Last weekend saw the 2014 DJD Transport Jim Walsh Cork Forest Rally take place in the Ballyhoura Mountains with its Headquarters and Service Areas located in the nearby village of Ballyhea.

A 62 strong entry left a dry but very overcast Parc Ferme at 08:30am and headed out for the first of 8 classic Cork tests. Rain had been forecast for the day but it did not seem to dampen the spirits of the competitors who were all eager to get going on the “Gravel Grand Prix”.

The action kicked off on Stage 1 Ballianboula. The much anticipated front battle unfolds immediately as the top 5 are separated by a mere 7.1 seconds. Owen Murphy/James O’Brien strike first blood taking fastest time but Josh Moffett/Jason McKenna are right in their slip-stream just 2.6 seconds in arrears. Derek McGeehan/Darragh Mullen get off to a flying start on his first visit to Cork and clocks in 3rd fastest time, a further 1.9seconds back on Moffett but the Mini driver is being closely shadowed by a hard charging Andrew Purcell/John Rafter who are just 0.1 seconds off. 2011 Winners Pat O’Connell/Mark Wiley are a further 2.5 seconds back, still well within striking distance of the lead. In the 2wd category, the heavy weight battle comes to a very early end with Adrian Hetherington/Gary Nolan taking a commanding lead in 7th overall as Frank Kelly is side-lined for several minutes, 0.5km into the 1st stage with fuel pump problems and Shane McGirr’s Starlet puts a rod through the block of it’s 2L Vauxhall engine. David Crossen/Andrew Bushe slot into a strong 2nd place on David’s first visit to Cork in his 2L Escort while Mickey Conlon/Ciaran McPhillips and local brothers Donal & Diarmuid Keane are locked in a dog fight for 3rd. In the Junior category Conor McCarthy/Dan O’Donovan were having a great battle with Alan Moran/Trevor O’Connell with just 1.6 seconds separating the pair. Shane Kenneally/Jer Connors were a further 17 seconds behind in the MK2.

By now the forecasted rain was beginning to fall as the crews made their way along a short road section toward Stage 2, the awesome, Newfields. The battle at the front is tight again. Murphy goes fastest once more. Pat O’Connell ups the ante and posts a time just 0.6sec off Murphy’s but still hold 5th overall. Derek McGeehan is 3rd quickest over the stage and 3rd overall while Andrew Purcell continues the trend with 4th fastest time and holding 4th overall. Josh Moffett loses a little ground to Murphy with a 5th fastest time but still retains 2nd overall. The battle at the front is so tight that just 7.7 seconds separate the top five positions heading in for service. In the 2wd category Adrian Hetherington settles in for the long haul after Kelly’s SS1 disaster and McGirr’s early retirement. Hetherington is now 10th overall and in a very comfortable lead. David Crossen’s great run comes to an early end right at the top of the mountain as he rolls his Escort out of the event while Mickey Conlon retires with mechanical trouble. This promotes local ace’s Donal Keane/Diarmuid Keane and Paul Fitzgerald with Peirce Dohney Jnr on the notes to 2nd and 3rd overall in the 2wd category. Frank Kelly was back at full speed but had a huge mountain to climb due to the time loss on SS1, but as everyone knows, Frank’s pace in Cork has always been stunning and he would have to be watched closely. In the Junior category, Conor McCarthy plays a blinder over Newfields and begins to show Alan Moran a clean pair of heels while Shane Kenneally holds a solid third.

Following a quick refreshment for man and machine in the Ballyhea Service area the action resumed on Stage 3, the repeat of Ballinaboula. Owen Murphy again is fastest but there is little or no breathing space between him and the chasing pack. Josh Moffett is next fastest, just 2.4 seconds slower but Pat O’Connell is signalling his intent, just 0.4sec off Moffett and overtakes McGeehan for third position overall. McGeehan however is still producing the times, just 1.5seconds slower than Pat, while Andrew Purcell is driving the wheels off his Evo 6, just 0.9seconds slower than the Mini and holding a menacing 5th overall. In the 2wd category, Adrian Hartington’s dream run was continuing. Keane- Fitzgerald punch out was continuing with Keane still holding the upper hand. Frank Kelly’s mountain just got a little smaller as he jumped 13 places in this stage alone but was still back in 31st overall. The Junior battle remained unchanged with McCarthy leading from Moran from Kenneally.

