

Dulux Trade MSA British Rally Championship round five

International Rally NI 20/21 August 2010

Northern Irish lead BRC into home event

Ulsterman Jonny Greer leads the Dulux Trade MSA British Rally Championship as the series moves to his home asphalt, International Rally NI, part of the Ulster Rally based in Antrim for the second year.

The young Carryduff driver has scored consistently in the top five, with his best result a second place on the Pirelli Rally. But since the championship title is decided on the best five scores from six, he will need to drop his worst, by Greer's own admission leaving the real battle for the crown between the only two former champions in the fray.

1996 Champion Gwyndaf Evans has made it an excellent tussle at the top in his first full season in the championship for several years, even adapting to co-driver changes when Chris Patterson moved to the WRC with Petter Solberg. He is joined for the penultimate round by 2007 champion co-driver Phil Pugh, who replaces Gareth Roberts, due to be back with S2000 Fiesta driver Craig Breen.

Evans' record on the Ulster Rally is a good one, having won the event outright twenty one years ago, repeating the feat in 1998 and taking BRC top spot twice in 2002 and 2006. It is fair to say that the Welshman enjoys the event as he has rarely missed both rally and BRC podium.

Reigning champion and Pirelli Star Driver Keith Cronin has a pair of perfect scores from the four events so far, which could so easily have been three but for a bitterly disappointing retirement in Cumbria, just metres from the finish line. However as a result of changes in co-drivers at the front of the field, his Northern Irish co-driver Barry McNulty leads the series in his first full season, a single point clear.

West Cork man Cronin's 2009 Ulster Rally did not however go to plan. Although he was ahead of both Evans (who was not registered for points) and Mark Higgins, he crashed out of the event in his Mitsubishi, leaving the others to battle it out.

Whilst the top step of the podium has been shared equally between Cronin and Evans this year, the remaining positions have been occupied by an array of drivers.

Evans' Welsh compatriot Jason Pritchard has improved steadily in his first full season in a four wheel drive car. He and new-for-2010 co-driver Robbie Durant have worked well together, climbing the finishers' list as the season has progressed. Seventh, sixth and fifth places in the first half of the season were good, but the youngster obviously didn't read the script, as he skipped a place on the Isle of Man, taking to the podium for the first time with an excellent third place.

Dave Weston Junior peaked early with an excellent runner up spot in Wales, but the Scot crashed heavily on round two and struggled with transmission problems and punctures on rounds three and four respectively. The youngster's pace is undeniable and with the calm Ieuan Thomas settled alongside, it is only a matter of time before they take to the podium again.

Outgoing Pirelli Star Driver Adam Gould also peaked on the opening round, the youngster having purchased Higgins' Subaru for a self-funded attempt at the full championship. He and new co-driver Craig Drew took third, but with limited budget each event has been a struggle and a costly crash whilst second on the Isle of Man could spell the end of his championship aspirations. He will definitely be out on the Antrim lanes though, TEG Sport sufficiently confident in the Bristolian's abilities that they are doing all they can to help.

Craig Breen and Gareth Roberts' stunning 2009 season, in which the County Waterford Ireland meant the car wasn't ready for the Isle of Man, leaving them too far adrift to make a realistic title challenge. driver and his Welsh co-driver took three Fiesta championships, has not translated into success in 2010. Mechanical problems caused two retirements, leaving them well outside the top ten in the standings, galling as they led the Jim Clark Rally at the time. A late puncture dropped them to third on the Pirelli and a crash in

Trillick's Alastair Fisher has had a difficult season too. With Rory Kennedy calling the notes, the pair has threatened to take a win all season, but those pesky gremlins have proved costly to the youngster's chances on all but one occasion. Beaten by just Evans on the Jim Clark it looked promising for the Isle of Man and they led on the opening stage. But like so many others he was caught out on the shiny tar, rolling his car out of the event. Contrast this with the Irish championship in which he leads the series, proving that with a bit of that Irish (good) luck the names of Fisher and Kennedy could easily be at the top of the results table soon.

Daniel Sigurðarson is currently joint sixth in the series, the multiple Icelandic Rally Champion and his sister Ásta Sigurðardóttir contesting their first full season in the Dulux Trade MSA British Rally Championship. With his only tarmac experience that of crashing heavily on the Manx National Rally in 2007, the Jim Clark was a great confidence building event for the siblings. So having crashed out on the Isle of Man again in 2010 it is good to see the pair "back on the horse" contesting the season's final asphalt rally.

The rally is based around the Junction One Outlet Shopping Centre on the edge of Antrim, with Rally HQ at the nearby Holiday Inn Express hotel and the service area in the complex's car parks.

A ceremonial start at the historic and recently renovated Antrim Old Courthouse square will take place on Friday afternoon from 1pm, with fourteen stages between the crews and a champagne finish back in Antrim from 5pm on Saturday.

The fight for the Dulux Trade MSA British Rally Championship may well end up being between Evans and Cronin, but as anyone involved in rallying will attest, "It isn't over 'til it's over." and the name at the top of the drivers tables has been Greer for three rounds now. Who knows, the title may well stay in Ireland this year, but this time north of the border.

For more information on the Dulux Trade MSA British Rally Championship visit www.rallybrc.co.uk

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