

It's back to the historic town of Lismore for round three of the 2011 TRITON SHOWERS South East Stages Rally Championship. This is also the final forestry round before we head for the tarmac stages in Carlow.

The first two rounds were crackers, the Tipperary Sean Conlon Forestry had one of the biggest entries for a forestry rally in many years, allaying fears that rallying would suffer mightily in these recessionary times. Thankfully the resilient rallying clubmen have been prudent with their lifestyles and have a few Euro aside to spend on their chosen pastime. Thirty crews signed up for the 2011 TRITON SHOWERS South East Stages Rally Championship, relief all round that we were up and running.

The Willie Loughman, Carrick-on-Suir Forestry Rally was next up with a few innovative features. It ran on a Saturday with an afternoon start time, allowing scrutiny on Saturday morning and with the novel attraction of night time stages. This was a fantastic experience for all as it pushed out the boundaries for everybody. So it's off with the light pods and time to savour the fast flowing stages in the heartland of Co. Waterford.

As usual the championship doesn't really take shape until the second round has been completed. The 2011 TRITON SHOWERS South East Stages Rally Championship is class based so all crews regardless of budget have an even chance of winning the championship.

2011 TRITON SHOWERS South East Stages Rally Championship leaders, Owen Murphy, James O'Brien, Mitsubishi Lancer, class 6 have really stamped their mark on the championship with back to back wins on the opening two rounds, plus bonus points on the opening round, total 45 points. He is a serious competitor on forestry and a talent to be nurtured. They are also making a determined attempt at the Valvoline National Forestry Rally Championship. So expect them to take another overall win today.

Second O/A are Derek Butler/Diarmuid O'Shea, Class 2, Honda Civic on 42 points. Another Cork crew, perhaps a revival of rallying talent from Cork is in the making! They were class winners in Mitchelstown and runners up in Carrick giving way to a well prepared and driven Escort MK2. This belays the assumption that the Civic is a bit 'soft' for the travails of forestry.

Third O/A is shared by two crews (the beauty of a class based championship) one from class 2 and the other class 5. Lowest number first, Douglas Stewart / Billy Ryan, Peugeot 206, class 3 on 40 points, just two less than second o/a in the same class. There should be a 'class' battle here for the pecking order honours. The address is Dublin but I suspect Co. Wicklow is nearer the mark as the Dubs wouldn't be used to the forestry tracks!

On the exact same scoring are the Carrick crew of Shay Power / Johnny Rafter, class 5, Escort MK2. Shay is a well known forestry competitor who can more than hold his own on tarmac. Rally is for enjoyment and the results will look after themselves. It's a form of relaxation he says, Johnny Rafter will be poaching entries for the Ravens Rock (round 5 of the championship)

An observation at this point; the majority of crews have declared their bonus rounds before getting onto the tarmac rounds.

Class 1 is being led by a country mile by Emmet Cronin / R. Long in the screamer of a MK2 Escort on 17 points. Their bonus round was a non finish in Mitchelstown. Richie Long is making a comeback before the midlife crises sets in.... Second are Andy Fanning / Paddy King in the Ford Ka. What a difference a year makes, 2010 TRITON SHOWERS South East Stages Rally Championship winner with a flawless run of finishes to two rounds gone and two non-finishes. A tough sport, this rallying! No doubt this will change rapidly...

Class 2. The ever present TRITON SHOWERS South East Stages Rally Championship competitor and past multi winner, Mick Nevin / Mike Garahy, Ford Escort MK2, 21 points are just one point ahead of Paschal O'Shea / R Hennessey, Ford Escort MK2, on 20 points. One a youngish charger the other a little older but resilient and both well up for the remaining rounds. An aside here, both crews have had equipment stolen at a recent event. There is a lot of low life out there waiting for the opportunity to steal and rob. Information gratefully and anonymously appreciated.

Class 3. The rip roaring going up a gear when all else are coming down, Mick Cuddihy / J. Dunphy, Toyota Starlet are well ahead on 39 points. Flamboyant and fantastic to watch and always competitive. Second are another Tipperary crew, Noel Wade / E. Touhy, Escort MK2 on 21 points. Third is one to watch for the present and the future, Craig Breen / G. Roberts Ford Fiesta R2, 15 points. This crew are "world class" competing on the WRC stages and it's fantastic to have them compete on the domestic scene. They will compete on selected events of the 2011 TRITON SHOWERS South East Stages Rally Championship. Every event is an

opportunity to hone their skills.

Class 4. As said earlier, there is a rallying revival in Cork. It's home of the Ford Marque and home to the Benskin's of Ballycotton, Co. Cork. Class 4 is the preserve of the Benskin family. Ray Benskin (jnr) / Ollie Kierce, Ford Escort 39 points, Ray Benskin / P. Walsh, Ford Escort, 34 points, Sean W. Benskin / Joe Fitzgibbon, Ford Escort, 32 points. What more is there to say, except, 'let the battle continue' Just for the record, Alan and James Commins, Ford Escort and Paul Quinlan /T Cuddihy, Sunbeam who are also in the class.

Class 5. James Coleman / M Haley, Ford Escort are heading a tightly bunched class on 32 points. Frank Kelly / Liam Brennan, Ford Escort, 30 points ffirst round. A returnee to rallying, after a bit of a lay off are Ed Colton / C. O'Mahony, Peugeot 306 on 28 points. Welcome back Ed, a bit more match practice and the younger lads will have their work cut out.