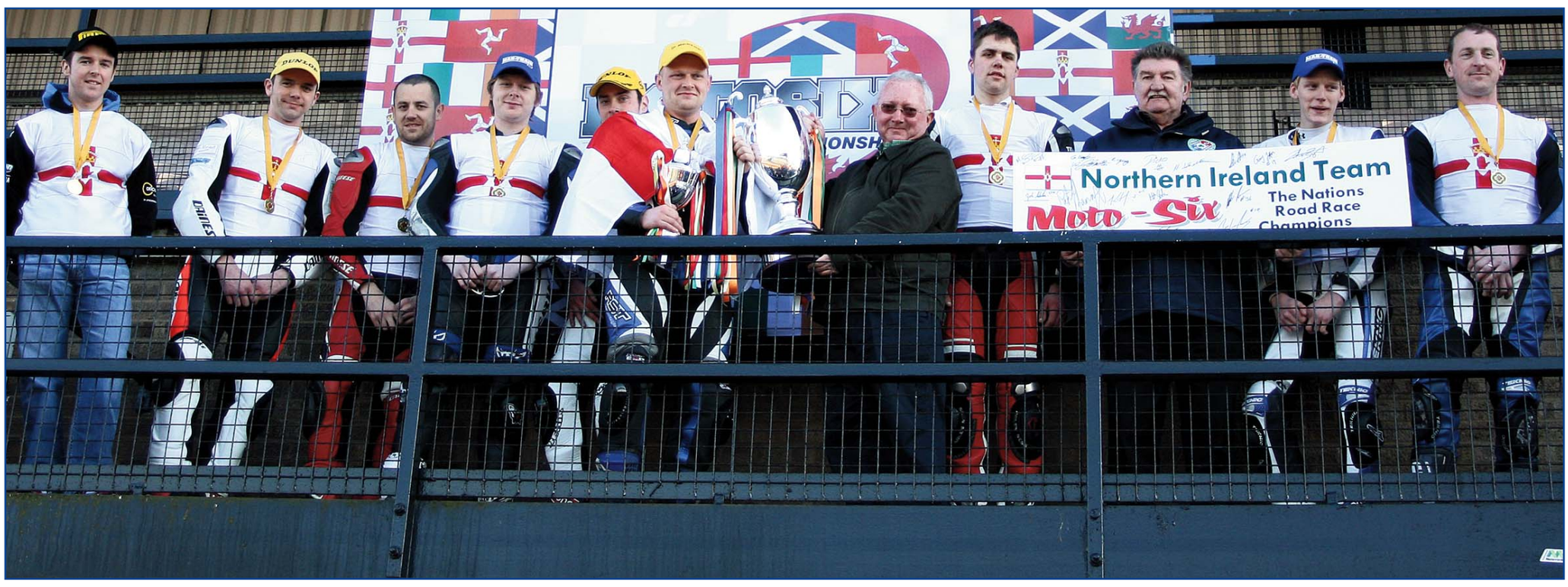
Motorcycling with John Savage

Capt Kirk and his enterprising stars rocket to success

Northern Ireland brilliantly won the inaugural MotoSix Nations Championship at Donington Park on Sunday, when the Ulster team — managed by Newtownards man Ivan Davidson and captained by his fellow Ardsman Kirk Jamison — humbled their English hosts by close to 100 points. Scotland finished third, ahead of Republic of Ireland and Isle of Man, as Wales picked up the wooden spoon.



Draped in a Northern Ireland flag, Ulster team captain Kirk Jamison received the £20,000 MotoSix Nations Trophy and replica from Robert Fearnell of Donington Park. From left: hat-trick hero Alastair Seeley, Michael Pearson, Marty Nutt, James Dickson, Gerard Kinghan, Jamison, Fearnell, Gary Jeffers, Northern Ireland team manager Ivan Davidson, Alistair Kirk and John Clarke. *Photo by Jimmy Windows*

Donington Park joined forces with the governing body of motorcycle sport in England and Wales, the Auto Cycle Union (ACU), to host the MotoSix challenge, with each nation invited to select six Superbike and six Supersport riders, plus five sidecar crews.

Qualifying last Saturday determined grid positions, and during Sunday's races, penalty points were awarded for race positions: one point for a win, two for second, three for third, down to the last finisher, and the MotoSix crown went to the team with the lowest points and Northern Ireland ended the day on 347 points to England's 433.

It was a magnificent performance by the Ulster team, with 28 year old Carrickfergus man Alastair Seeley outstanding, as he won three of his four MotoSix races, and conceded defeat in the final race, to make sure he packed crucial points for the team.

