

## **Flash Bang Wallop**

Saturday 18 March saw the long-awaited start of the 2023 SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship. With the first round cancelled due to circumstances well beyond the control of North Ulster Car Club, it was the 500 MRCI who stepped up to the plate to hold the season opening event.

With a cracking entry of 75 drivers making the trip to Kirkistown on what was a reasonable and initially dry morning everyone was excited to finally get the season under way.

Working through the paddock there were a lot of new names and cars in the paddock which is great to see and even better to see so many returning drivers including those who have been absent for a couple of years. Amongst the new drivers we also had some new cars as well, with the introduction of a class for Motorsport UK Log booked buggies. With new drivers such as Mark McClernon, Chris Nelson, Kevin Meenagh, all in Casmat buggies, Donal Sweeney Ricky McLanon, Harold Bunting, David Kane and Jenny Pollock all making their debuts at this event. Its great to see that this championship continues to look to the future and encourage new drivers to play.

In terms of the event itself, it started off dry and not too cold but sadly the weather deteriorated. An oil slick left by a competitor held up proceedings and by the time this was dressed and action was ready to commence the rain had started. The rain and the oil left the circuit slippery in places and everyone had to drive accordingly. There was a fair amount of rain falling too which didn't help matters leaving the first timed run very wet and the second timed run not just as bad.

Despite the weather Gerard O Connell took the overall win in his Dallara World series car with a clinking 107.61sec run in the conditions which Gerard set on his first run. Second went to a hard charging Ryan Murray who guided his flying Subaru Impreza to second overall a mere 0.09secs adrift of Gerard. Ryan used his 4wd and immense torque to take such a fabulous final place ahead of the Casmat buggy of Mark McClernon with David Kane fourth in his silvercar and Terry McCay fifth in his casmat. Its great to see so many drivers coming from the Rally Sport Association to run with us in the SW Adair Sprint Championship.

In terms of the categories the unofficial title of fastest mini in the west went to Karl Johnston once again. Karl is hoping to lead this title chase this season but rumours circulate that Gary Milligan will appear with a rebuilt engine in an attempt to beat Karl and Gerry once for all as he is sick of being the bride's maid and wishes to move up to being the bride!! Will this make Gerry the flower girl??

The modified category was very tightly contested, and Ryan Murray used his 4wd to secure himself maximum modified category Points ahead of Dan Campbell who was second overall at one point, and Stephen Colbert. The modified category looks as if its going to be hard to secure this year.

In the specialist category Andy Hawthorne stamped his authority on the 5 points available as he proved to be the fastest Hawthorne and fastest specialist driver on the day. Andy pipped son David Hawthorne by 8.77secs to finish 9<sup>th</sup> overall and Specialist category Winner in his Westfield SE, David Hawthorne was second in the category ahead of Mark Crawford who returned to the championship in his lotus exige.

Roadgoing category honours went to Crawford Ewing who proved that the car in front of the roadgoing category was a Renault. Aaron Vance steered his big BMW to second in the category ahead of Stephen Donnelly who debuted his new Renault Twingo

In the Heaslip Ladies Challenge Trophy Amy Hawthorne took class honours in her little Clio finishing a corrected 1.65 secs ahead of Second Placed Emma Campbell. Jenny Pollock made her championship and challenge trophy debut in a Reynard FF1600 and finished third in the ladies challenge. On the timesheets the ladies finished in the same order.

The next and second round of the 2022 SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship takes place at Nutts Corner on 01 April hosted by 500 MRCL. At present there are still entries available for anyone who wishes to compete. Entries can be found on [WWW.rallyscore.net](http://WWW.rallyscore.net)

Now for the class battles:

### **Class 1 – Road Cars up to 1700cc**

Pre event, all eyes were on Paul Forsythe and his Peugeot 106 but anyone who knows Stephen Donnelly knows, he is not to be underestimated. Stephen was described as the man of the day after an epic drive saw him take the class 1 win by 1.73 secs from the hard charging Paul Forsythe. Alan Wallace rounded out the class in third in his Honda Del Sol.

