

LOCAL CREWS SHINE ON THE MERRICK RALLY

The Merrick Forest Stages Rally at the weekend has been hailed a “great success” by competitors, organisers and spectators alike.

“A fantastic day”, “excellent stages”, and “well organised” were just some of the comments overheard as the crews returned to the Riverside car park in Newton Stewart on Saturday afternoon.

It proved to be a cliff-hanger, with former Scottish champion Jimmy Girvan and Dumfries star David Bogie fighting it out for top honours to the very last.

The two drivers posted identical times on the first two stages and after 45 miles of fierce competition through the Galloway forest the contest ended in a dead heat.

However, under rally regulations - Inverness-based Girvan emerged as winner, having beaten Bogie on the third stage.

Although disappointed to miss out on a maiden County Saab Scottish Championship victory, Bogie – with regular co-driver David Paterson – secured the series' Group N Trophy for production-standard cars in his Mitsubishi Evo 9.

“We achieved what we set out to do by winning Group N”, said Bogie, adding “it takes the pressure off going into the final round – the McRae Stages – later this month”.

The final podium place went to the Team Gretna duo of Steven Clark and co-driver Lee Kerr from Dumfries – their highest finish of the season – after another hugely impressive drive in their Evo 4.

“Everything went perfectly, and the car performed well” said Clark, “the only wee problem being a puncture after stage one – so we probably used up one of our lives there”. Lee also picked up the award for the highest-placed female competitor.

Things didn't work so well for Clark's team-mate Mike Faulkner, who slipped to sixteenth, after suffering a puncture on the final stage.

It was a disappointment for Faulkner who was running well up to that point: “We were lying sixth going into Glentool, but it was game over once we had that puncture. It's also caused some damage to the car so we have a busy time before the McRae Stages”.

Kirkgunzeon farmer Rory Young put in a strong performance at the wheel of his Evo 5 finishing seventh overall.

Young, who was returning to competition for the first time since June, was delighted with the result: “This year was never about winning trophies – we just wanted to have fun and learn a bit, and we've achieved that”.

Craig McMiken of Newton Stewart was also well pleased with his day - bringing his Evo 6 home in eleventh place.

McMiken paid tribute to his co-driver Ian Clark: “When you have an experienced co-driver beside you, it gives you the confidence to really commit to the corners - that's what made the difference today”.

He also praised the event saying: “The stages have been fantastic...the organisers should be congratulated”.

Elsewhere in the four-wheel drive category, Dumfries businessman Davie Hughes suffered a puncture on the first stage, and ended the day thirteenth overall and first in class in his left-hand drive Mitsubishi Step 2 WRC.

Ian Paterson of Dumfries finished a further two places behind and second in class in his Subaru Impreza.

Among the two-wheel drive runners, the Castle Douglas crew of Callum Bendall and Jim Haugh continued their strong runs of late in their Ford Ka, picking up their third class win in succession. Charles Blair from Dumfries was second in class in his Vauxhall Astra.

And Newton Stewart driver Mark McCulloch – with dad John on the notes - picked up the award for the highest finishing Machars Car Club crew, ending the day twenty-sixth overall.

The post-event awards ceremony was held for the first time at the cinema in Newton Stewart.

The cups and trophies for the various classes and categories were presented by Jane Bendall – the wife of the rally's main sponsor, Castle Douglas funeral director Ian Bendall.

There was loud applause when compere Jim McDowall announced that rally secretary and Scottish Championship co-ordinator Robert Beck had won the “Man of the Meeting Award” - the James Fleming Rosebowl.

The climax of the ceremony saw the curtain raised to reveal on stage the winning Subaru of Jimmy Girvan and co-driver Mike Ramsay.

Summing up the event, rally manager Allan Marshall said: “We've had a lot of really good feedback – the stages have been good, and the new service area at Glencaird has also proved a big hit. Even the weather has played its part”

Mr Marshall added: It's given us real encouragement for next year”.

Ends