Onward to a very foggy Stage 4, Newfields 2. Desi Henry & Liam Moynihan arrive at the party with a fastest time over the super-fast and flowing stage. Desi had been suffering all morning with differential problems and his Evo 9 was now back on full song. Owen Murphy is right behind Desi, just 0.4 seconds slower but still holding the overall lead. Derek McGeehan has another fantastic run and overtakes Moffett for 2nd overall. Josh slips to 3rd while Pat O’Connell holds 4th and still banging in top times. We lose Andrew Purcell on this stage due to brake problems which promote Brendan Cumiskey& Ronan Keane to 5th overall. The 2wd section remains unchanged with Hetherington continuing to set the pace while Keane and Fitzgerald fighting hard over 2nd and 3rd. Frank Kelly continued to climb the order and was now 23rd overall and beginning to appear on the horizon, albeit rather sideways. In the Junior section, Conor McCarthy continued to dominate but the event lost Alan Moran as he rolled his Peugeot out of the event on this stage, ending a fine drive. This promoted young Shane Kenneally to 2nd and David Beamish/Muireann Hayes in the blue Nova to third.

Following a further service, the crews headed out for the evening loop of stages and on to Stage 5, the one, the only Streamhill. Owen Murphy stamps his authority back on the event setting a stunning time over this incredible gravel hillclimb. Pat O’Connell is no stranger to Streamhill and serves up an equally impressive performance just 0.8 seconds slower than Murphy and leap frogs both Moffett and McGeehan to take 2nd overall. Josh Moffett goes third fastest but has now slipped to 4th. Desi Henry goes 4th fastest and moves into 5th overall while McGeehan is 5th fastest and returned back into 3rd overall. Our 2wd entertainers continue to see Adrian Hetherington lead the pack, holding a fine 7th overall in the slippy conditions while Paul Fitzgerald gets the upper hand on Donal Keane, taking second and demoting Keane back to third. What of Frank Kelly…. he’s in a big hurry and making ground fast. Drama unfolds in the Junior category as Conor McCarthy breaks a driveshaft and retires his Civic having led the event comfortably all day. Shane Kenneally now has open road after playing the waiting game and takes the lead in his MK2 Escort. David Beamish is delighted in second while Monaghan men Derek Mackarel & Peter Deery move into a podium position on only Derek’s first ever stage rally.

A deep breath, across the tarmac road and into Stage 6, The Classic, Coolfree. Josh Moffett makes amends for his Streamhill snooze and posts his first fastest time of the day and retakes the 3rd overall position. Murphy and O’Connell are both awarded Moffett’s time due to a timing issue for their respective runs which see’s their overall positions unchanged. McGeehan goes 4th fastest and fourth overall while Desi Henry has his car handling once more and is 5th fastest and 5th overall. The 2wd brigade continue to look out the side windows with Adrian Hetherington holding firm, leading a hard charging Paul Fitzgerald. But what of Donal Keane’s great drive? Unfortunately we lose Donal on Coolfree as he slips off the road with little damage but his event is over. Third position is now filled in by, you guessed it, Frank Kelly. Two stages to go and Baby Blue is back in the thick of it. Junior driver David Beamish smells opportunity and starts applying the pressure on Shane Kenneally. Shane still holds the lead but it is down to 15 seconds while Derek Mackarel holds firm in third.

Following the days last service, the crews headed out for the final shoot out. Enter Stage 7, Streamhill 2. Josh Moffett is not going to be left behind on the hill this time and posts another fastest time which moves him up to 2nd overall..again… Pat O’Connell is second fastest once more but gets downshifted by Moffett to 3rd overall. Murphy seems to be content to let his challengers battle it out and posts 3rd fastest time while retaining is overall lead. Derek McGeehan is 4th fastest and 4th overall while Desi Henry’s renewed confidence is sort lived when his front differential expires, forcing him to retire and hand the 5th overall position to Brendan Cumiskey. Adrian Hetherington continues to saw away at the wheel of his blue monster and comes out of Streamhill 6th overall and leading the 2wd category. Paul Fitzgerald is having a great day at home, holding 2nd but there is a blue haze in the mirror as Frank Kelly is 3rd and now only 57seconds behind the Ballyhea man. The Junior battle is now really game-on. Just 10 seconds separate Kenneally and Beamish at the end of Stage 7, Mackarel is content with third.