### **Class 2a – Road cars over 1700cc**

Crawford Ewing Jr stamped his authority on class 2a in his Megane which he sailed to a superb class win ahead of the ever hard charging Jonny Forsythe. Crawford was really pushing hard in his Megane and Jonny once again forgot that he had to drive the Fiesta back to Kilkeel as he hammered it round. To a stonking 26<sup>th</sup> overall!! Third in class went to the hard charging Mark Crawford in his Lotus Exige which is bound to have been a real handful in the conditions.

### **Class 2b – Road cars Mazda MX5 challenge**

In class 2b Craig Ewing took his maiden class win in his Mazda MX5 ahead of Barry McCann and Robert Fitzgerald. Interestingly all 3 drivers set their fastest times on their second timed run. With Barry and Robert only separated by a mere 1.42secs

### **Class 3 – Road cars specialist Production cars 4wd**

In order to run in class 3 today you had to be called Grady as only Paul and Tony competed in their Subaru. Sadly between the 2 brothers they only managed 1 timed run due to a series of overshoots and doughnuts that Duncan himself would've been proud of. Tony Grady proved to be the fastest Grady but possibly only down to circumstances on this occasion. Rumour has it that the 2 brothers have a bit of an upgrade planned for their next event?

### **Class 6a Modified Cars – Series Production cars 8v**

Class 6a was somewhat smaller than usual today with 4 cars entered and indeed the car in front of 6a was a mini... as was the car behind that and the car behind that too. Karl Johnston took the class win with an epic run to finish ahead of Chris Nichol and William Hutton. Its great to see William return after his recent lay off from the sport. Dale Singleton took fourth in class in his Fiesta which had, for some reason or another, been moved into the wrong class. Dale did however have a great days fun in the end.

### **Class 6b Modified Cars – Series Production cars 16v**

As of recent events Stephen Colbert was the man to beat today in his Talbot Sunbeam. Stephen lead from start to finish and finished 11<sup>th</sup> overall and second modified car. Seamus Murray returned to the paddock in his Honda Civic and took a fabulous second in class a mere 3 tenths of a second ahead of third placed Dessie Martin. James Lightbody returned in a beautiful newly built Mini JCW and he was certainly getting the hang of it as the day went on.

### **Class 7 Modified Specialist Production Cars 2WD.**

Class 7 Andy Hawthorne was the man to beat today in class 7 as he appeared to forget it was raining on his way to taking a class win. Andy led home son David Hawthorne with third in class going to Scott McMullan who kept up his tradition of beating Stephen Hawthorne. Lastly 5<sup>th</sup> in class went to newcomer Michael Campbell.

### **Class 8 Sports Libre cars Special Saloons**

Class 8 was a little low in numbers today but in terms of the machinery, it was great. Richard O'Mahoney was the sole competitor in 8 in his RSR Escort which had some minor surgery over the winter. Richard was going well and will be a lot closer to flying Jim Hutchinson this year. Whilst we mention Jim I t was good to see him at Kirkistown after his recent procedure. Everyone wishes you a speedy recovery Jim, well apart from Richard O'Mahoney who is trying to build up a bit of a points lead before you return.

### **Class 9a Sports Libre cars Saloons and GT`s**

Once again Campbell seems to be the name to have for class 9a with Dan Campbell taking the class in his Toyota Starlet. There were 3 Campbells in class 9A this year, Daniel, His dad Garry who finished third in his Starlet and Emma who finished fourth in her Peugeot 106. For those who have noticed I haven't mentioned who was second. Second went to newcomer Donal Sweeney who made his debut in a fabulous Toyota Corolla. Having spoken to Donal after the event he assures me that he had a good day out overall and intends to do as close to a full season as possible. Happy days.

