



## **Wexford gears up for Rally Time!**

For all rally fans in the south-east, the coming of autumn means only one thing, and that's the countdown to the Riverbank House Hotel Wexford Stages rally. The ultra-compact 210km, 12 stages, 2-day event is the only one of its kind in the south-east and draws big interest from both at home and across the water. The event is seen as one of the best value for money events in the country, with the fast flowing nature of the stages popular with both drivers and spectators alike. This year also sees the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the events link with the Riverbank House Hotel. Support of its kind is very hard to find and the club are very grateful for their continuing sponsorship and support. This year also sees the introduction of the WMC Modified Tar Masters. The Wexford rally has always been one which has been aimed at the clubman, and therefore the club have moved to introduce some new awards to give the winners of two of the best supposed classes even more incentive to come out on top over the weekend. The awards will see both the 1st 1650cc modified car and the 1<sup>st</sup> 2100cc modified car pick up an extra trophy and more importantly to the clubman, 2 Kumho Tyres Sponsored By Ears Motorsport in Cork.

Even at this stage with still two weeks to go before the event, entries stand at about the 120 mark. Those at the top of the list at this stage include the Subaru WRC's of Paddy McVeigh / Gary McElhinney and Kevin Barrett / Sean Mulally. McVeigh in particular will be a man to watch for the overall win. After a successful 2014 campaign, the Tyrone man has had a disappointing 2015 since taking delivery of his ex-Patrick Elliot S12B Impreza. He has however, shown in both Mayo and Carlow that while on the stages he is a match for the WRC regulars and the fast Wexford stages are sure to suit the power of the S12B. But if there's one crew the WRC shod men will be watching for, it'll be the 2.5 Millington engine rear-wheel drive Darrian T90 GTR of James Stafford and Richard Cleary. James of course is a double winner in Wexford, navigated on both occasions by his cousin James. This year Richard Cleary, no mean pilot in his own right, will be on the notes as the local men take the battle to the WRC pair and the other challengers. Last year James, navigated by his now wife Amy, set an absolutely scintillating pace by going fastest on 10 of the 11 special stages before mechanical problems forced their retirement. There's no doubt James and Richard will be on maximum attack and the local fans are sure to be urging on the rear engine rocket as they look to perform another giant-killing act they would see James make it a hat-trick of wins on home soil and Richard take his first.

The race doesn't stop there however. Two crews who could spring a major surprise are Simon Chapman in his Millington engine Proton and the turbo charged Mitsubishi Colt of Sean Crowley & Emma Jones. The wide-arched Colt is a rare sight on Irish stages and it will be interesting to see how this crew, who led the recent Harry Flatters stages, fair out against their rivals on the Irish open road stages. Graham and Tom Scallan will be another crew hoping to have a real good run on their home event. This year has been something of a watershed for Graham and Tom, with the pace which they had so often showed finally netting them some very impressive top 10 results in the Triton Showers National Rally Championship to make them the first ever Group R national champions. With the championship now sewn up, the brothers can plan a flat out charge on their home event.

The modified battle is always a fiercely fought affair in the model county, with the winners taking home the coveted John Joe Galvin memorial award. Last year it was Lisburn's Wesley Patterson, navigated by Johnny Baird who came out on top. The northern crew are returning to Wexford in a bid to retain their crown but they will face stiff opposition, most notably from the Darrian of Stafford and Cleary. Just some of the other crews set to challenge the northern pair are Mark Straker and Mike Coady, the recent winners of the ALMC stages rally and who were the early leaders of the 2014 event. Add to this the 2015 Heartlands Stages rally victors Adrian Hetherington

and Gary Nolan who return to Wexford to challenge Patterson and Baird in their Kawasaki green Escort. Frank Kelly made his Wexford debut last year but his challenge for modified honours was short lived. The Moy man returns to Wexford this year to make an all-out attack on the Wexford stages.

With technology advancing as it is, the stage times of the 2-litre cars are practically on the par with their 2.5-litre engine cousins so crews like Chris Armstrong / James Fulton (Escort), George Condell / Paul Twomey (Toyota Starlet) and Liam Howlett / John McGrath (Big Red!) are definitely ones to look out for in the modified battle. A dark horse is sure to be Neil Hickey and Enda Kennedy in Neil's brand new class 13 Escort. If the Subaru was a Kangaroo, the Escort sure isn't with three hundred of Stafford Performance Engines finest thoroughbred horses under the bonnet. With Enda shouting out the notes, there will be no bedding in period allowed as the push to hang onto the pace of the class rivals.

It's over 30 years since Wexford was a counting round for the then EARS / Motoring News championship. Memories of Bob Fowden's big Rover Vitesse, John Price's Renault 5 Turbo and various Metro 6r4's along with his son Stephen, the Manta's of Chris Griffith's and Steve King and the Darrian's of Geoff Kitney and John Dalton are just some of the memories that immediately spring to mind. The event always saw the crews from across the water come in their droves and even though the championship has now ceased, it is still great to see so many overseas crews coming over for the weekends "craic". Crews such as Wayne Evans / Sion Jones, Adrian Evans / Martin Henry, Aled Davies / Gwynfor Jones, Eilir Morris / Tudor Jenkins and Brian Davis / Ian Davis, along with the crews already mentioned are just some who have entered for this year's event.

As with every rally, it cannot be run with vast amounts of manpower and Wexford is no exception. For anyone who is willing to help the club with marshalling over the weekend, please contact chief marshal Robert Swaine on 085 8586286.



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