



Press Information

MITSUBISHI RALLIART EVOLUTION CHALLENGE IRELAND ROUNDS EIGHT & NINE REPORT



- Riverbank House Hotel Dick Bailey Stages Rally - 12th & 13th September 2009.
- Neil McCance becomes 2009 Irish Evo Challenge Champion after scoring double victory in Wexford.
- Donnacha O'Callaghan claims co-driver's title.
- Final round sees four drivers battle it out to the end.

14th September 2009

This weekend's Riverbank House Hotel Dick Bailey Stages Rally saw Neil McCance become the 2009 Mitsubishi Ralliart Evolution Challenge Ireland Champion. Co-driven on this occasion by Frances Regan, McCance recorded a double-victory, winning round eight on Saturday and round nine on Sunday. Stanley Ballantine and Donnacha O'Callaghan ended the weekend in second place, a result that confirmed Ballantine as runner up in the series and enabled O'Callaghan to claim the 2009 co-driver's title.

Hosting the final two-round's in this year's Irish Evo Challenge, the Wexford-based event featured two stages run three times on Saturday and another two stages run three times on Sunday. A service halt followed each pair, all of which were held over closed public roads in the countryside west of the host town in bright sunshine.

Prior to the event, five drivers and six co-drivers were mathematically capable of winning the series, which meant it was going to be a battle to the last. As it turned out, timing issues on the first of Saturday's stages meant that the leading three crews: William Mavitty/Keefe Kilcoyne, Alan Carmichael/Ivor Lamont and McCance/Regan were all accredited with the same time, with Ballantine/O'Callaghan 15 seconds behind in fourth.

At the first service halt following SS2 crews reported that the roads were not providing as much grip as anticipated: McCance losing confidence when his car got out of shape at high speed and Carmichael cracking a rear wheel after sliding wide near the start of SS1, just avoiding a puncture. But this was not the case for Mavitty, when his car under-steered into a bank six km before the end of SS2, forcing him and Kilcoyne to stop and change a wheel before continuing with bent suspension.

Having lost over ten minutes, Mavitty/Kilcoyne knew their challenge for the rest of the day was over, but still having to drop scores from one of the season's eight rounds, their title hopes were far from over and they carried on for the rest of the day in preparation for a big push on Sunday.

In contrast, Ballantine/O'Callaghan were delighted with their Mitsubishi's handling and were pleased to be third behind McCance/Regan and Carmichael/Lamont, with Tom White/Robert Murphy in fourth, having admitted to a series of overshoots and spins in stage two.

Still not completely confident with the conditions, McCance/Regan's lead was reduced to just one second following SS3 as Carmichael /Lamont went on a mission. But after a brief visit to a ditch on SS4 and a few close calls, they adjusted their pace on SS4 which saw the margin increase to seven seconds as they entered the second service halt. The speed of the leading two crews saw the gap behind them increase, with Ballantine and O'Callaghan now over a minute adrift.

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The margins between the first three crews were further extended on stage five and, with notional times applied for stage six due to an accident ahead of the Mitsubishi runners, the day concluded with McCance/Regan recording their third Evo Challenge victory of the season and moving a step closer to the title.

Round eight results

1 Neil McCance (Coomber)/Francis Regan (Cushendall)	1:04:26
2 Alan Carmichael (Ballymena)/Ivor Lamont (Ballymena)	1:04:47
3 Stanley Ballantine (Strabane)/Donnacha O'Callaghan (Mallow)	1:06:09
4 Tom White (Foulksmills)/Robert Murphy (New Ross)	1:08:39
5 William Mavitty (Eniskillen)/Keefe Kilcoyne (Westport)	1:20:58

The outcome of Saturday's result saw the battle for the driver's hot-up even more, with McCance now on 46 points and Carmichael, Ballantine and Mavitty all tying for second on 42. Equally the co-driver's title was still up for grabs, with O'Callaghan, Lamont and Kilcoyne (Regan not registered) separated by just five points.

Mindful that he would have to finish second or higher to claim the title, McCance started Sunday totally focussed on the task ahead and, after an impressive run through the opening stage, he and Regan stopped the clocks 11 seconds ahead of Carmichael/Lamont – their performance good enough to set the fourth fastest time overall.

