Motor cycling with John Savage

PYPER HITS THE RIGHT NOTE

Jason Pyper was on tune at Bishopscourt, with a brace of wins in the Irish Senior Clubmans' Championship. *Photo by Deek McCoubrie*

Newtownabbey's Jason Pyper hit the right note at Bishopscourt on Monday, where he scored back to back wins in the Irish Senior Clubmans' Championship, while Stanley Gamble played his cards safe, to rack up a double in the Supersport Clubmans' series.

It was a good day for local riders, at the third rounds of the Irish Clubmans' Championships, with a win in the non-championship Open National race for Newtownards man Kirk Jamison; a win and a second place for Neil Irwin, from Newtownards, in the Pre-97 National Championship; a win and a third place for Ballywalter's Alan Brown in the same class; and a win and a second place for Bangor youngster Scott Wilson in the RS125 Aprilia Challenge series.

Open National

An unpredictable gusting wind and sporadic heavy downpours made conditions less than perfect, and tyre choice difficult, in some of the races, evidenced by the rate of attrition on the first non-championship Open National race.

Kirk Jamison — who scored a brace of wins at the corresponding fixture last year — qualified his Jim Angus Contracts Suzuki GSX-R1000 in pole position, and grabbed the holeshot, but he nearly came to grief on the greasy track at Islandsgore on the opening lap of eight, and then ran onto the grass at Fairways, as he struggled to get rear end traction.

Peter Newell, from Cookstown, took advantage to seize the lead on his Kawasaki ZX10R, and Fermanagh man Gary Robinson also stormed past Jamison on the McElroy Suzuki GSX-R1000, but Newell's spell at the front was short-lived, as he went down before the completion of the first lap, at Ringawaddy.

So treacherous were the conditions, that young Banbridge man Alistair Kirk also crashed on the opening lap, when he was high-sided from his Mar-Train Suzuki GSX-R600, exiting the twisty Fairways section.

Jamison regained the lead from Robinson on lap two, but as he struggled with a dud intermediate rear tyre, Jamison was reeled in by Randalstown man Matthew Percy, who had overtaken Robinson on lap three.

Maximising the characteristics of his more nimble Slemish Water Suzuki GSX-R600 in the trying conditions, Percy harassed Jamison and the pair swopped positions on several occasions, before Percy made a pass stick on the penultimate lap, and Jamison dropped back into the clutches of Richard McCartney.

Kirk Jamison leads Nigel Percy through Fairways at Bishopscourt. They shared a win each in the Open National races. *Photo by Deek McCoubrie*

McCartney, from Larne, had the bit between his teeth, and he sneaked his Suzuki GSX-R1000 past Percy on the final lap to snatch victory by three-tenths of a second, as Jamison settled for a safe third.

Robinson dropped down the leaderboard to finish eighth, as Jami Coates took fourth, ahead of Robert Woods and Holywood man Jamie Patterson, making his return to two wheel racing with a 600 Yamaha, after he quit the sport a number of years ago to switch to racing cars.

With conditions much improved for the second race, and the track dry, Jamison stamped his authority on the proceedings and demonstrated why he is currently third in the Irish Superbike Championship standings, just 4.5 points in arrears of series leader, Michael Pearson, from Ballygowan.

Jamison romped to a start to finish victory, taking the chequered flag with 14 seconds in hand over Gary Robinson, as Kirk pulled out nearly two seconds a lap over his pursuer.

Afterwards Kirk said: "It was basically another test weekend, and after setting pole I was confident I could repeat my double of 12 months ago. Unfortunately the weather played its part in making conditions tricky. I also had to buy an old tyre, which inevitably didn't work, making life very difficult.

"I led the first race, before I took to the grass. I then diced for the lead with a few guys, going in front on a number of occasions. I had no rear grip, however, and there was no point chucking it down the road when no championship points were involved, so I settled for a disappointing third.

"Race two was pretty much dry. I got my slicks on and led from start to finish to win comfortably. The progress we made a couple of weeks earlier at East Fortune in Scotland was evident as, despite not pushing 100%, I was lapping within 0.4 seconds of my personal best, set on Easter Saturday in perfect conditions."

The next round of the Irish Superbike Championship is at Mondello Park in Co Kildare on May 26/27, and Kirk beamed: "I am full of confidence, heading to Mondello. It has been an invaluable few weeks for me and I am in a far better position heading into the next round."

Robinson was unchallenged for second, ahead of Richard McCartney, as Richie Ryan got the better of Matthew Percy, Robert Woods and Johnny Buckley in an entertaining battle for third place.

