

REPORT ON SCOTTISH MOTORSPORT FOR MSA COUNCIL 9th September 2016.

We are well into a relatively exciting year's Motorsport in Scotland. Most of the Championships are still undecided with several events still to run. The severe downturn in the oil sector in the North East is having a significant effect on many disciplines, and it is uncertain how the future will play out here, with a large number of competitors based in this area, where the economy has been buoyant for so long.

One example of this is the drop in SMRC grids in the BMW Compact cup, down a third from last year. Overall grids are down 15 / 20% on last year, which is having a big effect on the costs of running the sport. The Scottish FF Championship has attracted some new competitors this year, with the winner going forward to the Mazda "Road to Indy" shootout at the end of the year. It was good to see Sandy Mitchell become the youngest ever winner of a GT race, aged 16, in the Ecurie Ecosse McLaren at Snetterton a couple of weeks ago.

Working with Rory Bryant, the SMS National Development Manager, SMRC took the lead role in organising the sporting element of the biggest motoring show ever seen in Scotland, the Ignition Festival at the SECC at the beginning of August. David Coulthard drove a Grand Prix Car in Scotland for the first time, with Mark Weber, there was stunt driving from the Top Gear Live lot including The Stig, and bike displays too. Scottish Sporting Car Club ran a passenger ride Autotest, and processed 258 people over the 3 day event, working with GoMotorsport, and SMS which has now moved into it's operational phase. This follows the success of it's funding application to Sport Scotland, and Gillian Sefton, the new National Development Officer, was in attendance at the SMS/ SMRC Stand in the main hall. The event was a huge success on all fronts, attracting 30,000 folk over the 3 days. It will be repeated next year, and there is little doubt that the sport will be along again, as it was surely a huge draw to get folk through the doors to the commercial show, where the mundane business of selling cars was taking place! We must hope that all of this work by so many volunteers will attract newcomers to the sport, now that they have seen what we are all about. A great effort, all round!

Unexpectedly, Forest Rallying in Scotland has staged a comeback in competitor numbers this year following the loss of 2 events in 2015, although the cancellation of the Jim Clark Rally this year was a low point. Other factors came into play there, however, and the long awaited report from the Lord Advocate on the accidents in 2014 is still to be produced. This is creating considerable uncertainty about the future of the Clark. With 7 events planned for the year, losing the Clark has meant the Championship running only 6 events. The SRC Committee has found another event to add for 2017 in the old Argyll forests, which will bring the Championship back to 7 events. Entries in the other events have been good, and with only one event to go following a very successful first running of the Grampian Rally, there is a great buzz about, and it looks like we are back to full heath. Entry costs are still an issue, however, and Clubs are using more double usage than before to keep costs down.

This is fine where the stages are able to take it, but where that is not the case, such as with the Scottish Rally, which was also a BRC counter, the lower numbers take a significant amount of damage at the tail end of stages which have been run over by up to 200 previous cars.

A Rally Future meeting took place in Aberdeen a few weeks ago, the last in the series, but met with a disappointing turnout. Progress is undoubtedly being made, however, and organisers are making it all happen.

The Scottish Tarmac Championship has had a great year so far, with bumper entries, filling to almost capacity within a day of opening. This is a great championship for new entrants, less car damaging than forests, and with 9 rounds, 6 of which are counters. The cost of this type of event is another attraction, with the cost per mile being in the region of one third that of Forest Rallying. As with almost all other disciplines, there is a shortage of young blood on organising teams and officials. Medical cover is becoming more difficult too.

It is sad to report the loss of David Baker last month. David was a stalwart of our sport in the North East, but happily Clerked events around the Country. He was also Co-ordinator on two of the speed Championships in the North, and there is a danger that without David, these Championships will cease. Accordingly, the SSHC are looking at taking them under their wing to allow them to continue. David will be sorely missed.

Well past the halfway stage in the season, the Scottish Speed and Hillclimb Championship report that entries in their 3 Guyson supported Championships are well below average, and unlikely to increase significantly before the year end. It is good to report that the new Mazda MX5 Class has been successful. Speed competitors in racing cars are keen to know the outcome of the recent data gathering exercise by the MSA regarding ROPS compliance, particularly for older cars.

BRUCE LYLE

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