

Round 5 Report Kirkistown 03August 2019

Saturday 03 August saw the 5th Round of the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship at Kirkistown circuit. As usual a bumper entry of 82 drivers lined up to contest the event, which also was round 11 of the SBD Motorsport British Sprint Championship.

With the weather forecast showing a great morning with a slight chance of rain practice got under way around 10 am and the high speed antics commenced. After an uneventful practice session, the timed runs started around 1230 as predicted.

As the first timed runs commenced a series of dark clouds rolled in and a few spits of rain fell. With no serious rain forecast for the weekend no one batted an eyelid until the heavens opened. Infact it would be safe to say that the heavens opening was an understatement.

After a fabulous run local roadgoing competitor Michael Robb topped the timesheets in his BMW M3. He remained there almost throughout the run and only 6 of the single seaters managed to beat his time. That is some going when you consider he was in a road going car on road going tyres. He finished 7th overall in the first runs by my reckoning.

Whilst it may appear somewhat corny to quote a famous saying "the always cream rises to the top" this was certainly the case in the first runs. With the circuit struggling to cope with the deluge of rainfall which fell in such a short period of time Adrian Pollock appeared on the startline on a set of slicks!!!! A local competitor, who is famous for his very public wrong weather predictions, was heard on the start line asking, as he left the line in a cloud of spray, if Adrian was clean mad or if he knew something that no one else did

It appeared that Adrian did know something as he stormed off to set a phenomenal run of 131.96 secs which put him to the top of the time sheets in his Dallara GM F301. Adrian`s speed trap speed was 96 mph on his second lap, on slicks in the pouring rain!!!!

As the day continued circuit conditions improved and as the track dried up the times tumbled, however the local competitors remained fully in control.

After 3 timed runs Adrian Pollock topped the time sheets with a time of 113.88 secs, a mere 0.85 secs in front of second placed man Steven Gault in his Reynard 903. Southern Irish Formula Boss competitor Barry Rabbit took third in his beautifully presented Tatuus Renault.

With the overall win Adrian further increased his lead of the Northern Ireland Championship by 1 point from Steven Gault who was second on the day and second

in the championship. A strong 6th place finish netted Mr Consistency himself, Joe Courtney, championship points for third place which sees him remain third in the championship 5 points ahead of fourth placed Trevor Roberts who continues to drive his little 1.1 Jedi way beyond the pace you would expect this little pocket rocket to fulfil.

In terms of the modified championship contenders Gerard O`Connell was fastest of the modified contenders in his beautiful Escort Mk1 which still adorned stickers from his recent trip to St Guenno Hillclimb in France. Gerard set a fabulous time of 127.77 secs which saw him finish 17th overall. Oliver Cormican took second place honours in his flying Mitsubishi Evo with a run time of 132.04 which saw him finish 24th overall and Stewart Strain took the honours of third modified car in his Peugeot 205. Sadly Dermot O`Hagan, who has taken this years modified championship by storm in his civic, had a disappointing day after engine woes sidelined him in first practice.

In terms of the modified championship Oliver Cormican remains solid at the top with a 6 point lead over second placed Gerard O`Connell. Dermot drops to third 3 points behind Gerard. To further enhance the excitement in the modified championship the top 3 drivers are all still to marshal and Gerard and Dermot have now dropped 2 scores whereas Oliver has only dropped 1 score. So its still very close at the top, and then of course you have David Strain in the mix in his Peugeot 205, 1 point behind Dermot.

In the battle for the roadgoing series Andrew Robb took top honours again in his BMW M3. Andrews fastest run of 141.34 put him 38th overall and 7.3 secs ahead of second placed Stephen Donnelly in his clio. Alfred Robb took third in the Roadgoing series in the family BMW. Andrew leads the roadgoing championship with a perfect score of 28. Andrew has a 10 point lead over Alfred Robb and Aaron Vance remains third in his Clio, 10 points adrift of Alfred. With Andrew already having 28 of the 38 possible points available in the roadgoing championship it's safe to say that Andrew is extending his hand towards this particular prize and he will be hard to put off.

In terms of the Historics Stephen Strain took historic honours in his Mark 1 Escort from Gerry McGarrity in his mini with Mervyn Getty third in his MGB GT.

As the season continues it is becoming apparent that none of these historic drivers drive their cars in a way which is fitting for an older car to be driven. Stephen Strain put in a performance, especially in the wet, that Ken Block would be proud of as he slithered the Escort around the track going from lock to lock with his foot firmly planted to the floor. At one point his helmet struggled to contain his smile. Gerry, as always, was thrashing his poor little mini to within an inch of its life and is rumoured to have moved the front drivers headlight 6 inches further forward to allow him some extra toe room as he continues to push the mini to the max.

In the much coveted battle for the fastest Mini in the west Gary Milligan took the honours with a fine drive which saw him finish 2.65 secs ahead of Gerry. Sadly Karl

Johnston had mechanical issues which saw him drop out of the local battle during practice.

