

Gerard O`Connell crowned King of Kirkistown at Larne Sprint

Saturday 06 May Larne Motor club hosted round 3 of the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship at Kirkistown. As usual Larne run a fabulous event for us but today's just seemed to be extra good. Paddy Haveron stepped up to the clerk's role and he ran a super tight ship and all the hard work by the rest of Larne Motor Clubs members was abundantly apparent as the day went like clockwork.

For once the weather was superb and for most of the day you could even say it was warm which has been unusual for this season and indeed with such good weather everyone was in superb form making the entire atmosphere around the paddock one of the best we have seen in many years – and that's saying something.

From the offset Gerard O`Connell was the man to beat in his World Series Dallara which is an unreal sound as it leaves the line at maximum revs, whilst trying to stay ahead of Tim Woodside, Tony Greenan and the rest of the competitors. Indeed, Gerard was unbeaten all day and his second run was only a mere 2 tenths of a second faster than his first timed run which shows just how hard he was pushing. Graham Baalham- Curry has a superb photo of Gerard in the back chicane full of the rack with a superb slide as he eeks the maximum speed and grip out of his slicks. Tony Greenan was also on a charge and fought hard in his Mercedes Powered F317 Dallara. Tony can more regularly be seen in the Boss Ireland championship where he has had huge success of late and watching his smooth and committed style through the chicanes showed just how quick he is. Indeed, all of our drivers should watch Tony's commitment and cornering style. He is the ultimate example of fast and smooth entry and super-fast exit. We could all learn from him and indeed some of us need to lol. Tony finished second a mere 0.38secs behind Gerard after a superbly close battle all day. Third, 1.87 secs behind Tony Greenan and 2.25secs behind winner Gerard O`Connell went to Alan Cassells who debuted his new Force HRC in the championship.

Scott McMullan definitely wins the driver of the day award after pulling a blinder of a last run in his little Jedi Mk4 which he debuted today. Young Scott is well known in the championship for his giant killing performances in the family Westfield before he upgraded to a reis Aero in which he dominated class 7 last year before stepping up to a class 14 Jedi for this season. This car is no stranger to the paddock as it is the ex Tom Devaney car. Scott purchased this car after Tom sadly passed away and has decided to run in Tom's livery and using Tom's race number as a tribute to Tom who is still sadly missed around the paddock. Scott paid the ultimate tribute to Tom by taking 4th overall and a class win on his debut with the car and Tom is sure to have been super proud of this result today as is Scott's father David who was over the moon to see Scott pull off such a superb run. Indeed Scott was second in class going into his last run but pulled out a massive 1.71 secs out of his last run to overtake Brian Fitzmaurice to take his maiden class 14 win. I predict that this will not be his last class win of the year and I can't wait to see Scott, Ethan, George, Ryan and Brian all head to head at an event. Not even I could predict a winner there!

Another superb drive on Saturday which cannot go un-mentioned was that of Richie O`Mahoney Senior (and Jnr was going well too). Richie Snr has now finally got to grips with his beautiful SHP RSR Escort and after some tyre tips from his friend and

mentor for this season Jim Hutchinson Richie was flying. Indeed, he was going so well that one cheeky sod opened the door to ensure that it really was Richie driving as he thought it was a stand in stig!! Its great to see someone finally feeling comfortable in their car and Richie certainly is now. Richie was delighted to finish top of class 8 and 16th overall as it means he now has a 15-point buffer built up before Jim Hutchinson returns and these 2 guys go head to head.

Mentioning Richie Snr above I cannot fail to mention Richie Jnr who debuted his newly engine Escort Mk2 this season. Jnr was also flying and was superb to watch as he tried harder and harder to make it through each chicane backwards without actually loosing it. This was superb to watch and Richie was smiling so hard at the end of the day that he burst open his helmet as it wasn't big enough to contain his smile! I wouldn't fancy his tyre bill for the day though. Its safe to say that both the O`Mahoney boys had a belter of a day and Richie snr was delighted to beat Richie Jnr overall!!

We also had the pleasure of 2 Speed cars running as well in class 9b. David Kane was back out in his Speed car Silver Car and Chris Nelson debuted his new Speed car GTR. These insanely fast bike engine cars were in class 9b along with Ryan McGimpsey who split the 2 overall and Aaron Beattie in his brand new Speedcar Wonder. Its great to see class 9b being so well supported this year and the Speed cars are awesome to watch and could well win an event outright before season end!!