It was an eventful afternoon for Dunadry man Buckley, who tipped off and remounted his Module Road & Race Yamaha R6 on successive laps during the first race, eventually bringing it home an unlucky 13th!

Pre-97 National Championship

Ards riders shared the honours in the Pre-97 National Championship races, and in the second race there was an Ards 1-2-3.

The first race had to be stopped on the second lap, due to a torrential downpour, and the race was subsequently staged in bright sunshine on a wet track.

Neil Irwin, from Newtownards, cantered to a 14 seconds start-to-finish win over Billy Moore in the seven laps re-run, in which conditions were less to the liking of championship leader, Ballywalter fireman Alan Brown, who had been over two seconds faster than second quickest Irwin during qualifying.

As Irwin controlled the race from the front, Brown started from pole position, but found himself down in fifth, but he gained a place when Brian Hilton crashed his Bimota out of second place on lap two, and when Wayne Murray also prematurely exited the proceedings, Brown was elevated to third.

Padriag Campbell finished a second adrift of Brown in fourth, just ahead of Shane Cullen and Portavogie man Scott Thompson, as Honda CBR600 riders filled the top six places.

With conditions more or less perfect for the second race, Brown showed his true mettle, as he led home an Ards clean sweep.

Alan led all the way, to win by three seconds from Neil Irwin, who was second throughout the seven laps, with Scott Thompson a distant and lonely third, after he overhauled fourth finisher Cyril Traynor at half distance.

Billy Moore (600 Honda) and David Butler, aboard a 400 Kawasaki, completed the leading half dozen.

Senior Clubmans' Championship

Although Jason Pyper won both Senior Clubmans' Championship races, he was gifted victory in the first race, when the luckless Caoith Lawless slid off his Yamaha R1 on the final corner, after he had led for the entire seven laps distance.

Lawless, from Dunshaughlin, had a runaway lead of around half-a-minute when he went down at the final right-hander at Dunsfort, handing a 16 seconds victory to Pyper, also aboard a Yamaha R1.

After he qualified second fastest to Pyper, Scott Rourke stalled his Suzuki GSX-R1000 on the grid and was virtually last away, but the Saintfield man determinedly battled his way through the traffic to finish a fighting third, less than two seconds behind Belfastman Martin Titterington, and safely ahead of Philip James, from Newtownabbey.

Pyper paced himself to win the second seven lapper, during which he was never headed.

He won by three seconds from Rourke, who made a reasonable start and eased away from Lawless, after he passed him to take second place on lap two, and Lawless had to be content with third.

Dominic Coehlho was fourth, while Brian Patterson improved to fifth from sixth first time out and Philip James completed the leading sextet.

Supersport Clubmans' Championship

The first Supersport Clubmans' Championship race produced the closest finish of the day, as David Finnerty and Stanley Gamble duelled for supremacy throughout the seven laps.

Finnerty held the upper hand, until Gamble made his move to snatch the lead on the penultimate lap, and Gamble held on to win by less than half-a-second, from his fellow Honda CBR600 pilot.

Kevin Briggs was always third, astride his Alan Wallace Contracts Suzuki GSX-R600, but the Bangor man was never able to mount a challenge to the leading duo.

Briggs finished with a couple of seconds in hand over Honda-mounted Jonathan Irwin, with Paraic Conway a similar distance behind in fifth on his Suzuki, with a similar margin over Damien Horgan, best of the Yamaha R6 runners.

Gamble stamped his authority on the second race with a commanding display on the Linton Honda, and after he relieved Finnerty of the lead on the second lap of seven, he cruised away to win by a commanding seven seconds, as Finnerty slipped back to fourth, and Graham McCarthy narrowly got his Wizzard Kawasaki ZX6R across the line second, in front of Paul Maxwell's JPM Joinery Honda.

Iain Simpson finished hot on Finnerty's tail in fifth on the David Wood Foundation Honda, as Paraic Conway completed the top six, safely ahead of Jonathan Irwin.

Finnerty's championship lead over Gamble has been reduced to four points, with Kevin Briggs a further 32 points adrift, but 11 ahead of Conway.

The second race was something of a disaster for Briggs, who ran third for the first couple of laps, but then rapidly slipped backwards to finish 11th.

He rued: "Bishopscourt has not been a great track for me in the past, so I was apprehensive about my chances. I had a fair idea that Finnerty and Gamble, who were ahead of me in the championship, would clear off, but I was hoping I could maybe finish in the top three or four.