Seeley beamed: "It has been a really good event and we put in a big team effort. I was able to play my trump card, as I've plenty of experience at Donington Park. I was pleased with the two 600 wins and the one 1000 win and everyone brought it home as best they could. It all paid off and we have won the silverware."

On a day when the Northern Ireland football team kept their hopes of qualifying for next year's World Cup in South Africa alive with a 3—2 victory over Poland in Belfast, Seeley smiled: "It's just like football. When you are playing for your country, everyone wants the best. We all worked together and we'll be back for more next year."

Ulster team captain Kirk Jamison beamed: "Alastair could have gone for a clean sweep of wins in the last MotoSix 1000 race, but after I pointed out that we had a points lead and finishing was the key he told me he would 'let Cooper have it' [a reference to race winner Richard Cooper] and take two points for second, and that's exactly what he did."

Kirk continued: "The team spirit amongst all our riders was fantastic. There were no selfish riders. Everyone was there to do a job for Northern Ireland and that professionalism carried us to the trophy.

"Gary Jeffers and Gerard Kinghan had big offs in morning warm-up. Gary battled through the pain barrier to put in two excellent performances and Gerard and his team worked furiously to put his bike back together just in time for race one. Special mention also to Tim Martin of Mar-Train for stepping in and providing James Dickson with a bike for the weekend."

Coleraine man Dickson was co-opted into the Ulster team at the last minute, after Mar-Train rider Denver Robb, from Ballymena, broke a metatarsal bone in a foot and an elbow in a crash in the opening Irish Superbike Championship fixture of the season at Mondello Park in Co Kildare the previous weekend, and when Dickson found himself without a bike, Martin generously provided him with Robb's machine.

Jamison added: "Obviously we all wanted to win, but the mood was a relaxed one. Everyone was just enjoying the occasion and it certainly paid off. Conditions for qualifying were awful and many of us were caught out for tyre choice. Everyone showed their experience though and stayed on their bikes when everyone round them was falling."

"Our strength in depth won the trophy for us. Different teams were strong in different areas. The English especially put up one hell of a fight. The fact that we only had one 'did not finish' in six races was key though and I cannot praise all our riders enough for that. The English, I think, expected to walk it, as they had all had masses of track experience. To go and beat them on their home tarmac was a big achievement."

It was Jamison's Donington debut, and he enthused: "The track is fantastic — the best I have ever ridden on — and I enjoyed every minute. Even having to jump off the 600 and straight onto the 1000 didn't bother me. I wish there had been more laps. My own team were faultless as usual and having Alan Finlay of Nice Bike Paintshop on board last weekend was a huge help as well."

The 29 year old finance manager concluded: "Personally, my results of 21st, 17th, 15th and 10th don't look great and I have to admit I'm a bit disappointed. It was a team effort though and someone had to start at the back of the grid, which was staggered like a handicap race, and those results look a lot better when you consider I started from 32nd and 31st on the grid. I gradually brought my times down over the weekend and had I been in the first half of the grid I was fast enough to come home inside the top ten every time. We had a little problem with the steering damper leaking oil on the superbike, which made the races hard work, as she shook her head a bit to often, but it was okay."

Ivan Davidson has vast experience of team competition, having managed the Irish team in the annual Celtic Match Races between Ireland, Isle of Man, Scotland and Wales over many years, with such distinction that Ireland is by far the most successful nation in that four cornered serie.

Davidson paid a glowing tribute to the team: "Everyone acquitted themselves professionally and with distinction and they were all tremendous ambassadors for the Ulster Centre. No one should underestimate the extent of their achievement. They were magnificent and everyone involved with Ulster racing should be extremely proud of them. We should not overlook the contribution made to our success by our sidecar competitors. They played a crucial role and without them we would not have been crowned champions, so much credit is due to them."

Sadly, Ivan's mother passed away several weeks ago, and he acknowledged the massive contribution made to the team by Kirk Jamison: "Kirk shouldered an incredible workload to make sure we were there at all. I can't underline how much we owe to his contribution, both on and off the track. He worked tirelessly for the Ulster team and he can take tremendous personal satisfaction in our success. I owe him my personal thanks for everything he has done.

Ulster team captain Kirk Jamison at work on the Jim Angus Contracts Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR. *Photo by Jimmy Windows*

Superbike

Alastair Seeley arrived at Donington Park having scored four wins at the Irish Superbike Championship curtain-raiser at Mondello Park, and in what was his final shakedown before he commences his challenge for the British Superstock Championship at Brands Hatch at Easter, Alastair made his intentions clear from the outset.