Other new competitors included Paul Dalton from Dublin who debuted his Reynard Formula Vauxhall Lotus in class 15 Chris Nelson who debuted his Speedcar, Aaron Beattie who also debuted a new speedcar buggy, Jonathan Smith who debuted his beautiful green Escort Mk2 but with a Honda engine for 2023, Formula ford superstar and star of the future Brandon McCaughan who was competing in a Mazda MX5 and David McReynolds who was in a beautiful Escort. Returning after some time away was Kathy McDade, the flying Doc – David Hunter, Gary Milligan Michael Boyle, Chris Byers, Tim Woodside, Tony Greenan, James Graham and Roger Gordon

I'm afraid to say it but we finally had a glimpse of a regeneration of class 11 with 4 cars entered Michael Boyle took the class honours ahead of Richie O`Mahoney Jnr, Ian Getty and Derek Robinson. Its great to see 4 cars of this superb quality all fighting so closely together and with 4 distinctly different driving styles as well!!

In terms of the categories the unofficial title of fastest mini in the west went once again to Karl Johnston who pipped Gary Milligan and Gerry McGarrity in that order. It was great to se Gary Milligan back out again and Gerry was delighted to have him out to chase after. Gerry did however tell me that he was going to let Gary win the first one so that he thought he was good, then Gerry would blow him into the weeds at the rest of the events. We will see if this is correct through time!!

The modified category was closely fought and Dan Campbell took not only family honours but Modified honours after pipping his father Gerry by a mere 1.53 secs in their Toyota Starlets. Both these guys were flying on their way to finishing 11th and 12th overall. Third modified man home was the returning David Hunter in his Subaru. David has been missing from the paddock for quite a while but its good to see the Doc returning!! Points for the third placed modified car went to Richie O`Mahoney who

finished behind Michael Boyle in the overall time sheets but neither Michael or the doc are championship registered.

In the specialist category Andy Hawthorne took a superb category win as well as 13th overall in his Westfield. With neither Scott McMullan or his sons David and Steven both missing from the category today Andy had an easier run to the top spot than usual but he was probably more focused than ever before and was impressive to watch on the brakes. Richie O`Mahoney senior took second in the category and 16th overall in his SHP RSR Escort with Dale Singleton third in his little Rallycross KA. Dale advised that the long straights were just a bit too long for his gearing and that he would need another 2 gears for his next run on the long circuit.

The Roadgoing category was once again dominated by Crawford Ewing Jnr who is proving to be the man to beat this season. Crawford flew to 25th overall in his roadgoing Meganne and finished ahead of second Placed Stephen Donnelly who continues to impress in his little Renault Twingo and Ian Thompson in his Porsche Boxter.

In the Heaslip Ladies Challenge Trophy Amy Hawthorne was the only points scorer today after mechanical gremlins affected both Kathy McDade as she debuted her new lightweight modified Seat Leon and Emma Campbell who had oil-based issues in her Peugeot 106. Apparently, Emma`s bad luck was the fault of Championship Co-Ordinator David Evans who removed Emma`s Lucky charm (a window cleaning brush) from inside the car when she was sitting in the assembly area. Needless to say Emma was seen chasing David round the paddock and it was commented that David has never moved as quickly in his life.

A new prize for this event and events going forward is the Race and Rally spot prize. This new prize is a 50 second Fire safety Stick which was provided by Race and Rally of Lisburn as part of a newly launched collaboration between the SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship and Race and Rally. The prize was drawn randomly By Jason Frazer who is a championship Competitor and employee of Race and Rally Jason drew James Acheson as the spot prize winner. Congratulations James and thanks again to Race and Rally for the superb prize.

The next and fourth round of the 2023 SW Adair Tyres Northern Ireland Sprint Championship takes place at St Angelo Airfield on 03 June and is hosted by Enniskillen Motor club. This ever-popular event is one of the fastest of the season and Enniskillen are trying a new event format and a new course set up which should make this event even more popular! Entries can be found on WWW.rallyscore.net

Now for the class battles:

Class 1 – Road Cars up to 1700cc

Stephen Donnelly took his second class win of the year in his flying Renault Twingo with a superb 159.39 second run which saw him finish up 37th overall on the day/. Second in class went to Alan Wallace in his Honda Del Sol who got down to a 167.59 sec run.