"I was pleased to qualify on the front row in fourth, but times were tight and I knew it would be tough. I got the holeshot in race one, but Gamble and Finnerty immediately came past and pulled away, but I posted my fastest ever laps straight from the off and managed to pull a gap on fourth to get my third podium of the year."

Kevin continued: "Having put my wet tyres in for race two, I didn't have time to change back to dry tyres when the sun came out. Straight away I knew I was in trouble. The track was dry and I melted my 'wets' within a lap or two. I initially held third, but dropped back through the field to a disappointing 11th — my worst result of the season — but overall I am happy with the weekend."

I wonder if Kevin was so happy when he arrived home to discover his family's pet rabbit had eaten through his telephone line!

125cc Newcomers

Lisburn's Stuart Elwood dominated the 125GP Newcomers races with two convincing displays.

He won the first race by ten seconds from James Conroy, but had a little more work to do in the second race, in which Gareth Keys finished runner-up, a couple of seconds in arrears.

RS125 Aprilia Challenge

Scott Wilson enjoyed such a stranglehold in the first RS125 Aprilia Challenge race that the rest finished a lap behind the Bangor youngster, as Joseph Loughlin pipped Stephen McKeever for the runners-up berth, and another Bangor newcomer, former mini-moto front-runner Jonathan Annett, placed fourth.

McKeever took a grip on the second race, to win by 11 seconds from Wilson, with Annett fifth, behind Neil Glasgow and Fermanagh girl Melissa Kennedy, who was fifth in the first race.

Classic

Dundrum's Thomas Hogg and Comber's Alex Conroy fought out a terrific duel in the first National Classic Bike Championship race, in which Hogg got the verdict by a fifth-of-a-second at the completion of the six laps.

Saintfield man John Scott was forced to retire his 830 Rob North Triumph on the opening lap of the Classic race at last Saturday's Tandragee 100 and was a first lap retiree in the first race at Bishopscourt, but he stormed to victory in the second race.

Conroy and Hogg renewed their first race duel, and this time Conroy emerged on top, to finish runner-up, with Tom Robinson fourth on his 350 Drixton Honda, after he finished third in race one.

Results

Open National, 1st race: 1, R. McCartney (1000 Suzuki) 78.74mph; 2, M. Percy (600 Suzuki); 3, K. Jamison (1000 Suzuki); 4, J. Coates (1000 Yamaha); 5, R. Woods (1000 Suzuki); 6, J. Patterson (600 Yamaha); 7, N. Patterson (1000 Suzuki); 8, G. Robinson (1000 Suzuki); 9, R. Ryan (675 Triumph); 10, S. Titterington (1000 Suzuki). Fastest lap: J. Buckley (600 Yamaha) 81.53mph. 2nd race: 1, Jamison 90.69mph; 2, Robinson; 3, McCartney; 4, Ryan; 5, Percy; 6, Woods; 7, Buckley; 8, J. Patterson; 9, Titterington; 10, S. Clarke (1000 Kawasaki). Fastest lap: Jamison 92.25mph.

Pre-97 National Championship, 1st race: 1, N. Irwin (600 Honda) 72.44mph; 2, B. Moore (600 Honda); 3, A. Brown (600 Honda); 4, P. Campbell (600 Honda); 5, S. Cullen (600 Honda); 6, S. Thompson (600 Honda); 7, C. Traynor (600 Honda); 8, D. O'Dwyer (600 Honda); 9, N. Boyhan (400 Kawasaki); 10, P. Gartland (400 Kawasaki). Fastest lap: Irwin 74.39mph. 2nd race: 2nd race: 1, Brown 81.45mph; 2, Irwin; 3, Thompson; 4, Traynor; 5, Moore; 6, D. Butler (400 Kawasaki); 7, Campbell; 8, J. McCullough (600 Honda); 9, S. Connolly (600 Honda); 10, Cullen. Fastest lap: Brown 83.43mph.

Senior Clubmans' Championship, 1st race: 1, J. Pyper (1000 Yamaha) 72.33mph; 2, M. Titterington (1000 Suzuki); 3, S. Rourke (1000 Suzuki); 4, P. James (1000 Suzuki); 5, G. Daniel (650 Suzuki); 6, B. Patterson (1000 Suzuki); 7, J. Duncan (1000 Suzuki); 8, I. Hanna (1000 Suzuki); 9, E. Bannon (1000 Suzuki); 10, B. Morris (1000 Suzuki). Fastest lap: Pyper 74.74mph. 2nd race: 1, Pyper 84.12mph; 2, Rourke; 3, C. Lawless (1000 Yamaha); 4, D. Coelho (1000 Suzuki); 5, Patterson; 6, James; 7, Titterington; 8, Daniel; 9, P. Carmichael (900 Kawasaki); 10, A. Poston (1000 Suzuki). Fastest lap: Rourke 86.03mph.

