

## Flying Ferguson extends his winning run into the new season

Stewartstown's Steven Ferguson got his 2023 autotest season off to a flying start, as he took the win at the first round of the McMillan Specialist Cars NI Autotest Championship. The Autotest Drivers Club hosted this event at the Transport Training Services, Nutts Corner on Saturday 4th March. With 41 cars lining up to start, it was poised to be a day of stiff competition and proved to be so.

It was Ferguson who would finish the day on the top step of the rostrum in his Mini Special, with David Thompson only 15.3 seconds behind in second and Mark King a further 7.8 seconds a drift in third.

Despite a failure on Test 1, Peter Grimes gave chase to Ferguson in Class A in his Mini Special but was unable to catch him, finishing some 54.4 seconds behind the reigning NI champion, but with Ferguson claiming the Overall Win, this elevated Grimes to first in Class. Father and son Chris Grimes Snr and Jnr battled it out for the runner-up spot in class, with Snr finishing second, 17.4 seconds ahead of his son. Guy Foster would be an early retirement after his Mini Special experienced a mechanical failure but hopefully this won't be the last time we see the talented driver from south of the border out this season.

Scotland's Willie Keaning made the trip across the Irish sea for the event, taking the win in Class B for Sports Cars in his Sylva Striker with Andrew Blair just 1.3 seconds behind him in second and Trevor Ferguson taking third in this class in his Silvia Stryker.

Robin Lyons would take the Class C win in his Mini Saloon, with brother's Andrew and Richard Earney, battling for the runner up spot. A failure on the second run of Test 3 for Andrew, would hand the second place to Richard.

In the Large Saloon Class, David Thompson returned to battle with Mark King in their Vauxhall Nova's, seeing both drivers trading fastest times throughout the day. At the finish it would be Thompson who had the upper hand by 7.8 seconds, claiming the class win, with King settling for second. It was a three-way scrap for the final podium place in Class D, between Damien Mooney, Gary Campbell and championship sponsor George McMillan. It would be Mooney who would take the final class award, after Campbell suffered a mechanical failure on the first run of Test 3 pushing him back into fourth.

In the Clubman Challenge, Class A was won by Ian McCann in his Vauxhall Nova, and Gordon Buckley in his Westfield took the Class B win as well as sealing the Overall Clubman win on this occasion. The Class C winner was Kevin McNamee in his Nissan Micra. Class D was a battle of the Mazda MX-5s, with Derek Harrison taking the win ahead of Ian Lowry and Ryan Catterson in third.

In the Advanced Challenge Adam McMullan in his Toyota Starlet Special would take the Class A win, ahead of Paul Phelan in his Mini Special. Class C winner and the Overall Advanced Category winner was Robert Dickson in his immaculately prepared Mini Saloon. Gareth Dillon would take the win in Class D in his Mazda MX-5 and continued to show his autotesting prowess, finishing second overall in the Advanced Challenge.

A great day was had by all, and with dry weather conditions and a fantastic display of driving skills from all competitors made it enjoyable to watch by the many spectators who turned out to see all the thrills and spills the event had to offer.

The boys now head to the next round of the championship being hosted by the Ulster Automobile Club on Saturday 25th March at the Titanic Slipways - Belfast, where they will battle it out once

more to see who will be fastest on the day. If you can't wait to then for more action from the Autotest NI, visit their Facebook and Instagram for video highlights from this event.

#### McMillan Specialist Cars Northern Ireland Autotest Championship Round 1

Overall Winner – Steven Ferguson

#### **Championship Category**

Class A – Peter Grimes

Class B – Willie Keaning

Class C – Robin Lyons

Class D – David Thompson

#### **Clubman Category**

Class A – Ian McCann

Class B – Gordon Buckley

Class C – Kevin McNamee

Class D – Derek Harrison

#### **Advanced Category**

Class A – Adam McMullan

Class B – No Competitors

Class C – Robert Dickson

Class D – Gareth Dillon

#### **Production Car Category**

Class P – Adam Ferguson