As mentioned at the top, this event was also Round 11 of the SBD Motorsport, British Sprint Championship and it attracted 11 competitors to make the short trip across the Irish Sea. Going into this round Peter Goulding was leading this years British Sprint Championship in his Mygale F200.

Under British Championship rules competitors complete 2 timed runs and then the fastest 10 go head to head in a run off, where they get 2 runs to set the fastest time starting with the slowest qualifying car going first and the fastest car starting last.

John Loudon started the run offs and set a run time of 124.73secs. Next up was Mark Anston and then the rest of the run off competitors took their runs. Sadly Graham Porrett had to abort his run off after mechanical gremlins intervened. Peter Goulding then went fastest before Colin Calder launched himself off the start line in his 3.9 Gould single seater. Sadly Colin was unable to complete his run after a major off at debtors which saw one of the biggest accidents witnessed in Sprinting in many years. Thankfully Colin was uninjured but the car was badly damaged. John Graham took maximum points with Peter Goulding second and Nick Algar third.

In terms of the classes

Class 1 Roadgoing cars up to 1700

Scottish competitor Michael Sutherland took class honours in class 1 in his beautiful Mark 1 Ford Fiesta 4.19 secs ahead of local driver James Schofield in his Honda Civic. Andrew Straney once again piped Rudy Tate to third in class in the Mazda MX5 they share. Andrew Straney still leads class 1 by 6 points from James Schofield with Rudy Tate 2 points further adrift. James has 1 dropped round so far whereas Andrew and Rudy have no dropped rounds so this class is still very open and all is still to play for.

Class 2 Road going cars over 1700cc

For class 2 please see previous event reports, as once again Andrew Robb set a blistering pace to take class honours by 7.3 seconds from second placed Stephen Donnelly in his clio. Alfred Robb narrowly pipped Michael Clarke by 0.16 secs to third place. In terms of the Championship Andrew Robbs maximum score of 28 points is 9 points ahead of second placed Michael Clarke with Alfred Robb third on 15 points.

Class 5 Road Going Specialist Production cars

Richard Munnis took another great class win from second placed James Perry with a gap of 13.09seconds after 3 runs. Championship wise Richard Munnis has a virtually un catchable lead of 21 points over second placed Gardiner McIlwaine. If I were Richard Munnis I'd be starting to celebrate.

Class 6a Modified Production 8V

Once again David Strain dominated class 6a in a class where, this season Peugeot 205`S are hard to beat. The third runs proved very important in this class battle as Jonathan Strain found a whopping 7.91 secs to take second place from eventual third place driver David Evans, with Gary Milligan a further 1.34 secs back in his mini. In terms of the Championship David Strain has a 1 point lead over nephew Johnathan with Gary Milligan a further 3 points back in third. Once dropped scores and marshalling rounds are considered this class becomes very tight as David Strain still has to marshal and he and Johnathan have 1 round each to drop, Gary still has 2 scores to drop and David Evans has marshalled and has 2 dropped rounds so this will be an exciting championship run in.

Class 6b Modified Production Multivalve

Championship leader Dermot O`Hagan suffered a fairly substantial engine failure in practice which will seriously hinder his Modified championship run. Ken Colbert however took maximum advantage and took a solid class win with a 2.35 sec lead over David Clarke in his 2.0 Golf. Championship regular Andrew Kernohan took a superb 3rd in class in between filming and photographing the event as well. I often wonder how Andrew gets time to drive the car on events as you always see him recording the action. In some ways the driving is like a distraction to him.

Ken Colbert`s class win on Saturday sees him close the title gap to 2 points with Dermot still on top. Third place in the championship is still with Andrew Robb who wasn't competing on Saturday. I have a strong suspicion that this year's prize giving will see Kenny Colbert collecting a championship award for the first time in many years. It is, in my opinion a great reflection on how popular the Sprint Championship is when past champions like Ken Colbert are making an appearance again. I also noticed former Champion Dennis Biggerstaff walking around the paddock on Saturday. Was this coincidence or a sign of things to come???? It's also great to see that Ken hasn't lost his flair behind the wheel and he is definitely getting faster with every event. Now who remembers Ken in his 205??????

Class 7 Modified Specialist Cars

This class will be renamed "the Hawthorne's" next year as the vast majority of entrants are either Hawthorne`s or related to the Hawthorne's. Therefore its only right that "The Hawthorne's" finished 1st and 2nd in class. This time David took the nod over Stephen by 3.79secs. This is one of the biggest gaps I've seen between the 2 brothers who are usually separated by tenths of a second. Third place went to

Scott McMullan who has been in superb form this season. Scott finished 5.19 secs ahead of his dad David in the family Locost.

Championship wise David has a 2 point lead over brother Stephen and now has bragging rights to say that he is the faster brother. David McMullan has the upper hand on his son Scott in the championship battle and leads Scott by 2 points although Scott has 1 dropped round already so David may get his foot down to maintain this advantage as the season enters the final straight.

Class 8b Libre Saloon over 1400cc

Mark Madine had a lonely drive to a class win with a time of 151.23 in this class in his 1.8 Mini.