Supersport Clubmans' Championship, 1st race: 1, S. Gamble (600 Honda) 86.85mph; 2, D. Finnerty (600 Honda); 3, K. Briggs (600 Suzuki); 4, J. Irwin (600 Honda); 5, P. Conway (600 Suzuki); 6, D. Horgan (600 Yamaha); 7, T. Bradley (600 Yamaha); 8, D. Sheridan (600 Yamaha); 9, P. Maxwell (600 Honda); 10, V. Brennan (600 Kawasaki). Fastest lap: Gamble 88.73mph. 2nd race: 1, Gamble 81.34mph; 2, G. McCarthy (600 Kawasaki); 3, Maxwell; 4, Finnerty; 5, I. Simpson (600 Honda); 6, Conway; 7, Irwin; 8, M. Jordan (600 Honda); 9, P. Swords (750 Ducati); 10, Brennan. Fastest lap: Gamble 83.43mph.

125cc Newcomers, 1st race: 1, S. Elwood (Honda) 78.56mph; 2, J. Conroy (Honda); 3, A. McClean (Honda); 4, B. Moulds (Honda); 5, T. Elwood (Honda); 6, J. Cunningham (Honda); 7, W. Hamilton (Honda); 8, S. Bentley (Yamaha); 9, R. Patton (Honda); 10, N. Mawhinney (Honda). Fastest lap: S. Elwood 79.96mph. 2nd race: 1, S. Elwood 73.57mph; 2, G. Keys; 3, A. McMillan; 4, D. Jamison; 5, Moulds; 6, Conroy; 7, A. Kennedy; 8, Hamilton; 9, Cunningham; 10, G. Cushnahan (all Honda). Fastest lap: Elwood 78.08mph.

RS125 Aprilia Challenge, 1st race: 1, S. Wilson 67.61mph; 2, J. Loughlin; 3, S. McKeever; 4, J. Annett; 5, M. Kennedy; 6, N. Glasgow; 7, C. Hogg; 8, K. Reid; 9, A. Hogg; 10, A. McDonnell. Fastest lap: Loughlin 69.17mph. 2nd race: 1, McKeever 73.57mph; 2, Wilson; 3, Glasgow; 4, Kennedy; 5, Annett; 6, McDonnell; 7, Hogg. Fastest lap: Glasgow 67.13mph.

National Classic Bike Championships, 1st race: 1, T. Hogg (350 Honda) 61.14mph; 2, A. Conroy (350 Honda); 3, T. Robinson (350 Honda); 4, R. J. Woolsey (500 Honda); 5, S. Wilson (500 Honda); 6, S. Reynolds (500 Honda); 7, R. Hall (750 Triumph); 8, J. Miller (350 Honda); 9, S. Brown (350 Honda); 10, P. Simpson (250 Ducati). Fastest lap: Conroy 63.02mph. 2nd race: 1, J. Scott (830 Triumph) 64.37mph; 2, Conroy; 3, Hogg; 4, Robinson; 5, Woolsey; 6, J. Monteith (750 Triumph); 7, P. Murray (490 Triumph); 8, Wilson; 9, Reynolds; 10, R. Yates (250 Suzuki). Fastest lap: Conroy 72.58mph.

Ups and downs for Irish at Oulton

Report by Andrea Campbell

It was a day of ups and downs for the large Irish contingent, at the picturesque Cheshire circuit of Oulton Park, in the third round of the Bennetts British Superbike Championship.

The Bank Holiday weekend started badly for a number of Irish riders, with Castlerock man Marty Nutt being the first casualty, not able to make it back from the heavy crash at Silverstone one week previous, were he sustained rib injuries.

Then Nicole McAleer, the youngster from Omagh, tried everything she could to improve on her first 125cc qualifying session, which saw her outside the qualifying positions, however, despite giving all she could, she could not find the extra four seconds per lap she needed and was devasted she was a non-qualifier.

But this setback has turned out positive, with the ACU Academy taking her to Silverstone next weekend to try to get valuable time on the little Honda and help her regain her confidence, which has been knocked by a recent with lack of time on the bike and a couple of fairly big offs. Hopefully she will return to Snetterton in a few weeks time, with the confidence which saw her take tenth place at last year's Knockhill British Championship race, where she became the first Irish female to earn British Championship points.