Class 2a – Road cars over 1700cc

Crawford Ewing continued his winning streak and took not only the class 2 honours but also another roadgoing category win. Crawford is really getting into form in the Megane and is going well. Ina Thompson battled his big Porsche Boxter to second in class just ahead of Michael Johnston in his Escort and Pete Storey in his little Abarth 500.

Class 2b – Road cars Mazda MX5 challenge

There was another C Ewing at the top of class 2b but on this occasion it was Dundonald's Craig Ewing. Craig had a stonking battle all day with Aaron Moody who he pipped by a mere 1,26secs. Third went to Formula Ford expert Brandon McCaughan who is normally to be seen racing in England in the National Formula Ford Championship and was hard to beat here last year in the Formula Ford Championship. Brandon finished ahead of Barry McCann, Robert Fitzgerald Wayne Clyde, Jason Harkness and Roger Gordon in that order.

Class 3 Road Going 4WD production cars

Tony and Paul Grady both came out to play today in class 3 in their Subaru Imprezza. Once again Tony Grady proved to be faster than Paul however Paul would tell you that hes the better driver. In this instance the timesheets don't tell fibs, unlike the drivers.

Class 5 – Road cars specialist Production cars

Finally, Gardiner McIlwaine had someone to play with today when Gilmore Murphy joined him in his Westfield. Both drivers pushed hard all day but Gardiner had the advantage at the end of the day and showed Gilmore Murphy the way home.

Class 6a Modified Cars – Series Production cars 8v

Richard McAlonan once again was the man to beat in class 6a in his Vauxhall Corsa. Karl Johnston pushed hard in his mini to finish second but only pipped Chris Nichol to the place on his last run. Chris was second in class all day but Karl Pipped him by a mere 0.48 secs. Gary Milligan finished fourth with William Hutton hot on his tail to fifth.

Class 6b Modified Cars – Series Production cars 16v

Stephen Colbert was not here today as he was away with work and Ken, his father was intending to put a big dent into Stephens points lead. Sadly, for him James Lightbody and Dessie Martin also had similar ideas. James took the class win a mere 1.35 secs ahead of Ken Colbert. Dessie Martin was third 4.54 secs behind Ken. Hard changing Amy finished fourth in class in her little clio but had a great day and took ladies honours.

Class 7 Modified Specialist Production Cars 2WD.

Andy Hawthorne had a lonely drive to class 7 honours today but this didn't slow him down. Andy pushed hard to take the class win and finished up leading the specialist category and finished 13th overall. A wee birdie also told me that Andy officially retired on Friday so Saturday was his first day out as a retired man, however many who work in the garage would argue that Andy has been retired for years!!

Class 8 Sports Libre cars Special Saloons

Richard O'Mahoney took the class 8 honours ahead of Dale Singleton today. Richard was pushing hard and has now got the hang of his RSR Escort which is great to see. Richie is doing his utmost to gather up as many points as he can before Jim Hutchinson makes his return to the championship. Dale also had a great day although he advised that his rallycross KA was too short geared for the long straights, but never the less this didn't slow him down.

Class 9a Sports Libre cars Saloons and GT's

Class 9a was once again about the Campbells. Once again Daniel was the Campbell to beat and his father Garry pushed hard to try and beat Dan. In the end there was only 1.53 secs between the 2 in Dan's favour. Dan also took the modified category win. Third went to Jonathan Smith who has finally got his Honda engine Escort back out again. Jonathan was going well and has highlighted a few more things which he wants to change for the next event. Poor Emma Campbell had a bad day after having oil pressure problems at Debtors. Sadly she didn't complete a timed run.

Class 9b Closed wheel Sports libre cars.

David Kane was the man to beat in class 9b today in his Silver Car in this class. Richard McGimpsey was pushing hard in his RMG V2 but sadly had an issue on his second run. Had he been able to complete 3 timed runs it may have been a different top 3 order. Third went to Chris Nelson in his Speedcar GTR ahead of Aaron Beattie in his speedcar wonder. All in this class was separated by a mere 8.19 secs which is impressive.

