

Thrills and spills as UK rally elite storm the McRae Stages



SEE YOU JIMMY: the senior McRae had a super final stage to secure seventh place overall.

WELL DONE: young Motherwell driver Kevin Ross and co-driver Kirsty Riddick fared well.



ROUGH RIDE: Kenny Moore of Larkhall and driving partner Karen MacLeod in their Talbot Sunbeam.

CUMBRIAN teenager Matthew Wilson was a convincing winner of Saturday's Colin McRae Forest Stages Rally, finishing the Perthshire-based event more than a minute-and-a-half ahead of his nearest rival.

The 18-year-old, whose father Malcolm runs the Ford World Rally Championship team and is a former sparring partner of McRae's dad Jim, started the rally with his Ford Focus 02 carrying number 1 by virtue of his maiden win last year.

Organised by Coltness Car Club, with backing from EventScotland and Perthshire, the rally was the final round of the County Saab Scottish Rally Championship. Although Durham's Barry Johnson won the title at the penultimate round in Galloway last month, the McRae had promised furious action from those chasing the runner-up spot.

That eventually went to Malcolm Proudlock from Dumfries after his rivals retired during the four-stage event held over Perthshire's famous forest stages.

For the first time the "Bears" decided to run two-wheel drive cars at the head of the field in their own separate category, giving them a chance of taking part over relatively smooth roads before the following 4x4 cars chewed them up.

Here it was the former British

champion Jim McRae who was to the fore in a Mk2 Escort. He had an event-long battle with Yorkshire's Steve Bannister in a similar car, with the Lanark driver eventually making sure of victory – and seventh place overall – with a storming drive over the final stage.

Jim was tackling the stages just a few minutes after his famous son, Colin, who was driving his development Mk2 Escort as opening car. Without the usual constraints of having to have a professional co-driver, Colin opted to enjoy himself and also raise cash for charity. He raised £70,000 by auctioning-off a chance to sit beside him at competitive speed over a forest stage to four "lucky" people!

The rally attracted the largest entry of any national B event in the country this year, and included crews from Majorca and Norway. There was also a strong entry from members of the organising club, including former motorcycle race champion-turned-rally driver John Crawford from Motherwell. His Metro 6R4 was lying fifth equal after stage one, but he and Roy Herron retired on the next stage after losing a wheel.

Last year's Scottish Junior Champion, 18-year-old Motherwell driver Kevin Ross eventually finished 19th and third in class with his Mitsubishi Lancer. He is still getting the hang of his recently-acquired car, yet he and co-driver Kirsty Riddick still managed to set a sixth-fastest time on the new Griffin stage.

Not so fortunate was fellow Motherwell driver John Paterson, accompanied by William Smillie in an Escort Mk2. They went out after stage four with gearbox troubles. Also out, after a stage two accident, was the similar car of brother and sister Steve and Lynn Hope.

Larkhall's Kenny Moore, partnered by Karen MacLeod, didn't have the best of days either, although he eventually did bring his post-historic Talbot Sunbeam home in 64th spot.

Although they are only 17, Bothwell youngsters Alick Kerr and Ian Angel managed to overcome major problems to finish in 61st place.

Their Leaker Direct-backed Peugeot 205 GTi had been reliable over the previous couple of rallies but decided to give up the ghost at the weekend. "It all started the night before when we couldn't get the car started and it took over an hour to fix a small electrical problem with the starter motor," explained Kerr.

With problems on each of the four stages, the pair did well to finish the rally, especially since they only had third gear for the final two stages.

At the end-of-rally prize giving at Perth Racecourse the rally's manager and driving force behind the country's most successful national event, Jim Brown from Blackwood, was for once speechless when he found himself being presented with "The Spirit of the Rally" award by Jim McRae.