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Edwards tames the Bulldog on home ground

The second round of the Kick Energy Fiesta Sport**Trophy** (FST) was won by 2009 rookie, Matt Edwards (24) from Cockermouth, Cumbria and long time navigator Andy Murphy, the pair won the event by an impressive 25.1 seconds and also win the overall BRC Challenge rally by 2:47.0, both incredible achievements.

19 Fiesta ST's lined up on Saturday morning for the start of the event, the first time that the FST series has run in it's new 'dual format' with eleven of these crews tackling the full International event whilst the remaining eight crews took on the stages of the Challenge event. The event based in Bala, saw the FST crews tackle four of the best stages in the country with the longest stage an incredible 16 miles in length.

The first stage was the 8.84 miles of Dyfnant. The first FST crew into the stage was 19-year old Kris Hall from Appleby, Cumbria with co-driver Robbie Durant. With the stages reported to be slippier than seen on the recce, Hall stopped the clocks on 9:33.0. Second into the stage was Craig Breen (19) from Waterford, and navigator Gareth Roberts. Breen was competing on the event knowing a finish was vital not only for his title fight, but also because his car would be leaving for Portugal the following day so he could compete in the first round of the Fiesta Sport**Trophy** International series. Breen completed the stage 3.1 seconds slower than Hall. With the International field running before the crews in the Challenge field it was Mark Donnelly (17) from Omagh and co-driver Paddy Robinson who were third fastest International competitor on the opening stage. Edwards who was the first of the Challenge runners then posted a time of 9.32.8, 0.2 seconds quicker than Hall stunning everyone and showing that Edwards second overall on the first round was a result he was keen to repeat and maybe even beat. However, it was not good news for one FST crew, Patrick Malley (24) from Auckland, New Zealand had made a 12,000 mile journey to the get to the event, only for an under-bonnet fire on the first stage meaning an early retirement and a long journey home – Malley has however already commented on looking forward to the next round of the series – The Pirelli International Rally in April.

The second test for the competitors was the 8.48 miles of Aberhirmant. Edwards would again take the fastest stage time, 2.5 seconds quicker than Breen, with Hall a further 2.5 seconds adrift. Kyle Orr (19) from Dromore, with last minute stand in navigator Rob Fagg would take fourth quickest on the stage. Orr was taking the event steady as he was keen for a good points finish. Donnelly dropped some time in stage two and moved on to the first service of the day in fourth place overall.

As the crews all headed back to service the main talking point was of Edwards speed over the first two tests. The only problem reported in service was 17 year old Jamie Brown from Norwich who had passed his driving test only the day before the event, who suffered a broken hub which was replaced with seconds to spare by his hard-working team.

Gartheiniog at 15.57 miles in length would be a real tester for the drivers. Edwards would continue his trend and finish the stage quickest with a time of 16:17.8, a whole 13.6 seconds quicker than any other crew. Breen was second quickest with Hall third, despite running wide and hitting a post causing minor damage to the car. Donnelly was fourth quickest and local driver Luke Francis (19) from Denbighshire would be fifth quickest on his first FST round of the year. The penultimate stage would also unfortunately see the demise of two other FST challenge crews. Neil Coalter (26) from Glanamman and co-driver Hannah Cessford would be forced to retire with a driveshaft failure whilst newcomer to the series for this event Robbie Barrable (21) from Dublin would see what was becoming a successful debut in the Fiesta ST come to a premature end when he left the road and was unable to get the car back onto the stage.

With the crews heading for the final stage Edwards held a healthy lead of 19 seconds over Breen with Hall only 6.1 seconds further behind in third and with the longest stage of the event left (Big-Ray at 16.85 miles) the result was set to go down to the wire.

Away from the leading crews a number of other competitors were having successful runs. In the International event the Billy Coleman Award winner Ross Forde (25) from Galway and new navigator Gary McElhinney, were posting increasingly faster stage times and with no problems throughout the rally they would finish the FST event sixth overall. Rory Hall (26) from Fishguard and co-driver Lee Burgess couldn't complete the whole recce after sustaining a puncture on their car which they could not get changed, and ultimately drove all but the first stage blind without their own pacenotes, a seventh overall would see the crew happy after this problem. Francis would eventually take eighth overall in the event and the final prize money for the event. Ninth would go to Barry Greer (21) from Carryduff and navigator John Lemon, with Stevie Brown (21) from Aberdeen and navigator Andrew Roughead rounding out the top 10.

Meanwhile back on the final stage, with the International crews completing the test first it would be Breen who recorded a time of 19:27.4. Hall would sustain a puncture within the first few corners of the start of the stage dropping him out of overall contention and allowing Donnelly to leapfrog him and finish 3rd overall in the FST event with Hall ending up fourth. It was then a nervous time for Breen as he waited for news on Edwards final stage time. As the time of 19:21.3 emerged it would mean Edwards would take the FST win by 25.1 seconds. Breen was devastated but acknowledged the superb drive from Edwards who apart from the FST win would also claim the challenge rally overall win, and with four quickest stage times from a possible four stages he also took the Castrol Hard Charger award.

