

## Thoroughbred driving at NI Autotest Championship

The fourth round of the 2023 Northern Ireland Autotest Championship, sponsored by McMillan Specialist Cars of Antrim, took place on Saturday 6th May at the Dundrod Pits, Lisburn. Organised by Thoroughbred Sports Car Club, with tight and challenging tests for the Championship contenders, and a little more open version of each for the Clubman, Advanced and Production categories. The venues surface would prove challenging for competitors throughout the field, as the grippy tarmac tested even the most seasoned of competitors.

It was Stewartstown's Steven Ferguson in his Mini Special who was again the man to beat at this event, after another battle for the top spot of the podium with the large saloon of David Thompson and the rear-wheel drive sports car of Andy Blair. Blair would take the runner up spot with 16.1 seconds separating the top two drivers. Thompson was forced to settle for third place overall after a pylon penalty on the third test of the day cost the Manorhamilton man a valuable five seconds.

With Ferguson taking the overall win, this would elevate Peter Grimes to first in Class A, with a minor 6.1 second advantage over the runner up in class, James Wilson. Guy Foster had put on a promising performance early in the day but was forced to retire due to irreparable mechanical issues after completing only four tests. This left Chris Grimes Senior to take the third place in the class.

Class B was dominated by Andy Blair in his Westfield, as he took the class win by a significant margin, with Paul Lowther taking the runner up spot. The Coagh father and son pairing of Trevor and Mark Ferguson in his Silvia Stryker were forced to head for home early, after a mechanical failure forced them to retire early in the day.

In the Small Saloon Class C, Robin Lyons continued his winning run, making it three class wins out of four for the Drumbo driver. The Earney brothers continued to battle it out for the runner up spot in class in the Mini Saloon. It would be Richard who would win the brotherly battle to finish second in class, ahead of Andrew.

The Large Saloon Class again had five contenders, with David Thompson taking the class win. Mark King would take the runner up spot after an unusually troublesome day for the Newmill's man. After clipping a pylon on the third run of test one, the base of the pylon would get lodged underneath his Vauxhall Nova cutting his rear brake lines and forcing King to slide through the finish line, forcing him to pick up ten seconds of penalties and have to finish the day with no rear brakes. Ardboe brothers Paul and Damien Mooney battled it out for the third place in class, but it would be Paul who would get the better of younger brother Damien, who would have to settle for fourth place at this event. Dungannon's Gary Campbell would have a frustrating day in his Vauxhall Nova, as he struggled with a gearbox issue, which forced the up and coming autotester out of the class podium places.

In the Clubman Category, for those with limited experience of Autotests, Ian McCann again came out on top in his Vauxhall Nova despite picking up a pylon penalty early in the day. Closest to Ian in the category was Jordan Burns in his Ford Fiesta Special with Jimmy Dougan taking third place overall.

There was a small but highly experienced and competitive turnout in the Advanced Category. Former clubman challenge winner Adam McMullan in his Toyota Starlet Special would take the overall category win. Robert Robinson in his Toyota Yaris would finish in second only 1.2 seconds behind McMullan, with Jack Gillis a minimal 4.5 seconds adrift in third.

In the Production Category, Coagh's Adam Ferguson would take the win with Andrew Molyneux Junior and Senior taking second and third places respectively. Omagh's Ryan McAleer would make his debut in the production class, showing some impressive driving skills in his Ford Fiesta.

With four rounds now completed Steven Ferguson leads the Championship category, with David Thompson in second and Peter Grimes and Andy Blair tied in third. In the Clubman Category, Ian McCann leads from Gordon Buckley in second and Jimmy Dougan in third. Robert Dickson holds the lead in the Advanced Category with Ashley Lamont second and Adam McMullan third.

Enniskillen Motor Club will host Round Five on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May, why not come on down and see what it's all about?

Overall Winner – Steven Ferguson

Championship Category:

Class A – Peter Grimes

Class B – Andy Blair

Class C – Robin Lyons

Class D – David Thompson

Clubman Category:

Class A – Ian McCann

Class B – Gordon Buckley

Class C – Brendan Mullan

Class D – Derek Harrison

Advanced Category:

Class A – Adam McMullan

Class B – No Competitors

Class C – Robert Robinson

Class D – No Competitors

Class P – Adam Ferguson