Dubliner Jack Kennedy also struggled, crashing during Sunday's Supersport qualifying and despite qualifying 21st he was a non-starter on Monday.

Supersport

The opening race saw the Relentless by TAS Suzuki team make a perfect start, with Toomebridge rider Michael Laverty swooping into the lead, and Padgett Honda ace Dennis Hobbs unable to keep up with Laverty's blistering pace during the opening laps.

However, by lap six, Hobbs had closed this gap, with Laverty with struggling with front end problems on the Suzuki and by Lodge Corner, Hobbs was past and was never headed again.

Ian Lowry, the slower starting Relentless team-mate of Laverty, was soon on the pace and passed Laverty at Shell Oil Bend on lap 12 to take second place and close on Hobbs.

The young Moira rider mounted a strong challenge to Hobbs and was only 0.674 of a second behind the winner at the line, 1.020 seconds ahead of Laverty, who hung on to take a Relentless second and third on the podium and add to his points tally at the head of the Maxxis British Supersport Championship.

Laverty's 16 points for third place takes his points tally to 82, 26 points ahead of Lowry, who is now six points ahead of Hobbs.

B. J. Toal has James Webb and Midge Smart for company in the Virgin Media Cup race. *Photo by Philip Campbell,*

Afterwards Laverty said: "I am delighted with that, as I was really struggling with the front end and have been all year. We just can't get it sorted".

The only other Irish finisher in the Supersport race was Ballyclare's Jamie Hamilton, who made it up to 23rd place overall and fifth place in the Cup race for privateers.

Alan O'Connor and Conor O'Brien were both non-finishers, with O'Connor pulling into the pits on lap four with bike problems and O'Brien parting company with his bike on the opening lap at Knickerbrook, uninjured.

Virgin Media Cup

Luck was certainly with Omagh's B. J. Toal, when he was involved in a dogfight with Midge Smart, James Webb and Leon Morris in the Virgin Media Cup race, which had seen him already take two wins out of three to date.

Despite having a front row start, Toal made a poor getaway, and Smart dived into the lead, ahead of Morris and Webb, with Toal pushed back to fifth. It was not long before BJ got his head down and was challenging Morris for third place when the race was red-flagged on lap five, when Daniel Brill came of at the Hizzy's Chicane, taking a lot of debris and fuel onto the track which had to be cleared before the restart.

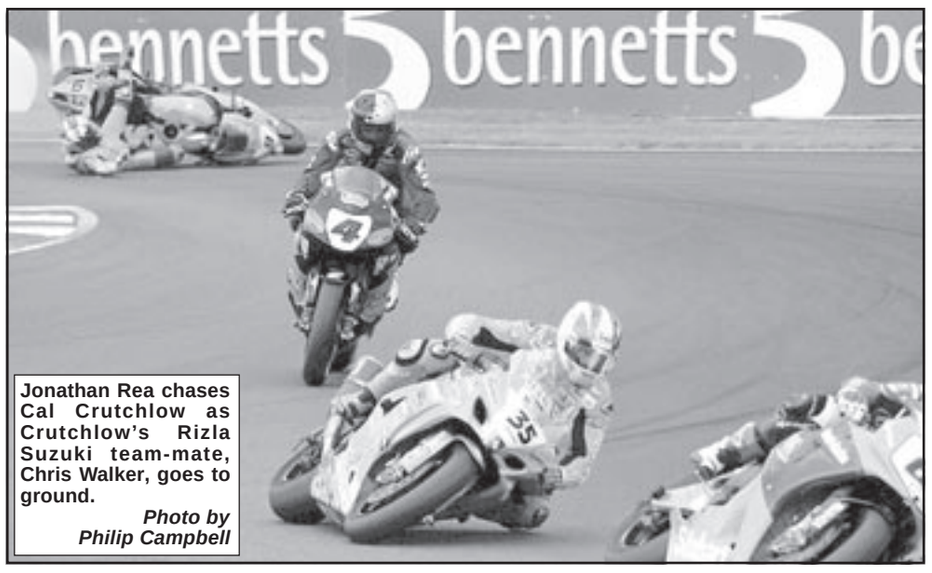
Toal got a better start second time around, and he was up to third on the first lap of the restart by the chicane. Two laps later, Webb, whilst fighting Toal for third, came to grief in The Avenue, parting company with his Yamaha and leaving Toal to challenge for the lead.

