now equal at the top of the class championship.

Class 13 – Formula Racing Cars. Ryan Campbell took class honours 5.5secs ahead of his father Henry Campbell. Ryan had a fabulous drive and was 10<sup>th</sup> Overall. Ian Maple took third in class ahead of Willie Mckee. Ryan's win yesterday puts him 3<sup>rd</sup> in the class championship 1 point behind Ian Maple and 4 behind his father Henry.

Class 14 – Small Racing cars – Trevor Roberts took a lonely class win after and 6<sup>th</sup> overall in the little Jedi Kawasaki. Trevor's first timed run time had him 2<sup>nd</sup> overall as his wealth of Karting success and experience allowed him to pilot this little jedi in the damp as if it was on rails. Trevor leads this class championship now by 6 points from Catherine Donnelly.

Class 15 All other Race cars. Adrian Pollock took the class win, and FTD in his Dallara F301 with Joe Courtney second and Rory Stephens third. As the season develops this is going to be a fabulous class to watch as Joe Courtney has a 1 point lead from Steven Gault with Adrian Pollock third 2 points behind Steven. This class will go right to the wire this year.

Class 16 A Road Going Historics . Ian McCullough was another who had a lonely run to class honours in his lovely Lotus Elan. Ian now leads the class championship.

Class 16B Non Road Going Historics – Arthur Ovens drove his little Midget to class honours in a lonely class drive.

As always thanks must go out to everyone who made the event happen and especially to the hard efforts of Wilson Carson and Fel McIlroy for persevering with the weather and going above and beyond to get the event running in such poor weather conditions on Saturday morning.

See you all on 06 April at Nutts corner