### **Class 9b Sports libre Closed wheel sports racing cars.**

Today saw 5 cars in class 9b. This is the biggest entry ever for this class. Of the 5 cars entered we had 4 casmat buggies and David Kane in his Silver car. Mark McClellan took the class win in his casmat a mere 0.65secs ahead of David Kane who was only 0.19secs ahead of third Placed Terry McCay. All in, the 5 cars in this class finished within 6.12 secs of each other and all 5 finished in the top 13!!

### **Class 10 Sports libre Cars – small capacity Rally cars**

Class 10 also had one of the biggest entries ever seen today with 7 competitors running in class 10. Raymond Johnston took the class win 0.78secs ahead of second placed Ricky McLanon and Alan Roddy Third only 0.43 behind Ricky and a mere 0.26secs ahead of fourth placed Scott Walker.

### **Class 11 Sports libre Cars – large capacity Rally cars**

Michael Boyle proved to be the fastest in class 11 today taking the class win in his Ford Escort from Ian Getty in his Escort. Third in class 11 went to Derek Robinson who managed to see the back of his own head at colonial on his second run.

### **Class 12 4WD sports Libre Cars**

Class 12 was shaping up to be a real class battle today especially for second and third. Ryan Murray took the class, and modified category win as well as second overall. The conditions were perfect for a 4wd car as Ryan showed us. Second in class went to Ted Johnston in his Beautiful Escort Cosworth. Ted has been missing from the paddock for a couple of years and hopefully will grace us with his humour for the remainder of the season. Third, but only by 0.39s went to Adrian Kielt in his Subaru. Adrian has also been an infrequent visitor of late so its good to see him back out again as well.

### **Class 13 Formula Racing cars**

Henry Campbell was once again the man to beat in class 13 and he kept up the honour, but he was pushed hard. Stephen Wishart was driving his works Swift SC and finished second a mere 1.07 secs behind Henry. Third in class went to Adrian Pollock who debuted his new Reynard FF89 which he co-drove with his wife Jenny who finished fourth. This definitely was not the weather for your first ever event so fair play to Jenny for doing so well.

### **Class 14 small Capacity Racing Cars**

Class 14 was another class which was a little underrepresented in terms of numbers today, compared to previous events but the 2 drivers who were competing all got their elbows out and dug their heels in and fought hard with all both of them finishing in the top 12. Ethan took the class win and 7<sup>th</sup> overall in his Jedi Suzuki with Brian Fitzmaurice finishing second in class and 12<sup>th</sup> overall 2.17secs behind Ethan

### **Class 15 large Capacity Racing Cars**

Gerard O`Connell was the man to beat today in his fabulous sounding Dallara World series car. Gerard finished 1<sup>st</sup> overall and first in class ahead of a hard charging Ryan McGimpsey who was out in the family Mygale. Third in class went to regular hillclimber Brendan Flynn who was out for a shakedown in his Megapin and Eamon Matheson sadly suffered suspension issues which side-lined him however had he been able to compete he would have been there or thereabouts.

### **Class 16a Historic Road Cars**

As if you didn't know Gerry McGarrity was the man to beat in class 16a in his mini. Gerry took class honours ahead of second placed Bill Blair. Harold Bunting took third ahead of Vincent Rodgers, Mervyn Getty and James Acheson. Its not often of late that Vincent has had the legs on Mervyn. Vincent put it down to his superb and superior driving talents, whereas Mervyn blamed the weather. All I know is that I'm not going to comment as I don't want to feel the wrath of either of them lol.

## **Class 16b Historic Saloons and Sportscars**

After a bit of a lay off Alan Jardine returned to the paddock in his beautiful Mk1 Escort. Alan took the class win from Stephen Nevin who had a trying day in his Escort. Third went to the flying Stephen Harvey who drifted his escort home ahead of his father Norman who had more fun than the rest of the competitors put together.