Determined not to be outdone, Carmichael/Lamont threw caution to the wind on the next stage, split times showing they were fastest of the Evo Challenge crews right up until the final corner, when the car slid wide and clipped a wall, which stopped them in their tracks. Although managing to get the car back to the service halt that followed, they felt that too much time had been lost and, because of the extent of the damage, decided to retire from the event albeit philosophical that they could not have tried any harder to overhaul the leaders.

This left McCance/Ferris ahead of Ballantine/O'Callaghan by 44 seconds and with the dilemma that often plagues crews who have a comfortable lead: whether to continue at a competitive pace or to back off and risk the possibility of losing concentration. However, McCance's mind-set was to drive the remaining four stages according to the text-book.

For Mavitty/Kilcoyne, the day's tactic was to go as hard as possible, which is exactly what they did. Pushing his Evo VI to its limits on the opening stage resulted in a 10-second overshoot, but a clean run through the second and third stages saw them within two seconds of Ballantine/O'Callaghan. But it all started to go wrong on the fourth stage, when the car stepped out of line at 120 mph and spun three times before coming to rest – miraculously without making contact with any of the surroundings.

After collecting their thoughts, Mavitty/Kilcoyne continued through the stage at similar pace, only to hit the wall previously discovered by Carmichael, the impact bringing their gallant efforts to an abrupt conclusion. However, they retired in the knowledge that they had done all they could to challenge for the title and had done enough to claim third in the end-of-season standings.

Their exit meant that Ballantine/O'Callaghan were now in a comfortable second place, a position they maintained to the finish - the result seeing Ballantine end the season as the runner-up driver and provide O'Callaghan with the 2009 co-driver's title. Also achieving a near-faultless run, White put his local knowledge to good use to record his and Murphy's best finish so far in the Evolution Challenge.

But it was McCance's day and, after a perfect drive, he crossed the line at the Riverbank Hotel overlooking Wexford Harbour to record his second win of the weekend, his fourth of the year and his first Evolution Challenge title in six year's of competition.

"After competing for five years in the UK and now a year in the Irish Mitsubishi series', I am just delighted to have finally achieved my first Evo Challenge title." said McCance. "Although we have won both rounds this weekend, it has not been easy as I had to finish second or higher today and in this sport nothing is guaranteed. But it's great to have done it and I have to thank my team and everyone who has supported me, not just for this season, but for the past five years as well."

McCance will now go on to claim his prize, details of which will be announced shortly.

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The Mitsubishi Ralliart Evolution Challenge Ireland is supported by: Pirelli tyres, Sunoco Racing Fuels, James Foley Rallysport, Carbone Lorraine, Murray Motorsport, Speedline Corse wheels, PIAA lights, Pacenotes, Sparco racewear and Mitsubishi Motors Ireland.

Round nine results

1	Neil McCance (Coomber)/Francis Regan (Cushendall)	1:02:34
2	Stanley Ballantine (Strabane)/Donnacha O'Callaghan (Mallow)	1:04:28
3	Tom White (Foulksmills)/Robert Murphy (New Ross)	1:07:13

Retirements

SS2	Alan Carmichael (Ballymena)/Ivor Lamont (Ballymena)	Accident
SS4	William Mavitty (Eniskillen)/Keefe Kilcoyne (Westport)	Accident

Final series standings

Drivers

1	Neil McCance	58
2	Stanley Ballantine	52
3	William Mavitty	48
4	Alan Carmichael	42
5	Liam Egan	39
6	Tom White	26
7	John McGlaughlin	24
8	Keith Cronin	24
9	Geoff McMahan	20
10	Brendan Cumiskey	8
11	Michael Murray	5
12	Alan Burrows	4

Co-drivers

1	Donnacha O'Callaghan	59
2	Ivor Lamont	44
3	Keefe Kilcoyne	40
4	Sean Ferris	34
5	Robert Murphy	29
6	Crawford Henderson	24
7	Greg Shinnors	24
8	Mary O'Kane	22
9	Robert Graham	21
10	Colin Harkness	18
11	Brian Daniels	6
12	Gavin Burrows	4

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Photo: After winning the final two rounds of the Mitsubishi Ralliart Evolution Challenge Ireland at this weekend's Wexford-based Riverbank Hotel Dick Bailey Stages Rally, Neil McCance secured this year's Irish Evolution Challenge driver's title (*copyright free image*).