Class 10 Sports libre Cars – small capacity Rally cars

Class 10 had 3 cars today and one of them was a new one. Portaferrys Chris Byers made his return to the sprint scene after a few years away in his Escort. Chris was fresh from a third in class on Mondays St Angelo May Day rally and kept up his tradition of coming third by finishing third again today. Raymond Johnston took class honours in his Escort Mk2 ahead of the hard charging Alan Roddy in his Citroen Saxo with another good battle between these 2 drivers

Class 11 Sports libre Cars – large capacity Rally cars

I've touched on class 11 above but Michael Boyle returned to the scene today in his Escort and took a lights to flag win a mere 0.54 secs in front of Richie O'Mahoney with Ian Getty third 6.88secs behind Richie and 10 secs ahead of and Derek Robinson fourth in in the only non-escort amongst the class. This was a good class battle today between the top 2 men but Richie was seriously hampered by spending most of his lap

swinging from side to side like a pendulum. Whilst its superb to watch and bound to be good craic to be sitting in Richie is bound to know where he lost the 0.54 he needed.

Class 12 4WD sports Libre Cars

With Tedward Scissor Hands Johnston working (allegedly), Ryan Murray not quite ready to run again and the Lancashire's not out Adrian Kielt felt he was going to have a lonely run today and then the Flying Doc David Hunter decided to dust down the race suit and have a go. David and Adrian had a right royal ding dong between themselves today and David took the class win on the day but Adrian secured the class pints in the championship. Once again its good to see some resurgence of interest in class 12. Ohhh and a big shout out to our stalwart of recent years, Oliver Cormican who I was speaking to at Craigantlet. Olly advised that he's missing the craic and hopes to get back out again soon!!

Class 13 Formula Racing cars

Occasional Formula Ford racer James Graham came ouy ot play in his Van Dieman and proved to be back on the pace immediately. James had an epic battle all day and managed to sandwich Henry Campbell and Stephen Wishart with Henry taking class honours ahead of James and Stephen driving his works Swift to third in class. This was one of the closest class 13 battles we've had in a while and was great to see. Hopefully James will make a few more outings?

Class 14 small Capacity Racing Cars

Class 14 was a class of extremes today. Scott McMullan made his maiden appearance in the class in his newly purchased Jedi and boy was he on form taking a debut win with an epic last run. Brian Fitzmaurice had set the early pace and looked to be the man to beat and Ethan Faulkner was trying hard to catch Brian. Sadly Ethan had a slight mishap at the back chicane on his first run which side lined him for the rest of the day. Brian also had some bad luck when he developed a problem on his second run which meant he didn't complete a third run. Its unfortunate that this happened as Both Brian and Scott where on superb form and Scott took a massive 1.58 secs out of Brain on his last run and wel never know if Brian could've prevented Scott's maiden win or not. Personally, watching Scotts form I think he will be hard to beat this year in class 14 – watch this space!!

Class 15 Larger Capacity Racing Cars

In total there were 7 cars entered in class 15, which is Impressive when you consider that there were no class 15 cars at our last round. Gerard O`Connell was the man on form and took the class win despite a very very tight tussle with Tony Greenan in his Dallara F317. Third wen to Alan Cassells who finished Infront of Robert McGimpsey with Eamon Matheson Paul Dalton and Tim Woodside all finishing behind Robert in that order. Sadly, Both Eamon and Tim had mechanical woes which prevented them form showing their full hands at the table but there will be another round in 4 weeks. Paul Dalton made his championship debut and had a sterling drive in his Formula

Vauxhall Lotus having a ball of fun in the process. Its great to see new people coming to the sport and having as much fun as Paul did.

Class 16a Historic Road Cars

In what seems like the norm Gerry McGarrity once again took the class win ahead of Mervyn Getty in his Sebring. Mervyn was a bit lost today with no Vincent to give him abuse and egg him on, not that Mervyn needs any encouragement. Ian Paget did however push Mervyn hard and its great to see a big heavy V8 midget racing for tenths of a sec with a mini!! Fourth went to David McReynolds in his escort ahead of Brian Carson, James Acheson and a disappointed Arnie Wishart who developed some form of gearbox issue with his Chevrolet Corvette.

Class 16b Historic Saloons and Sport scars

Last but my no means least was Stephen Harvey who was all by himself again in class 16b. Stephen, never the less, pushed hard – so hard in fact that he was observed having a romantic moment with some track furniture, but only a quick peck now!!!!. Its not often you see Stephen getting this close to the furniture. Ohh and it was with the front and not the result of one of his famous tail out moments!!