

## SNOWMAN RALLY REPORT

Photos: Whittle Snow-tographic

## Ready of hope

MacKay took a surprise win in heavy snow.

By John Fife



**HANKOOK MSA  
SCOTTISH RALLY  
CHAMPIONSHIP**

MacKay was mighty in his high-powered Metro 6R4

**Arnold Clark Thistle Hotels  
Snowman Rally**  
By John Fife

Organiser: Highland Car Club When: February 14  
Where: Inverness, Scotland Championship: Hankook  
MSA Scottish Rally Championship Stages: Five  
Starters: 129

Prior to the start of last Saturday's Arnold Clark Thistle Hotels Snowman Rally, pre-event winner predictions had all the accuracy of a blindfolded man trying to pin the tail on the donkey.

The winners would have to combine driving talent with a determination to survive atrocious and treacherous conditions. Qualities amply demonstrated by Reay MacKay and Robert MacDonald on their way to winning the first round of the Scottish championship.

Deep snow greeted a record entry of 129 cars and crews at the first

stage at Meall Mor with some of the early seeds taking 'wrong turnings' on the way to the stage to avoid being first on the road.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the number 37 seed was fastest through the opening snowbank lined test. But what was surprising was that that car was Alick Kerr's Fiesta ST, 16 seconds faster than John Morrison's Lancer.

Meanwhile, reigning Scottish champion Jimmy Girvan was struggling after an off: "It was my fault. I caught a car in the first stage. He couldn't get out of the way and I couldn't get past. My concentration dropped and when he speeded up it caught me off guard. I tried to catch up again, slid off, and got stuck on a snowbank." And there he stayed till the tow-truck came through.

Conditions weren't better in the nine-mile Millbuie test, but they were different. This time Reay

MacKay was fastest in the Metro, on his first time out since he commenced a car rebuild early last year. The leaderboard also started to look a little more sensible.

Jock Armstrong was second quickest, ten seconds faster than Jimmy Girvan who was running late on the road after his earlier 'off', while Willie Bonniwell was fourth.

At first service, MacKay's secret was revealed. He had fitted a 20-year-old set of Michelins. Fortunately, prior to the rally start, new championship sponsor Hankook had agreed to relax the rules about competitors running its product. With no suitable ice or snow tyres available, Hankook allowed drivers to run virtually anything they liked, as long as it was legal.

He may have had the right tyres, but he still had to drive the beast and over the 13-mile Torrachilty

test, MacKay snatched the rally lead with a stunning time, 27 seconds quicker than an equally impressive Steven Campbell, and the only driver under 20 minutes for the stage. Alick Kerr also proved his first stage time was no fluke, going third quickest, but if there was a Metro at the head of the field, there was also one on its ear in the forest. Andy Horne lost out on a possible top ten position when he slid off and into a ditch.

Going into the final test, MacKay led Armstrong, Steven Campbell and Alick Kerr, but it was Campbell who posted the fastest stage time from Rory Young. Reay MacKay shared third quickest with David Bogie, ahead of Euan Thorburn and Mike Faulkner. But where was the impressive Kerr?

"Just three miles from the end of the stage, a driveshaft broke," explained the disappointed youngster, "at first I didn't realise



Kerr starred in his Ford Fiesta

what it was, because it was so slippery, but I'm lucky I made it back." And 11th overall was still an excellent result.

As for the winners, Reay MacKay and Robert MacDonald held on to their lead. "That last stage was nerve-racking," said MacKay, "I was trying to go hard enough to win, but stay on the road. It's my home event and my first forest rally win, so it's really special. Here's hoping I win some more!"

**CLASSES  
ROUND-UP**

Stephen Murray scored a resounding 24th overall in his Peugeot 106 on his way to winning Class One from Scott MacDonald in his Nova and Stephen Fraser's original Mini, which struggled on its 13-inch wheels.

Class Two winner Fraser Wilson was 33rd overall ahead of Craig Rutherford. The Sunbeam of Dougal Brown won Class Three from the Nova of Niall Inglis while Calum MacLeod's 205 ended its run embedded in a first stage snowbank.

The second 2WD car home was the Class Four winning Ford Puma of Bruce McCombie, proving that FWD was better than RWD this time around. Stewart Davidson was second in the Proton, but only after pushing it across the finish line with a dead clutch.

Neil Morrison took the Class Five win in his Sunbeam from James Brims in a Peugeot 205, while Walter Aitken's Escort Mk1 was the winner in Class Six for historic cars from Colin Wilkinson's Avenger, but only after class leader Ken Wood had spent five minutes stuck in a snowbank on the final test in his Dolomite.

Star of the show Alick Kerr finished first in Class Seven and was also 11th overall in his Ford Fiesta ST - and that could have been fourth if not for his problems (see main report). Second in class was Neil Coalter on his first time out in his new Fiesta ST. He also set the fourth fastest time on the opening stage.

The best of the rear-wheel-drive cars was Steve Bannister's Class Eight winning Ford Escort Mk2. He finished 22nd overall with Mike Horne taking second in class in his re-shelled and rebuilt Escort Mk2 by just eight seconds from John Crawford. BTRDA Silver Star champion Frank Kelly slid off the road on the third test in his Escort Mk2. Adrian Heatherington was the only finisher in Class Nine in his Escort Mk2 after Viv Hamill's rally ended on the opening stage with clutch failure.

The Class Ten winner was Donnie MacDonald in eighth place overall in his Group N Lancer from Shaun Sinclair, Ivor Clark, Kris Tennant and Stephen Lockhart all failed to make a mark on Class Ten when snowbanks hampered progress