He qualified his JMF Millsport Yamaha R1 in pole position for the MotoSix Superbike class, with a best lap which was just under one second faster than the time posted by Nottingham's Richard Cooper, with young Dromara man Alistair Kirk, the reigning Irish Supersport champion, impressing by putting the Mar-Train Suzuki GSX-R1000 third on the grid in what is his first season in the Superbike class.

After Cooper set the pace for three laps during Sunday's first ten laps race over the Donington grand prix circuit, Seeley hit the front. However, the result was in the balance right to the chequered flag, and Seeley squeezed home to win by a miniscule 0.07 of a second in a near photo-finish.

Such was the pace set by the leading duo, the rest were in a race of their own, and Welshman Phil Bevan claimed third in a Yamaha R1 clean sweep, as Scots duo Torquil Paterson and Jimmy Storrar finished in close company in fourth and fifth on their GSX-R1000 Suzukis.

Gavin Hunt, son of popular now retired Isle of Man TT rider Paul, was best of the Manxmen in sixth on his Honda Fireblade CBR1000RR, while Ballymoney's Gerard Kingan brought Gerry Kingsbury's Ziz Zag Suzuki home in a valuable seventh, and Alistair Kirk was ninth.

Rory Clarke was the leading Republic of Ireland rider in tenth on his Clarog Enterprises Suzuki, while two other Ulster riders finished in the top 15, with Coleraine's Mark Johnston 13th on his Honda and Kirk Jamison 15th aboard the Jim Angus Contracts Honda Fireblade.

Seeley and Cooper exhanged the lead throughout the second Superbike race, and after Cooper snatched the lead from Seeley on the final lap, the Ulsterman decided to settle for second and pack the valuable points, rather than gamble on a race win and cost his team dearly.

Cooper, who contested last year's European Superstock Championship, won by a somewhat flattering 1.14 seconds, as Storrar finished some eight seconds back in a somewhat lonely third position, and Bevan again upheld Welsh honour by beating Paterson and Hunt to fourth.

Kinghan was eighth, while Clarke was again best of the southern Irish contingent in ninth, in front of Johnston, while Ulster riders James Dickson, Kirk and Jamison all scored precious points.

Supersport

Irish riders dominated the MotoSix Supersport races.

The first race, which was finally staged over eight laps, was twice halted due to red flag incidents, however, that didn't unsettle Alastair Seeley, who stormed to an eight seconds victory on the JMF Millsport Yamaha R6.

Dubliner Jack Kennedy set the pace for the first couple of laps, but once Seeley stamped his authority on the proceedings he was always in control, and Kennedy ultimately had to surrender the runners-up berth to Castlerock's Marty Nutt, aboard the nuttravel.com/T&G Yamaha.

English riders Josh Day, Daniel Frear and pole setter Matt Bilton completed the leading half dozen, while Mark Cringle was best of the Manx riders in seventh and Les Shand was top Scot in eighth.

Ballygowan's Michael Pearson was tenth on the GSMCC Honda CBR600RR, followed home by his Ulster team-mate Gary Jeffers from Cookstown, with Alistair Kirk 13th on the Mar-Train Suzuki GSX-R600 and Kirk Jamison 17th aboard the Jim Angus Contracts Yamaha.

Seeley, Kennedy and Nutt were again at the head of affairs in the second Supersport race, but again Seeley emerged on top, although Kennedy trimmed his margin to just 1.5 seconds.

Nutt's aspirations to a podium finish evaporated dramatically when he crashed on the final lap, thankfully without injury, and the leading sextet was shuffled on the last lap, when Englishmen Dean Hipwell and Josh Day also tipped off.

Frear was promoted to fourth, ahead of Shand and Bilton, while Michael Pearson took seventh and Michael Sweeney from Skerries salvaged some honour for the Republic of Ireland when he placed eighth, just ahead of England's Jimmy Dye, Kirk Jamison and Gary Jeffers, with Alistair Kirk packing more points for Ulster in 13th.

Sidecar

It was left to the sidecar team to wrap up the MotoSix title for Northern Ireland, much to the delight of their solo colleagues.

English duo Bryan Peddar/Rod Steadman convincingly won both races from Banbridge man John Clarke and his Antrim passenger Stuart Graham, with Scots duo Scott Lawrie/James Connel third on each occasion.

It was the in-depth strength of the team which settled the issue in favour of Ulster, as former world sidecar champion Tim Reeves, from Kent, who now resides in the province, claimed fourth and was top Formula Two finisher in both races against the more powerful Formula One outfits, with his passenger Patrick Farrance.

