

For Immediate Release: 25 March 2008

Easter Treat for Evans

The second round of the 2008 Maxol E85 Ford Fiesta Sporting Trophy championship took place last weekend on the UAC Circuit of Ireland Rally. The rally was based in the seaside town of Newcastle on the east coast of Northern Ireland.

The nine Fiesta crews that lined up for the start were to face Sunday's six stages, making up 52 competitive stage miles. The competitors were faced with cold overcast weather conditions as they left the start, with a possible threat of rain the majority of competitors opted for an 'intermediate Pirelli tyre, the RE pattern tyre.

The first stage was the 8.7km of Knockiveagh 1. Top seeds Elfyn Evans (18) and Gareth Roberts from Mid Wales would set the quickest stage time followed only three seconds adrift by last season's championship winner Alastair Fisher (18) from Enniskillen with co-driver Barry McNulty. The brothers of Tadhg and Shane Buckley from Ballyhaunis would round out the top three eight seconds behind Evans. Meanwhile the stage would also claim the first FST victim with Meilyr Evans (18), and co-driver Andrew Roberts, teammate's to Elfyn retiring with electrical problems. Once the car was back at service the problem was easily fixed but it was an unfortunate early ending for the young Welsh duo. Paul Quinn (20) and new co-driver Gary McRam from Dungannon were also in trouble, an excursion into a field meant they dropped around a minute to the leaders.

Stage 2, Legananny, at 8.49km would prove to be a dramatic stage for some of the Fiesta crews. First to be caught out were the Buckley brothers, as the car compressed through one of the many dips on the stages it would veer off the road into a field and demolish a wall. The second Fiesta to retire would be local driver Kyle Orr (18) from Dromore, he was partnered by new navigator Drew Sturrock from Aberdeen. Orr rolled twice on the last corner of the stage resulting in instant retirement from the rally. Away from the drama, Fisher would claim the stage win and the overall lead, with Evans eleven seconds adrift. Evans reported having a big moment over a jump and surprising himself. Paul Quinn came back from his off on the first stage to set the third quickest time on the stage.

Stage 3 was the longest stage of the rally, Slieve Rosley at 8.8km. Fisher would again take the stage win increasing his lead over Evans to 10.4 seconds heading into service. Third quickest time on the stage was Adrian McBride from Co. Tyrone and Rodney Hicks, closely followed by Stephen Wright (18) from Co. Monaghan and his co-driver Ashley McAdoo. Wright was having a cautious first loop of stages reporting a number of big jumps and greasy road conditions in places but the Pirelli tyres were working well.

Crews headed to service at Newry, with no major problems to report a general check over of the cars was all that was required. Competitors then headed back out for the afternoon stages, a repeat of the morning loop.

Stage 4, a repeat of SS1 would be another win for Fisher again followed by Evans. McBride, Quinn and Wright would trail with Barry Greer (20) and John Lemon from Carryduff rounding off the Fiesta crews. Quinn's fourth fastest time meant he would leapfrog Greer to take fifth place overall.

Stage 5, the penultimate stage of the rally, a repeat of SS2 Legananny, would again cause drama for the top crews. Fisher reported a problem with his fuel tank, a loose connection meaning reduced fuel pressure and dropped over 30 seconds to Evans and with it the rally lead. Fisher would clear the stage and end up with a 17.2 second deficit to Evans going into the final stage – a tall order with only 8.8 competitive km remaining. Quinn would be second fastest on the stage only six seconds behind Evans. McBride was third fastest and Greer continued his improvement in times finishing fourth quickest.

SS6, the final stage was a repeat of SS3, the 8.8km of Slieve Rosley. Fisher would start the stage but an effect of the technical gremlin on the previous stage would mean a retirement for Fisher, a cruel blow for the crew that had led for most of the day. However a consistent fast pace from Evans meant he had been in touch with Fisher all day and after the problems for Fisher, Evans held his nerve and took the win and with it €750 EUR in prize money. Paul Quinn again showed his potential pace with a second quickest time and without the early off he could have challenged for a podium position. However, rounding off the top three were both championship newcomers for 2008, McBride and Wright. Both crews were ecstatic with podium positions on only their second event in the cars.

The continued use of Maxol E85 Bio-Ethanol fuel and the Pirelli tyres meant that the stage times set by the Fiesta crews were again the talk of the rally, with the on-stage performance of Elfyn Evans and Alastair Fisher, enough to put them 5th overall in the International Rally, ahead of the 4WD Gp.N car's, a remarkable achievement in the 2WD, non-turbo charged Fiestas.

The www.rallyinsurance.co.uk Most Improved Driver of the Day was Adrian McBride who climbed eight places in the day to lead the Motorsport Insurance Services supported challenge after the second round.

The next round of the series will be the Killarney Rally of the Lakes on 4 May 2008.

Elfyn Evans (18) from Powys, Mid-Wales, said:

We are over the moon with back to back wins in the Irish Series. There was a lot of hard work before the event preparing the new car but all the effort by the GEMsport team paid off with a maiden victory for the brand new car. The rally was a difficult one with some big crests and tough roads but to come away with the victory made the Easter vacation for the Hustings.Com team a great experience. Our next aim in Ireland is to make it three out of three!

Final Results

Position	Driver / Co-Driver	Overall Time	Diff. Previous	Points	€ Prize Money
1	Elfyn Evans / Gareth Roberts	49.28.7		30	€750
2	Adrian McBride / Rodney Hicks	51.16.4	+1.47.7s	25	€600
3	Stephen Wright / Ashley McAdoo	51.34.5	+18.1s	22	€450
4	Paul Quinn / Gary McRam	51.57.7	+23.2s	20	€375
5	Barry Greer / John Lemon	52.03.6	+05.9s	18	€300

Championship Calendar

Date	Event	Location
3 February	Galway Rally	Galway City
23 March	UAC Easter Rally	Newcastle
4 May	Killarney Rally of the Lakes	Killarney
14 June	Donegal Rally	Letterkenny
23 August	Ulster Rally	Armagh
28 September	Cork '20' Rally	Cork City

For further information on the Fiesta Sporting**Trophy** Ireland, please contact Irish series co-ordinator Richard Millener on rmillener@m-sport.co.uk

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