



Despite threatening for most of the day; a relatively dry evening greeted drivers, teams and fans as they gathered at HRP Lochgelly Raceway this past Saturday night for the Official Season Opening Event. The earlier rain had left the track in a greasy condition and this would remain the case for the evening as five formulas were scheduled to kick off season 2017.

The season opener at HRP Lochgelly Raceway often attracts a cosmopolitan entry and, while there were no cars from England in the pits, a large influx of Northern Irish drivers arrived to battle the local Scottish drivers with representation from across the Irish Sea in all five formulas.



The first formula to take to the track were the Junior productions. This is a new formula for 2017 for 11-16-year-old drivers who prefer to take the non-contact racing route in their careers as opposed to the Ministox contact class. The formula has been running in Northern Ireland for many years now and has proved to be a great feeder formula with many of the province's top drivers having cut their teeth in the class before graduating. Northern Ireland were represented in the formula this past Saturday by three of their very best including Matthew Nicholl, Adam Weir and Drew McKeown. Two Scottish drivers were able to have their cars ready for this event with Cameron Willacy making the move from Ministox while Amber Tyrell would be making her short oval debut. The first race saw the more-experienced Northern Irish drivers stamp their authority on proceedings as they locked out the podium places with Matthew Nicholl claiming the win ahead of McKeown and Weir with Willacy beating Tyrell as the first Scot home. The youngsters displayed car control and skills beyond their years throughout the evening and Nicholl, who has experience of racing at HRP Lochgelly Raceway in his Ninja Kart used his track knowledge and skill to claim heat two ahead of McKeown, Weir and Willacy once again with Tyrell sadly unable to start the race. The feature final saw Nicholl stroll to a faultless hat-trick in a carbon copy of heat two as the Northern Irish underlined their dominance on the night. Credit to all drivers who raced in poor conditions and the formula seems set to continue to grow with several Scottish cars almost ready to go!

The 2.0 Hot Rods have seen a bit of car-swapping during the winter with track owner William Hardie returning to the formula with the ex-Hylands/Bonnar Saxo while Andrew Denholm has upgraded to the ex-Burgoyne Saxo after an impressive 2016. Kevin Stewart made his debut in the formula while it was

also great to see Gary Black return to the track after concentrating on daughter Evie's Ninja Kart – Evie will return soon in a Junior production plus Ryan Mackie also brought his car back out. Aaron Beattie was the sole visiting driver as he brought his Saxo from Northern Ireland. Hardie made an impressive return in conditions that he is known to enjoy as he strolled to victory in heat one ahead of Kelty's Kinzie Law with an impressive second and Carronshore's Ryan Mackie. Hardie doubled up in heat two but had to keep an eye on his mirror as Scottish Champion Gordon Alexander had also made his way through the field to claim an eventual second place while Mackie continued his excellent night with another third place. Mackie made the early running in the feature final as the drivers dealt admirably with the tricky conditions but he was unable to keep Hardie behind him as Hardie cruised to a faultless hat-trick of wins on his return to the formula with Mackie holding on for a very impressive second place while Dunfermline's Gerry Hendry came home in third.



The National Hot Rods were beginning the second half of their 2017 World Championship Qualification Series sponsored by Dechmont Forklift Trucks and it was fantastic to see the Scottish drivers joined by three of the very best exponents of the formula from Northern Ireland in the shape of World Champion Adam Maxwell, National and British Champion Adam Hylands and former World and National Champion Glenn Bell. Lochore's Billy Bonnar crossed the line first in heat one but was sadly loaded following a technical infringement at post-race inspection handing the win to Glenn Bell ahead of Hylands and Scotland's Jim Cowie. Cowie managed to stay ahead of the chasing pack in heat two as he held on for the win ahead of heat one winner Bell and Graeme Callander. The feature final saw some tremendous action with the drivers slicing their way around the greasy track but it was that man Bell who managed to hold off fellow Northern Irishmen World Champion Maxwell and Hylands for an all-Ulster 1,2,3 on a night that produced some great action despite the weather. The next event for the National Hot Rods at HRP Lochgelly Raceway is the Dechmont Forklift Trucks European Championship Weekend at the beginning of April and it promises to be a great event.



