

THE PAST VERSUS THE FUTURE

Rally
Of The Lakes

As someone who was lucky enough to act as a Marshal when the sight and sounds of Billy Coleman's Lancia Stratos and Tony Pond's Metro 6R4 came to Galway, I am especially pleased that Killarney have taken on the task of organising a round of the FIA Historic Rally Championship. In fact, if I had my way, the engines of all competition cars would be required to have a minimum of 6 cylinders! The rise and fall of the engine note is a sound that lives with me to this day as those wonderful cars wound their way between the stone walls of some of the most challenging stages in world rallying.

It is entirely appropriate then that this weekend's focus is on the world of Historic Rallying, albeit of a slightly different era. However, I thought it might be interesting to compare those wonderful times with where we are today with our current crop of young drivers. I believe this may well be the second "golden age" of Irish Rallying the like of which we may not see again.

Just think about it for a moment; we have a FIA Junior World Rally Champion and a three times MSA British Rally Champion in our midst; namely Craig Breen and Keith Cronin.



As I write this piece Craig has made a solid start to his attempt to win the FIA European Rally Championship and Keith has set his eyes on winning the Citroen Top Driver award run in conjunction with six rounds of the FIA World Rally Championship. Such are the abilities of these outstanding talents, who would bet against both of them succeeding in their stated goals? Of course, both of these are previous winners of the Billy Coleman Award, Craig in 2009 and Keith in 2007, which leads me nicely to the other outstanding talent; the winner of the €50,000 fund and current holder of the Billy Coleman Award, Daniel McKenna. Daniel oozes natural ability as anyone who has seen him extract the last ounce of performance out of his beloved Escort Mk II will testify. However, 2013 will be a very different challenge as Daniel sets about making his mark in the MSA British Rally Championship in an R2 car. We wish him well.

And who can mention the Billy Coleman Award without thinking back to its inception in 2000 and the first winner of the award, Rory Galligan, who passed away last year. Those that know far more than me about such things thought then that Rory was the greatest Irish Rally driver since Billy Coleman. What a terrible loss to his family, friends and many supporters throughout the country, and the sport. As the Killarney International Rally of the Lakes approaches once again do you ever wonder what Rally fans will talk about 40 years from now when they reflect on the past decade or so over a coffee or a pint of the black stuff? To the Killarney & District Motor Club and their hundreds of helpers who make this weekend possible may I congratulate you on taking on the responsibility of hosting such a prestige championship and wish you a successful and above all, a safe event. For my part I count myself one of the lucky ones that I am here today to experience it all. Long may it continue.

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