



Mother of Welsh closed-road rallies is reborn

Published: 8th March 2018

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Online version: <http://www.wheelswithinwales.uk/mother-of-welsh-closed-road-rallies-is-reborn/>

The revamped Protyre MSA Asphalt Rally Championship returns in style this weekend with the mother of all closed road rallies in Wales., *writes Roger Gale.*

There's a superb entry for the Port Talbot MC-organised **Melvyn Evans Motorsport** Tour of Epynt on Sunday 11 March, an event which can trace its origins back to October 1965.

Having taken a sabbatical in 2017, it's been 17 months since the last MSA Asphalt Rally Championship round (Cheviot Stages, October 2016) - and since then the BTRDA-run series has undergone a significant overhaul, with a new calendar of events, class structure and points system.

And the innovations have met with the approval of competitors from across the classes, with a magnificent field of cars heading to the famous rollercoaster asphalt roads of the Epynt military range for the opening round of the 2018 series.

With six Asphalt Rally Championship titles and 18 rally wins on Epynt to his name, Damian Cole is one of the favourites for victory in his Get Connected Ford Fiesta WRC. He'll be partnered by the experienced Jamie Edwards, in what will be their first proper rally together. But if experience on Epynt is the key to success, look no further than Bob Fowden - who is celebrating 40 years in rallying this season. Co-driven by Aled Davies, he'll be aiming for nothing but a repeat of last year's Tour of Epynt victory in his ex-works Comline Auto Parts/NGK-backed Subaru Impreza WRC S11.

Spectators are welcome and should approach the Epynt ranges via the 'dual carriageway' off the A40 at Llywel.

Admission is £10 per car and includes a comprehensive Spectator Guide & Entry List. Three locations will provide viewing of all the stages throughout the day - all accessed from the Dixies Corner area and arrowed accordingly.

Please note that the Centre Road will be closed and Location C will only provide access to the afternoon stages. At all locations, please park on one side of the road and heed marshals' advice. For more event information, please go to ptmconline.com.



Event sponsor Melvyn Evans will start at three in his Subaru Impreza WRC, while the 2007 Asphalt Rally Champion Steve Simpson returns to the series in his Impreza WRC. Three-time MSA British Historic Rally Champion Jason Pritchard hasn't as much experience on Epynt, but whether he drives his five-time Manx National Rally winning Focus WRC05, his Fiesta S2000 or his rapid Mk2 Escort, expect the North Road Garage-supported Builth Wells driver to be challenging for the win too.

The wide variety of potential rally winning driver and car combinations continues with Nigel Feeney and Daniel Harper in a pair of Prodrive-built Mini John Cooper Works Mini WRCs, Jamie Jukes and Philip Hopkins in a brace of Spencer Sport Mitsubishi Mirage R5s, former Welsh Tarmac Rally Champion Rob Tout in his The Wheel Specialists/Enterprise Insurance/Owen Developments/Tout's Tool and Plant Hire Mitsubishi Evo 10, Adrian Spencer and Brian Watson in a pair of Subaru Impreza S11 WRCs and Richard Clews in his ITG Air Filters Subaru Impreza. Double N4 class champion Chris Rice drives a GC8 Subaru, Lee Perry an Escort Cosworth and John Macniven a Subaru Impreza.

If conditions are dry, the four-wheel drive cars will be under considerable pressure from a squadron of powerful rear-wheel drive Darrians. The mid-engined cars, built in west Wales by Tim Duffee, are synonymous with asphalt rallying and have twice beaten four-wheel drive cars to the MSA Asphalt Rally Championship title - with Geoff Kitney/Alan McCann champions in 1990 and John Dalton/Alun Davies in 1993.

This year's Melvyn Evans Motorsport Tour of Epynt is based in Llandovery, with 75 miles of stages over the famous Epynt military range. A competitor recce, followed by technical scrutineering, takes place on Saturday 10 March, before the action gets underway the following day (Sunday 11 March) at 08.40. The finish is back in Llandovery town centre at 16.30, with the prizegiving at 18.00.

There are currently six highly motivated and serious registered Championship Darrian drivers contesting the Tour of Epynt: Ashley Field (Darrian T90 GTR+), Andy Fraser



(Darrian T9 V6), Huw Reed (Darrian T90 GTR), Tony Rees (Darrian GTR), Paul Culverwell (Darrian T9) and former double Welsh Tarmac Champion Richard Merriman (Darrian T90).

There are many other exciting two-wheel drive cars to keep an eye on too, like Mike Williams' MG ZR 160, which has been fitted with a new six-speed sequential gearbox, the rapid 220bhp Vauxhall Corsa driven by last year's ASWMC Sealed Surface Rally Championship runner-up, Darren Pool, the Fiesta S2000 of former Class C Manx Rally Champion Geoff Wright and the Proton Satria S1600 driven by Roger Priestnall.

There are plenty of spectacular Escorts too, including the ones driven by Paul Doroszczuk, Phil Turner, Ross Brusby, Tomas Davies, Mike Pugsley, Richard Slinger, Gareth James, Stefan Davies and Steve Retchless - while Stuart Anderson contests the event in his Vauxhall Chevette HSR GP4.

Other registered contenders to keep a close eye on include Mike Farmer (Ford Focus), Mark Booth (Honda Civic), Tom Barber (BMW Compact), Gareth James (Peugeot 205GTi), Adrian Drury (Peugeot 106 GTi), Tim Waters (Renault Clio), Rhidian Daniels (Citroen C1 Max), James Nicholls (Peugeot), Kevin Harbour (Citroen C2R2) and Geoff Glover in his rear-wheel drive Vauxhall Astra.

Mitsubishi Lancers are very well represented, driven by the likes of Wayne Sisson, Barry Groundwater, Stu Bainborough, Oliver Hopkins, Chris Marshall, Paul James and former Dixies Challenge Champion and 2017 Jaffa Stages winner Philip Turner.



There are several talented youngsters contesting the Protyre MSA Asphalt Rally Championship this year, including 19-year old Ed Fossey (the reigning BTRDA 1400 Champion driving a newly acquired Peugeot 208 R2) and 21-year old Lloyd Morgan in a Mike Morgan Rallying Nissan Micra. Morgan will also be in an intriguing 1400cc class battle with William Mains (Vauxhall Nova), while Oliver Bell (Nissan Micra) takes on Bill Paynter (Peugeot 106 Rallye).

Like all six rounds of the 2018 Protyre MSA Asphalt Rally Championship, registered competitors on the Tour of Epynt will enjoy a comprehensive TV and broadcast package, with live streaming via the Special Stage Facebook page and live radio broadcasts and interviews on rallyfm.net. A few weeks later, a dedicated Tour of Epynt rally report will be televised on the Sky/Freesat Front Runner channel, on the Motor Trend On Demand channel and on the Special Stage Facebook, YouTube and App platforms.