The ProStocks had a relatively early start to their season so it was very pleasing to see a turnout in the mid-teens with several names missing on the night. Northern Ireland were represented by Jordan McCann, Del McLaughlin and Adam White. There were several drivers making their debut in the formula on a night that was certainly not conducive to great ProStocks racing as the track surface remained greasy all night but the drivers in attendance put on a good show which bodes well for a formula which has certainly struggled in recent times. Ryan O'Shea, driving the ex-Ricky White Astra which showed tremendous pace throughout 2016, claimed the first win of 2017 with a great drive to stay ahead of McLaughlin and McCann. White has told this writer that he is now moving up to the Stock Rod formula for 2017 – he could be one to watch. McLaughlin went one better in heat two as he held off Cowdenbeath's Paul Barron to take victory with Kirkcaldy's Ian Christie coming home in third. The feature final saw McCann eliminated early on as his car was sent spinning to the fence but Northern Irish pride was maintained by McLaughlin who came through the chaos to claim a fantastic heat and final winning double – Barron was once again the quickest of the Scots in second with Dalkeith's Dougie Kidd coming home in third in what may be one of his final ProStock outings before moving over to the CC Rod formula.



The final formula on show was the Superstox and, following a fantastic 2016 Season, much is expected of the open-wheel class with the driver base increasing and some stunning new cars on show. Sadly, an incident at practice last week saw Dino Bruce forced to sit this event out while several others were not quite ready to go. Nevertheless, a turnout of over twenty cars was excellent for the opening event and Northern Irishmen Chris McArdle and Lee Davison were welcome additions to the grid. National Points Champion Stuart Gilchrist debuted his new car as did Steven Ballantine while Scottish Champion Bryan Forrest showed off his extensively-refurbished machine as did Ally Noble after converting his BriSCA F2 Stock Car to Superstox spec. The standard of preparation across the formula from all drivers was extremely impressive and a credit to all drivers and teams. The first race saw the expected chaos on the greasy racing surface with the bumpers going in and cars flying everywhere!!! 2016 rookie Jack Turbitt was driving brilliantly and looked to be heading for a maiden win of 2017 before being overhauled by Scottish Champion Forrest who had made his way from the very back of the pack – Turbitt held on for an excellent second with Gilchrist bringing his new car home in third on its maiden voyage. Turbitt made the early running once again in heat two but was overtaken by Allan Gibson racing from a favourable yellow grade start but Turbitt managed to hold on for third as only Forrest was able to get past Turbitt as Gibson cruised to victory. The feature final was another frenetic race from the drop of the green flag with Gibson quickly taking the lead once again. Gibson powered away from the field as a tremendous battle between Forrest, Gilchrist, Tony Lattka, Barry Stephen and Turbitt ensued for the minor places with Forrest eventually coming out on top of that battle to come home in an impressive second while

Lattka posted his best result of the night in third. Gibson will now start the next meeting from further back in the blue grade so Turbitt may well have his eyes on some silverware on March 18th.

The track conditions did their best to take the shine off the season opening event but the drivers, teams and staff deserve huge credit for putting on a highly entertaining event and the large crowd in attendance also deserve a pat on the back for coming out to enjoy some excellent stock car action.

The next event at HRP Lochgelly Raceway is this Saturday March 11th and features the 1300 Stock Cars in the first round of the MR Coachworks/Ringtone Racepaints Series while the Stock Rods, Ministox and Ninja Karts will make their 2017 competitive debuts plus the ProStocks will be back in action. The green flag will drop on the first race at 5:45pm this Saturday at HRP Lochgelly Raceway.