Reigning Irish sidecar champions Alex Johnston/Kyle Young from Newtownards were 15th in both races, while their fellow Newtownards man George Kennedy, partnered by Colin Smyth, were 17th in race one and improved one position in the defining second race.

For the Irish Republic, the best crew were John Farragher, who was teamed with Englishman Paul Knapton — they placed sixth in the first race and seventh in the second.

After they failed to finish the first British Formula Two Sidecar Championship race, Reeves/Farrance won the second race.

Reeves related: "It has been a really enjoyable weekend and great to start the season with a win. In the two MotoSix Nations races, the F1 outfits had the edge, but I was very satisfied to take a brace of fourths and be the first F2 outfit home on each occasion and help the Northern Ireland team to win the title."

Reaction

Kirk Jamison applauded: "The event is a fantastic addition to everyone's year. Donington and the ACU have already signed up for three years and deserve a lot of credit for the whole thing. It was very professionally done, with interviews, a press launch and, of course, the presentation of a £20,000 trophy!

"To go up and lift the trophy was undoubtedly the best moment in my racing career to date. Whatever I do, or don't, achieve in racing before I retire, no one can take that moment away from me. To have my whole team and biggest supporters with me to witness it was especially important, as without them I wouldn't be racing at all."

Robert Fearnell of Donington Park, who was instrumental in launching the MotoSix Championship, was delighted with how the event went.

He said: "It has been a great success and the event has a long term future here. The racing has been intense and we will make it even better in the future. We've learned things and will build for the future. This has been a superb competition. The Federations have supported it strongly and the spirit among the teams was brilliant."

Jim Parker of the ACU added: "There has been enormous interest and we look forward to doing it again next year. The sport needs new, innovative ideas. The six national teams here really got involved, got into the spirit of it, and made it work."

Support races

There was a full supporting programme to the MotoSix races, and Alastair Seeley won both Open Pro-Bike races, aboard the Superstock-specification JMF Millsport Yamaha R1.

The first eight lapper was staged following qualifying last Saturday, and Seeley romped to a ten seconds victory over Gerard Kinghan, with Englishman Dan Stewart third on his Yamaha R1.

Seeley won Sunday's Pro-Bike race by 11 seconds from Phil Bevan and Stewart, while Donington debutant Michael Pearson improved from 11th in the previous afternoon's race to take a good fourth on his 600 Honda, ahead of Rory Clarke.

The combined Formula 600/Suzuki GSX-R600 Trophy race produced tremendous entertainment, with the leading trio separated by less than half-a-second.

Gary Jeffers took the win by three-tenths of a second from English duo Josh Caygill and highly rated Manx Grand Prix rider Ian Mackman, while Antrim's John Simpson led for four of the 13 laps, before he slipped back to finish fourth on the Trickbits UK Yamaha R6, on which he will contest this season's British Junior Superstock Championship.

Results

MotoSix Superbike, 1st race: 1, A. Seeley (Yamaha/NI) 93.17mph; 2, R. Cooper (Yamaha/Eng); 3, P. Bevan (Yamaha/Wal); 4, T. Paterson (Suzuki/Sco); 5, J. Storrar (Suzuki/Sco); 6, G. Hunt (Honda/IoM); 7, G. Kinghan (Suzuki/NI); 8, A. Fagan (Honda/Eng); 9, A. Kirk (Suzuki/NI); 10, R. Clarke (Suzuki/RoI). Irish: 13, M. Johnston (Honda/NI); 15, K. Jamison (Honda/NI); 21, P. Byrne (Yamaha/RoI); 22, P. Barron (Triumph/RoI); 23, D. Swanton (Yamaha/RoI); 25, J. Walsh (Honda/RoI); 29, J. Dickson (Yamaha/NI). Fastest lap: Seeley 94.47mph. 2nd race: 1, Cooper 92.91mph; 2, Seeley; 3, Storrar; 4, Bevan; 5, Paterson; 6, Hunt; 7, D. Stewart (Yamaha/Eng); 8, Kinghan; 9, Clarke; 10, Johnston. Irish: 15, Dickson; 16, Kirk; 17, Swanton; 20, Barron; 21, Jamison; 22, Byrne; 25 Walsh; 28, C. Lynch (Suzuki/RoI). Fastest lap: Cooper 94.23mph.

MotoSix Supersport, 1st race: 1, A. Seeley (Yamaha/NI) 91.99mph; 2, M. