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Maxol E85 Ford FST gears up for the Circuit of Ireland

Round 2 of the Maxol E85 Ford Fiesta Sporting **Trophy** Ireland kicks off on Sunday 23rd February when the registered crews will line up for the UAC Circuit of Ireland Rally.

The event, which is run by the Ulster Automobile Club and based in Newcastle, will see Fiesta crews run as one group just behind the main International field. Competitors face the demanding stages of Sunday's leg, which offer a total of 52 competitive miles.

Round 1 – The Galway International Rally – was won by Welsh duo Elfyn Evans (18) from Powys, Mid-Wales and Gareth Roberts and the pairing will lead the nine FST crews away from the start. Evans, who currently leads the drivers' standings, will be looking to claim a second consecutive win a brand new Fiesta ST built for this event. With his father and ex-Ford works driver Gwyndaf overseeing the young Welshman's progress, he has some invaluable advice available to help him on his title assault.

Alastair Fisher (18) from Enniskillen will be the second car to leave the start ramp. Fisher will be co-driven by Barry McNulty as usual. Fisher, who had bad luck on the first round of the series when a heavy landing after a bridge resulted in a broken driveshaft which eventually cost him the victory, will be aiming to change his misfortune and get through the rally and take maximum points.

The brothers of Tadhg and Shane Buckley from Ballyhaunis in County Mayo will be the third car on the road. A third place overall on round 1 has given Buckley a strong start to the championship, and he will be trying to build on this on round 2.

Fourth Fiesta on the road will be Meilyr Evans (18) from Machynlleth, co-driven again by Andrew Edwards. Evans is competing in both the UK and Irish Fiesta series in 2008. Having only competed in two rallies in a Fiesta ST, the Welshman has had a strong start to both series, scoring valuable points on both occasions, and his aim at the Circuit of Ireland will be to continue this trend.

Kyle Orr (18) from Dromore will be the fifth car on the road. He will be joined by Connor Harvey's (3rd in the 2007 series) former navigator Tony McDaid. Orr is also competing in both the UK and Irish FST series and, with a strong finish on the first rounds of both championships, he will be hoping to build on his current results. Orr has spent a lot of time developing his pacenote-making skills and has competed in a number of other rallies outside of the series to gain maximum time behind the wheel; he hopes this extra effort will be rewarded with his first FST victory.

The familiar pairing of Barry Greer (20) from Carryduff, Northern Ireland and John Lemon will be the sixth Fiesta in the pack. Greer, younger brother of Jonny, last year's FST UK Champion, has had a steady start to the Irish series. Greer's last outing on the first round of the UK series ended in disappointment after holing his radiator on Stage 1, forcing him into retirement. He will hope for better luck on what effectively will be his home event and will look to climb from his current fifth place in the drivers' championship standings.

Seventh Fiesta away will be newcomers Stephen Wright (18) from Co. Monaghan and co-driver Ashley McAdoo. With the crew aiming to build on their limited experience in the car they will look to grab a healthy points haul from the event and build their pace over its duration.

Championship regular Paul Quinn (20) from Dungannon, will again reunite with his Round 1 co-driver Jason Gillespie. Quinn will be hoping for better weather conditions than Galway, where water from flooded roads, resulted in the clutch slipping and dropping him valuable time. Quinn's main aim for the rally will be to record a solid finish.

The final registered crew rounding off the fiercely competitive field are Adrian McBride from Omagh, Co. Tyrone and Rodney Hicks. McBride, the former Irish 205 challenge competitor, suffered a disappointing first round when a broken driveshaft on SS5 meant he had to complete two stages of the rally with one-wheel-drive, leaving him to round off the finishers in Galway. Before this unforeseen problem McBride set some promising stage times, this could mean McBride may walk away with a good result at the end of the event.

With the competitors fighting for a prize fund of almost €3,000 on this event, competition will be close and relentless, with any of the crews capable of taking the outright victory of the FST series second meeting.

Elfyn Evans (19) said:

"We have been very busy getting the brand new car ready for the circuit of Ireland, we have had very little time to test before the event but I am still really looking forward to the event. Alastair will of course be very quick, and I have to match his pace but also make sure that I don't take any major risks on the event. A repeat of Galway would be a great result but it will be a tough battle for victory"

Championship Calendar

Date	Event	Location
3 February	Galway Rally	Galway City
23 March	UAC Circuit of Ireland	Newcastle
4 May	Killarney Rally of the Lakes	Killarney
15 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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