With the FST results declared final after four stages it also meant the end to the BRC Challenge rally, where FST crews would take the top four places. Edwards was outright winner, with Francis second, John Boyd (22) and Fred Bell from West Linton third and Harry Hunt (20) from London with navigator Tudor Jenkins fourth overall.

As Edwards sprayed his champagne, nine of the FST crews went out to complete the last two stages of the International event. Breen would finish the day an incredible tenth overall in the International event and second two-wheel drive home beating a number of other highly powerful cars back. Hall would leapfrog back in front of Donnelly to finish 15th overall with Donnelly taking 16th overall. Orr would finish 17th overall and Rory Hall would round out the top 20.

The new format of the Kick Energy Fiesta Sport Trophy UK 2009 came to an exciting end on the first round of the British Rally Championship and not only produced an FST winner from the Challenge rally event, but the Fiesta ST dominated the International rally results and proved what a winning package the car really is.

Event Winner, Matt Edwards, said:

"We are obviously delighted with this result, its a dream come true to win both our first Fiesta event and take our first Overall event win here on these stages; its definitely a weekend I will remember, and arguably the best weekend I've had in the sport for the four years I have been competing. It's the ideal reward for all the hard work that goes in behind the scenes, and I'd like to congratulate Andy on a great job reigning me in today, as I have been more fired up for today's stages than I can ever remember being!"

Interesting points for Editors:

- FST had a top four overall in the Challenge section of the rally and five registered competitors finish in the top 20 of the International event.
- Matt Edwards times would have placed him 11th overall in the International rally after the first four stages.
- There were only three retirements from nineteen registered starters on the event.

Bulldog Rally Final Positions

Pos	Driver	Co-driver	Road Penalty	Total	Difference
1	Matt Edwards	Andy Murphy		53:46.4	-
2	Craig Breen	Gareth Roberts		54:11.5	+ 25.1
3	Mark Donnelly	Paddy Robinson		55:50.3	+ 1:38.8
4	Kris Hall	Robbie Durant		55:53.3	+ 3.0
5	Kyle Orr	Robb Fag		55:56.3	+ 3.0
6	Ross Forde	Gary McElhinney		56:11.9	+ 14.6
7	Rory Hall	Lee Burgess		56:30.9	+ 19.0
8	Luke Francis	Jon Madoc-Jones		56:33.4	+ 2.5
9	Barry Greer	John Lemon		56:56.9	+ 23.5
10	Stevie Brown	Andrew Roughead		57:05.0	+ 7.1
11	John Boyd	Fred Bell		57:48.9	+ 43.9
12	Stefan Davis	Kim Baker		58:38.7	+ 49.8
13	Harry Hunt	Tudor Jenkins	1:00	59:19.9	+ 41.2
14	Thomas Watson	Elgan Davies		1:04:12.4	+ 4:52.5
15	Martyn Jones	Kris Killip		1:18:00.9	+ 13:48.5
16	Jamie Brown	Craig Burgess		1:23:05.5	+ 5:04.6
-	Robert Barrable	Seamus O Grady		DNF	-
-	Neil Coalter	Hannah Cessford		DNF	-
-	Patrick Malley	Malcolm Read		DNF	-

2009 Championship Calendar

Date	Name	Surface	Website
7 March	Malcolm Wilson Rally	Gravel	www.malcolmwilson.co.uk
28 March	Bulldog Challenge Rally or Bulldog International	Gravel	www.bulldog-rally.co.uk
17-18 April	Pirelli Challenge Rally or Pirelli International	Gravel	www.pirelliinternationalrally.co.uk
27 June	RSAC Scottish Rally	Gravel	www.scottishrally.co.uk
10-11 July	Isle of Man Challenge Rally or Isle of Man International	Tarmac	www.mir.co.im
21-23 August	Ulster Challenge Rally or Ulster International	Tarmac	www.ulsterrally.com
26 September	Trackrod Challenge Rally or Rally Yorkshire	Gravel	www.trackrodmotorclub.co.uk
TBC	Awards Ceremony		TBC

2009 Championship Standings after Round 2

Pos	Driver	Points
1	Matt Edwards / Andy Murphy	55
2	Kris Hall / Robbie Durant	50
3	Mark Donnelly / Paddy Robinson	42
4	Kyle Orr / Rob Fagg	40
5	Barry Greer / John Lemon	30
6	Ross Forde / Gary McElhinney	26
7	Craig Breen / Gareth Roberts	25
8	Rory Hall / Lee Burgess	25
9	John Boyd / Fred Bell	22
10	Martyn Jones / Kris Killip	22

11	Harry Hunt / Tudor Jenkins	21
12	Stevie Brown / Andrew Roughead	20
13	Matthias Boon / John Lavaerts	14
14	Luke Francis / Jon Madoc-Jones	13
15	Stefan Davis / Kim Baker	9
16	Tom Watson / Elgan Davies	7
17	Jamie Brown / Craig Burgess	6
-	Robert Barrable / Seamus O Grady	-
-	Neil Coalter / Hannah Cessford	-
-	Patrick Malley / Maloclm Read	-

For further information on the Kick Energy Fiesta Sport **Trophy** UK, please contact UK series co-ordinator Richard Millener at rmillener@m-sport.co.uk

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