



Hankook MSA Northern Ireland Stage Rally Championship

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Kenny McKinstry is 2011 Hankook MSA N.I. Rally Champion!



Kenny McKinstry and Kenny Hull in their Subaru Impreza WRC during the 2011 Fisher Engineering Lakeland Stages Rally. photo by Martin McCorriston.

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Kenny McKinstry has sealed the 2011 Hankook MSA Northern Ireland Rally Championship title!

Victory at last weekend's Fisher Engineering Lakeland Stages Rally saw the Banbridge driver secure his sixth maximum points haul of the season, and with it, the prestigious 2011 title.

His tally of 72 points has put the title beyond reach of his rivals. Second in the standings, George Robinson, has a total of 41 points. Even if Robinson won the remaining three rounds, he could only manage a maximum haul of 71 points after dropped scores come into play.

McKinstry's success comes more than 20 years after he first won the Northern Ireland Rally Championship. It was in 1988 and 1989 that he claimed his first two titles, and he came close to making it a third in 2009. But Derek McGarrity won on that occasion, forcing McKinstry to wait another two years before he could lay claim to the trophy again.

The Banbridge driver has been in dominating form this season with his Subaru Impreza WRC. Victory at the opening round, held at Co. Down's Kirkistown Race Circuit, was swiftly followed by another win at Bishopscourt just one month later.

Then it was on to the closed roads of the Circuit of Ireland Rally, with the opening day of the event acting as a counting round of the Championship. McKinstry enjoyed an intense battle with former champion Derek McGarrity, with the Banbridge rally ace emerging on top by just 1.6 seconds. Maximum score number three.

The McKinstry steamroller continued at the Tour of the Sperrins and Mourne rallies where he secured his fourth and fifth victories, but with the cancellation of August's Dogleap Rally, he had to wait that little bit longer to put his hands on the title.

Saturday's Lakeland Stages was by no means an easy task for McKinstry and navigator Kenny Hull. Based in the forests surrounding Enniskillen, the Group N Mitsubishi Lancer crew of Donagh Kelly and Kevin Flanagan equalled McKinstry over the opening two stages to share the rally lead.

Then Kelly made the lead his own after the third test, powering ahead of McKinstry by two seconds, while 2010 champions, Stuart Biggerstaff and Anthony Nestor, were just four seconds further adrift in third.

But on the second run through the Ballintempo stage, McKinstry returned fire, swiping seven seconds out of his rivals to propel him into the rally lead. Kelly tried hard to reel him in once again, nibbling one second back after stage six, but on the third and final run through Ballintempo, McKinstry extended his lead by another five seconds.

It was a close run affair, and at the end of the event, McKinstry and Hull secured the win by just 11 seconds, with Donagh Kelly and Kevin Flanagan forced to settle for second.

Kelly also topped the Sunoco Fuels Group N tree, and held the charging Stuart Biggerstaff and Anthony Nestor at bay. Biggerstaff, who borrowed suspension from Seamus Devine to contest the event, secured third overall, 43 seconds ahead of Vivian and Paul Hamill, who enjoyed their first experience of Toyota Corolla WRC power.

In the two-wheel-drive category, Frank Kelly and Sean Ferris were on course to seal the spoils when they entered the final stage, but a fairly hefty rock put paid to their hopes during the closing miles. Instead, Shane McGirr and Niall Connolly were the surprised victors, securing a top 10 position in the process.

The Montgomery Motorsport Historic category saw Andy Johnson and Jim McSherry seal a start to finish win in their Chevette. They headed Tommy O'Connell and Sean Magee from the start, and when O'Connell retired, that left Johnson with a clear run to victory.

Next Event

The overall championship title may have been won but there are still plenty of class battles to fight for over the remaining three rounds of this year's Hankook MSA N.I. Rally series. The action continues with the Omagh based McKelvey Bushwhacker Rally on 24 September. More details can be found online at www.nirally.com.

ENDS.

Top 10 - Fisher Engineering Lakeland Stages

- 1 Kenny McKinstry/Kenny Hull (Impreza WRC) 40m30s
- 2 Donagh Kelly/Kevin Flanagan (Evo 9) 40m41s
- 3 Stuart Biggerstaff/Anthony Nestor (Impreza WRC) 40m59s
- 4 Vivian Hamill/Paul Hamill (Corolla WRC) 41m42s
- 5 Vincent McAree/J.P. McAree (Lancer Evo 9) 41m44s
- 6 Enda McNulty/Paul Sheridan (Impreza) 41m46s
- 7 Stephen Wright/Suzanne Wright (Lancer Evo 6) 42m00s
- 8 Liam Regan/Damien Duffin (Peugeot 206) 42m21s
- 9 Ian Cochrane/Thomas Nugent (Lancer Evo) 43m06s
- 10 Shane McGirr/Niall Connolly (Starlet) 43m06s

Championship Standings (after round 7 of 10)

- 1 Kenny McKinstry 72
- 2 George Robinson 41
- 3 Donagh Kelly 36
- 4 Stuart Biggerstaff 31
- 5 John McGaffin 28
- 6 Neil McCance 24



Full results from all the Hankook MSA Northern Ireland Rally Championship can be found at www.rallyscore.net



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www.nirally.com www.hankook.ie