The pressure was too much for Morris and he ran off the track, leaving Toal to take the chequered flag and his third win this year, ahead of Smart, with David Paton third.

Whilst all the excitement was going on at the head of the field, Lisburn's Davy Haire rode a perfect race to take sixth place, whilst Grant Molloy from Enniskillen was just outside the points in 16th place.

Toal now has a 24 points lead at the top of the championship, ahead of Smart, with Morris a further 24 points down. Haire is up to eighth, with only a handful of points separating him from sixth place.

After the race Toal said: "that was a tough race! I got it a bit sideways in the last lap and I didn't realise that both Webb and Morris were off".



Jonathan Rea chases Cal Crutchlow as Crutchlow's Rizla Suzuki team-mate, Chris Walker, goes to ground. *Photo by Philip Campbell*

Superbike

Hopes of the illusive first Superbike win for HM Plant Honda's Jonathan Rea were again firmly planted on the Larne lad's shoulders, with a huge crowd of Irish fans cheering him on.

He was stood on the second row of the grid for race one, eyeing up a gap between Gregorio Lavilla and Ryuichi Kiyonari, and he did this perfectly, unfortunately a lap too soon on the warm up lap, and when the green lights came on again, nerves got the better of him and he fluffed the start, ending up back in ninth at the end of lap one.

In true Rea fashion, after a couple of laps to warm up the tyres, he was back on the pace and by lap 11 was up to fourth place, but was not close enough to push his HM Plant Honda team mate Kiyonari for third place.

The top three positions were a dogfight between Airwaves Ducati team mates Lavilla and Leon Haslam, with Kiyonari push hard also, but at the chequered linen again it was the wily Spaniard, Lavilla, who took the flag, ahead of Haslam and Kiyonari.

Rea finished fourth, in front of the Stobart Honda duo of Tom Sykes and Shakey Byrne.

Dubliner Paul Barron was left to uphold the Irish tradition of podium places in the Cup race for privateer riders, however, he just missed out, finished fourth in the Cup and 22nd overall. Winner of the Cup race was James Buckingham, with Tristan Palmer second and Malcolm Ashley third.

In race two, Rea made a much better start, but this time he was pushed wide and back to 15th place in the opening lap. Again Rea got his head down and the backside up and he was soon pushing through the field.

By lap four, Tommy Hill's early lead had been taken by Haslam, but by lap ten Kiyonari was on the move and into the lead. Haslam maintained his second place until the chequered flag, whilst to the delight of Paul Bird, Byrne took his first podium of the year for the Stobart team, in third place, keeping championship leader Lavilla out of the top three.

Lavilla was fortunate there were not a few more laps left when the chequered flag went out, as Rea was on the move and was closing in fast. Rea took fifth place, and the fastest lap on lap 16.

Sykes wrapped up the top six, with Buckingham taking the double in the Cup, ahead of Palmer and Ashley, as Barron failed to finish.

Rea is up to third in the championship, 31 points behind Kiyonari in second, with Lavilla a further 29 points ahead at the top of the table.

125cc

In the British 125GP Championship race, Belfast rider Nikki Coates again rode consistently and snatched sixth place from Michael Wilcox, in a race won by Luke Jones, from Kev Coghlan and Luke Mossey.

Newtownards rider Stephen Kelly had a good ride in a very competitive class, which saw 44 starters, and finished 21st.

Jones heads the title challenge, four points ahead of Coghlan, with Ashley Beech third. Coates is fifth, only nine points behind Mossey in fourth.

Superstock

The Metzeler Racetec National Superstock Championship race saw the most drama of the day.

Steve Brogan took the early lead, but his lead was soon cut when the safety car was deployed on lap six. Then the car pulled off on lap nine, but just then rain started to fall and Brogan put his hand up to signal he was stopping the race, which brought out the red flags.

Ben Wilson, who was in second, decided to put his head down and then lost his bike at Shell Oil Bend, but the red flag situation enabled him to be able to restart.

Wilson managed to finish fourth, behind winner Howie Mainwaring, who gave MV Agusta their first British Championship win.

Mainwaring took the win, ahead of Glen Richards and Lee Jackson, with Toomebridge's John Laverty taking seventh place on his Buildbase Ducati.

Carrickfergus man Alastair Seeley was 18th, Ballymoney's Gerard Kinghan was 27th, with Lee Johnston 29th.

Crumlin man Ryan Rainey, who had been running 18th in the first part of the race, was a non-starter in the second part, having to catch a ferry to get home in time for North West 200 practice.