

THE ARMSTRONG



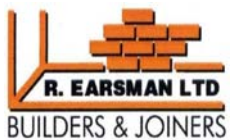
SUNDAY 30 OCTOBER 2011

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MARK'S "MAGIC" MAIDEN WIN

Mark McCulloch celebrated his first ever outright rally win on the Armstrong Galloway Hills on Sunday, describing it as a "magic day" on one of his home events.

After three stages, the Newton Stewart driver was trailing rally sponsor Jock Armstrong by fifty-three seconds.

However, when the four times winner dropped out with turbo boost failure in his hired Mitsubishi Evo 9, it was left to McCulloch and co-driver Craig Wallace to keep it all together and aim for a victory. They completed the five stages in a total time of 46m 06s, thirty-one seconds ahead of Stephen Petch Jnr and John Richardson in a Hyundai Accent WRC.

Third place - a further 48 seconds adrift - went to Newton Stewart's Craig McMiken and navigator Susan Shanks in a Mitsubishi Evo 9.

It was McMiken's third podium finish on the Galloway Hills, and his Elgin-based co-driver's first on any event - made all the more sweeter in that she beat husband Neil who finished fourth alongside Chris Collie in a Subaru Impreza.

Following heavy rain the previous day, competitors were greeted by dry conditions, and even some blue sky, as they lined up in Castle Douglas for the start of the popular end of season event.

McCulloch pipped Armstrong on the first stage by a single second: the Castle Douglas man experiencing a "major moment" after missing a gear in his unfamiliar left-hand drive Evo, hired from Steve Petch. Third fastest time went to Petch Jnr, ahead of Irish gravel champion Pat O'Donnell in a Subaru Impreza.

Armstrong and navigator Kirsty Riddick were fastest through the second Cairn Edward stage but were then hit by a fuel pump problem coupled with a "smell of burning wiring". It resulted in the pair having to push the car from the street into service for some frantic repairs by the SGP Motorsport mechanics.

The Castle Douglas duo were 31 seconds faster than the rest through the third Dalbeattie stage, with McCulloch one of several competitors to lose time after picking up a puncture.

However, having built up a healthy lead, Armstrong's challenge was about to end: "We were heading out to Gatehouse, and as we turned off just a couple of miles before the stage the car started to misfire again, and we did another couple of miles on the road section and it stopped, and that was it".

It was now advantage McCulloch and Wallace and with victory in sight, they gave it their all.

"On the first stage this morning we thought we could do quite well because we were quicker than Jock by a second", said McCulloch: "I'm afraid that rather went to our heads because neither of us got going on the second stage and we set a terrible time. But we got it together and went into stage three and were going great and then got a puncture for three miles on the front and lost a barrow-load of time but the last two stages were perfect. We got a wee puncture on the rear in the last stage but believe me I didn't back off any. To do win on our third gravel event in this car is magic because it's a good home rally and it's been a good battle all day with a few guys round about us."

Petch Jnr brought his rather battered Hyundai back to the finish in Castle Douglas, disappointed that he was unable to capitalise on the drama at the front.

"It's been an entertaining day alright - we're lucky to be here to be honest", said Petch: "I made two costly mistakes including a spin on the last stage which lost us 20 seconds. But hats off to the organisers - the stages were very enjoyable and fast flowing".

Craig McMiken, meanwhile, was well-pleased with his day's work. "It took the first couple of stages to settle in. We got through Dalbeattie alright, then had a great run through the last two. It's been a really enjoyable day - a great event with fantastic stages. The sun has also been shining, which is something a bit different for the Galloway Hills".

Aberdeen's Chris Collie suffered two punctures which hindered his progress on his way to fourth: otherwise he was showing the kind of pace which has impressed in this year's Scottish Rally Championship.

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Having finished eighth on the Merrick Stages on his first visit to Galloway, Northern Ireland's Liam Regan, co-driven by Damien Duffin, followed up with a fine fifth overall in his 4WD Mitsubishi Evo-powered Peugeot 206.

Richard Dickson and Sanny Dobie recorded their third top ten finish in as many years taking sixth overall, ten seconds ahead of the class-winning Toyota Starlet of Irish crew Shane McGirr and Steven O'Hanlon.

Kilmarnock's Andrew Gallacher, with Phil Sandham on the notes, was just a second further back at the wheel of his Subaru Impreza and also won his class, te gearbox problems towards the end.

Despite two offs, Allan McDowall and Gavin Heseltine finished ninth overall in their Opel Kadett, ahead of Iain Paterson and Jim Haugh in their Subaru Impreza, which earlier had suffered boost problems.

There were also class wins for Ayrshire's Blair and Alex McCulloch (Class 8), who ended the day 16th overall in their Vauxhall Nova; Gareth White and Callum Atkinson (Class 4) in a Citroen C2R2 who were 20th, and Garry Smith and Mark Roberts (Class 7) in their VW Polo, who were 32nd out of 38 classified finishers.

It proved to be a day of high attrition – with Armstrong and O'Donnell heading the list of twenty-one non-finishers.

Top 20 Finishers with Total Times:

- 1 Mark McCulloch (Newton Stewart)/Craig Wallace (Kirriemuir) Subaru Impreza 46m 06s
- 2 Stephen Petch (Hamsterley)/John Richardson (Northallerton) Hyundai Accent WRC 46.37
- 3 Craig McMiken (Newton Stewart)/Susan Shanks (Elgin) Mitsubishi Evo 9 47.25
- 4 Chris Collie (Aberdeen)/Neil Shanks (Elgin) Subaru Impreza 47.27
- 5 Liam Regan (Belfast)/Damien Duffin (Rasharkin) Peugeot 206 47.55
- 6 Richard Dickson (New Abbey)/SannyDobie (Castle Douglas) Subaru Impreza 48.28
- 7 Shane McGirr (Fivemiletown)/Steven O'Hanlon (Ballygawley) Toyota Starlet 48.38
- 8 Andrew Gallacher (Kilmarnock)/Phil Sandham (Carnforth) Subaru Impreza 48.39
- 9 Allan McDowall (Tarbolton)/Gavin Heseltine (Gilberdyke) Opel Kadett 48.51
- 10 Iain Paterson (Dumfries)/Jim Haugh (Stranraer) Subaru Impreza 49.27
- 11 Mickey McGillin (Omagh)/Aaron Johnston (Finton) Ford Escort 50.11
- 12 Peter Stewart (Lochfoot)/Phil Shortt (Dumfries) Subaru Impreza 50.43
- 13 Brendan Campbell (Trillin)/Ciaran McAnespy (Derrylin) Ford Escort Mk2 50.54
- 14 Robert Adamson (Kilmarnock)/Dick Wardle (York) Ford Escort RS 1800 51.06
- 15 Richard Stewart (Lochfoot)/Carin Logan (Kelso) Subaru Impreza 51.25
- 16 Blair McCulloch (Drongan)/Alex McCulloch (Drongan) Vauxhall Nova 51.31
- 17 Derek Crossen (Comber)/Peter Martin (Co Antrim) Mitsubishi Evo 6 51.31
- 18 Lee Hastings (Collin)/Brian Findon (Dumfries) Subaru Impreza 51.36
- 19 Jimmy Donnelly (Enniskillen)/Fabian McAleer (Enniskillen) Subaru Impreza 52.05
- 20 Gareth White (Melrose)/Callum Atkinson (Lauder) Citroen C2R2 52.54

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For more information Event Press Officer, Robin Wyllie, via admin@gallowayhillsrally.co.uk