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Press Information

BARRY BATTLES THROUGH TO WIN EVO CHALLENGE OPENER

- 2009 Mitsubishi Ralliart Evolution Challenge Round 1.
- Rallye Sunseeker – 27th & 28th February.
- Daniel Barry snatches victory by 2.8 secs.
- Impressive Evo Challenge debut for second placed Simon Hughes.
- Swedish Mitsubishi Champion Andreas Magnusson claims third.
- Lead changes five times.



2nd March 2009

Daniel Barry and co-driver Martin Brady got their bid for the 2009 Mitsubishi Ralliart Evolution Challenge title off to a flying start when they won this weekend's opening round on the Bournemouth-based Rallye Sunseeker, finishing just 2.8 seconds ahead of series newcomer Simon Hughes, who was accompanied by 2007 Champion co-driver Patrick Walsh.

Since it first started on this same rally in 2001, the Evolution Challenge has earned itself a reputation of being one of the most competitive rally championships in the UK – and this year's round one did not disappoint. Ten Evo Challenge crews started the event, which although is less than the championship is used to, did not detract from the intensity of competition, with just a few seconds separating the front-runners all day and the lead changing five times.

Making things even more interesting was the appearance of drivers from outside the UK and Ireland. These included 2008 Swedish Evo Challenge Champion Andreas Magnusson and runner-up Hans Erik-Weng, plus the re-appearance of Icelandic Rally Champion Daniel Sigurdarson and Barbados driver Neil Armstrong.

As is traditional with the Rallye Sunseeker, the event began with two runs through the host town's botanical gardens and along the sea front. However, an accident meant that these popular spectator stages had to be abandoned and therefore, the competition began in earnest on Saturday morning.

The day was to feature 11 stages in Ringwood and Wareham Forests and first to set the pace was Barry. However, an intermittent problem with the car's anti-lag system saw him lose time during the first four stages and, when crews arrived at the first service halt, time sheets showed Nik Elsmore in the lead, albeit just half a second ahead of Barry.

Only a further 0.9 seconds back was Hughes, who was making an impressive Evo Challenge debut. Magnusson was next and admitted he was off to steady start, having not driven his Evo since the final round of the Swedish series in September. Switching from the Irish series to the UK for this season, Owen Murphy was in fifth, but hampered by a car that was handling as if it were rear-wheel rather than four-wheel drive.

Next was Weng, who also started cautiously, this being the first event in his brand new Evo X – and the first time Mitsubishi's latest version of the Lancer had been seen rallying in the UK. Another ex-Irish Evo Challenge front-runner Alan Carmichael was disappointed to find himself seventh, but knew that most of his time had been lost when his intercom had failed during the morning's stages.

Armstrong was eighth of the Evo runners at this point and was clearly enjoying his first ever rally on British soil – albeit quite different to the conditions he is used to when rallying in the Caribbean.

More unfortunate was Evo Challenge regular Jonathan Sparks, who retired after exceeding his maximum lateness during the road section on the way to service. But by far the worst luck of the day was reserved for Sigurdarson, when his car's rear differential broke just a few 100 yards into the first stage of the day.

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Four of the next loop of five stages took place in Wareham Forest and saw Elsmore drop back, last year's runner-up putting his loss of pace down to pushing too hard on what was a softer surface. Seeing his rival's speed reduce, Barry edged ahead on stage seven, but admitted he had taken his eye off Hughes' times and on stage nine the series debutant took the lead.

Surprised not to be in front Barry fought back, but a repeat of the earlier anti-lag issues - plus an overshoot - in the final two stages meant that it was a neck-and-neck battle to the finish between him and Hughes. Just behind the leading pair a fight was also going on for third. Magnusson had now found his feet and was flying, recording the fastest Evo Challenge times in both SS12 and SS13, which was enough to nudge him ahead of Elsmore by 4.4 seconds.

Murphy was fifth, still having to cope with a car that went sideways at every opportunity, which did little to help his progress, but a lot to entertain the spectators. Carmichael got quicker as the day progressed, but could not make up for the lost time in the morning, whilst Armstrong was seventh and delighted to get to the finish, reporting he had thoroughly enjoyed his new experience.

In contrast it was disappointment for Weng when his new car's turbo lost its boost in the final stage and, not wanting to do any more damage, he decided to stop rather than try to make it to the finish. However, his team was delighted with the potential the Evo X showed.

"It's great to have won the first round of the Evo Challenge - and to finish fourth overall", said Barry. "We had a great battle all day and it was very close at the end, although the problems with the anti-lag system made it harder work than it should have been. However, it's just the start we were looking for and there's no doubt we have an exciting season ahead of us."

From an initial field of 80 cars, the overall results saw four Evo Challenge competitors finish in the top ten and the first six home were also the first six Group N runners. The Evolution Challenge now moves north for round two, the Border Counties Rally, which takes place in Kielder Forest on 21st March.

The 2009 Mitsubishi Ralliart Evolution Challenge is supported by Mitsubishi Motors UK, Ralliart, Pirelli tyres, Sunoco fuels, JR Motorsports, Speedline Corse wheels, Carbone Lorraine brakes, Walkinshaw Performance, Sparco racewear and PIAA lights - who sponsor the junior award for under 25-year old drivers.

Mitsubishi Ralliart Evolution Challenge Round 1 – Results

1 Daniel Barry (Enniskerry)/Martin Brady (Navan)	58:43.0
2 Simon Hughes (Abergle) /Patrick Walsh (Aberystwyth)	58:45.8
3 Andreas Magnusson (Sweden)/Henrik Hulterskog (Sweden)	58:57.8
4 Nik Elsmore (Coleford)/ Craig Drew (Bream)	59:02.2
5 Owen Murphy (Cork)/Dai Roberts (Carmarthen)	1:00:01.9
6 Alan Carmichael(Ballymena)/Ivor Lamont (Ballymena)	1:00:52.6
7 Neil Armstrong (Barbados)/Max Ferri (Barbados)	1:03:36.8

Retirements

SS3 Daniel Sigurdarson (Iceland)/Isak Gudjonsson (Iceland)	Transmission
SS6 Johnathan Sparks (Glastonbury)/Chris Davies (Abergavenny)	OTL
SS13 Hans-Erik Weng (Sweden)/Roger Gunnarsson (Sweden)	Turbo

Championship positions after round 1

Drivers

1 Daniel Barry	12
2 Simon Hughes	10
3 Andreas Magnusson	8
4 Nik Elsmore	7
5 Owen Murphy	6
6 Alan Carmichael	5
7 Neil Armstrong	4

Co-drivers

1 Martin Brady	12
2 Patrick Walsh	10
3 Henrik Hulterskog	8
4 Craig Drew	7
5 Dai Roberts	6
6 Ivor Lamont	5
7 Max Ferri	4

ENDS

Photo: Daniel Barry and Martin Brady on their way to winning round one of the Mitsubishi Ralliart Evolution Challenge.

For media enquiries and copyright free images please contact the Mitsubishi Ralliart Evolution Challenge Coordinator & Press Officer Simon Slade: Tel: 01935 424873 | Mob: 07966 153555 | E.mail: simon@rpmprmo.com

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