Class 9a Libre Saloons

Dungiven`s Gerard O`Connell piloted his lovely Mk1 Escort to another class win. Despite Gerard having no one to play with in his class he still set some brilliant times to finish 17th overall and he now leads his class by 15 points, is second in the Modified championship and 5th in the overall championship. I watched Gerard attack the back kart chicane in the wet on his first timed run and his commitment was unreal. He came into the chicane with all 4 wheels locked having timed his braking to perfection before setting the car up for a class drift through, and then out of the chicane. You had to see it to believe it.

Class 9b Libre Sports cars

Eamon Matheson proved to be the man to beat in this class after class championship leader Alan Cassells had another mare of a day with his radical. In the class which seemed to collect all the fast but unusual cars on Saturday Eamon took a fabulous class win and 4th overall in his homebuilt 20T MM3. Yes thats correct, Eamon built his incredibly quick machine himself in his shed. Anyone who knows local Motorsport will remember Eamons previous reputation for building a quick motor and then turbo charging it and this one is no different, although in this instance he has taken quick to a whole new level. Second went to a well deserved Lee Kirkwood in his Radical SR3. Lee has been slowly getting to grips with his radical and with some more seat time he will be hard to work with. Third went to Simon Bainbridge in his 4.2 SBR Crono. This car has to be seen, and heard, to be believed. It originally started out as an Audi TT and now resembles something from Gotham city, but boy can it go!! Its twin turbo Audi V8 engine has a sound of its own as it accelerates and Simon Bainbridge throws it about like a mini through the chicanes. I suspect he has had some tips from Gerry McGarrity.

Championship wise Alan Cassells has a 6 point lead over Sheryl McBride with Gerard O`Connell third.

Class 10 – small rally cars

Raymond Johnston took class honours in his immaculate MK2 Escort with a 10.3 sec lead over Noel Conachy s Honda Civic. With neither man being championship registered Alan Roddys 7 point lead over Phillip Roddy remains unaffected.

Class 11 – Larger rally cars

Stewart strain took class honours here in a lonely run to 30th overall and 3rd fastest modified. More importantly though he took the honour of being the fastest Strain which is the most important result in the Strain family. Stewart now leads this class in the overall standings.

Class 12 – All other 4wd Sports libre cars.

Another driver with no one to play with this weekend was Oliver Cormican in his EVO. Despite feeling a tad lonely Oliver finished 24th overall and was second in the modified battle which sees him lead the class and modified championships. As a bit of a spoiler alert, Oliver was seen and photographed sitting in a single seater on Saturday..... and was then heard to say “boys don’t tempt me”. Personally Id be disappointed to see Oliver in a single seater as his driving style in the EVO is great to watch and he wouldn’t be as spectacular in an single seater. Or would he???

Class 13 Series Racing cars

Ryan Campbell once again upset the apple cart and took a 3.27sec win from his father Henry in their formula fords. Third went to Phillip Harris who pushed hard on his third run to try and catch Henry. Ian Maple was fourth in his Mondiale which is getting more competitive every event. Ryans win sees him close the gap on his dad to 7 points but Henry still leads the class tables by 5 points from Ian Maple with Ryan third. Dropped scores will be very relevant here.

Class 14 Small Capacity racing cars

Trevor Roberts continued his winning ways to take his third class win of the year in his Jedi from Ryan McGimpsey who was second in his 1.3 Jedi 1.57secs behind Trevor. Third went to George Stevenson who lead fourth placed man Brian Fitzmaurice home by 2.48 seconds. Championship wise Trevor Roberts 10 point lead over Ryan McGimpsey will be hard to beat and Lewis Wilson is snapping at Ryan’s heels 1 point behind in third. Again dropped scores will be a major factor here as Trevor has 1 round dropped already whereas Ryan missed the first 3 rounds so it is all to play for.

Class 15 All other racing cars

As I said above Adrian showed why he preferred Motorsport to golf when he headed off on his first timed run on slicks, in the wet, to take the overall lead, a position which he didn't relinquish. Steven Gault was a very close second only 0.85 seconds behind Adrian with Barry Rabbit third in his 2.0 Tatuus Renault. The fastest of the visiting British Championship competitor was fourth placed John Graham in his 3.5 Gould GR55B. Its only when you consider that Both Adrian and Steven have nearly half the cubic Capacity and an awful lot less horsepower than John Graham that you realise just how well the top 3 local drivers drove to get these results.

Adrian has a 3 point lead in the class championship and a 4 point lead in the overall championship from Steven Gault with both drivers having 1 additional round to drop. The battle between these 2 drivers has been nip and tuck all season and will be great to watch as it unfolds.

Class 16 Historic Saloons

Stephen Strain was fastest Historic on the day beating Gerry McGarrity by 4.91 secs. Mervyn Getty was third in his MGB GT a mere 0.28 secs ahead of Ian McCullough.

Ian McCullough is joint top with 16 points in the championship battle with Mervyn Getty. Gerry McGarrity is third with 13 points.

The next and sixth round of the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship will take place o 14 September in Kirkistown, hosted by Larne Motor Club. See you all there.