On to Coolfree for the final time and the final stage of the day. Pat O’Connell throws caution to the wind, he wants 2nd overall…. Pat posts the fastest time as he crosses the flying finish of the final stage backwards and snatches 2nd overall from Josh Moffett, what a way to do it…. Owen Murphy shows pressure is only for his Hankook tyres as he bangs in 2nd fastest time and seals a magnificent start to finish victory on the 2014 DJD Transport Jim Walsh Cork Forest Rally. Derek McGeehan gives one more push to take the 3rd fastest time but his 4th overall finishing place remains unchanged. Josh Moffett spins in the stage while trying to fend off the O’Connell assault and posts 4th fastest time which drops him to 3rd overall at the very finish. What a battle all day between Josh and Pat. Brendan Cumiskey takes a fine 5th overall in his Impreza WRC. Adrian Hetherington has one hand on the MK2 Master Cup and posts a masterful 5th fastest stage time on the final test which sees him secure 6th overall, the 2wd win and is declared the new “MK2 Master”, what a day for Adrian and Gary. Paul Fitzgerald stays in control of the Kelly cannonball run and takes second 2wd and 11th overall while Frank Kelly rounds out an eventful day, climbing from 44th after SS1 to 12th overall and takes the final 2wd podium spot.

The day saw loads of action throughout all the classes.

Class 1: An all CMC affair saw Johnny Kenneally with Grace O’Brien on the notes take the victory from Com O’Mahony and Ken Carmody

Class 2: Late entries Tom Murphy and Conor Collins took a fine victory from Mike Garahy & Gavin Sheehan in 2nd while Tim and DJ Howard took the final spot in 3rd.

Class 3: Local ace Paul Fitzgerald with Peirce Dohney Jnr on the notes took an impressive victory from Douglas Stewart & Kevin Purcell with the ever sideways Alan Tracey/Brian O’Keeffe sliding into 3rd position.

Class 4: Mick “The Warrior” O’Sullivan took another class win in Cork with Carol O’Keeffe keeping him on the straight and narrow all day. Ray Benskin Snr/Nicky Hegarty took a fine 2nd in class with Sean W. Benskin & Joe Fitzgibbon taking 3rd.

Class 5 (A): Damien and Thomas McGauran unusually are the only finishers in this highly competitive class which saw the remainder of the field retire at various stages during the day.

Class 5(B): Adrian Hetherington and Gary Nolan take a comfortable victory from Frank Kelly with Sean Hayde on the notes. Ollie Williams and Brian Quinlan take 3rd.

Class 6: Breckan McBreen with Breen McNamee on the notes lifted the honours.

Class 7: Brian Donnelly travels all the way from the US and takes a fine victory with Brain Doherty on the notes.

Class 8: Niall Henry & John Rowan take the spoils while another US visitor Patsy Keenan who had Tommy Hayes on the notes take home 2nd. Local crew Alan O’Riordan and Cathal Murphy are third.

Class 9: Shane Kenneally & Ger Connors seize the opportunity and hold off the pressure from David Beamish Muireann Hayes to take the Junior victory. David and Muireann are second with Derek Mackerel and Peter Deery taking a fine third on Derek’s first ever Stage Rally. Well done Derek.

Class 20: Derek McGeehan and Darragh Mullen took the honours with Brendan Cumiskey / Ronan Kane in second and Michael Carbin/Stephen Thornton in third.

The Cork Motor Club would like to thank everyone who made this event possible. In particular we would like to thank our main sponsor Denis J Downey Transport Ltd, all of our associate and stage sponsors. We would like to thank Greenhall Motors, The Charleville Agricultural Show Committee, Coillte and Motorsport Ireland.

We would also like to than the marshals and volunteers who turned out in force to man the various locations and time points throughout the day in wet conditions. You are the lifeblood of the sport.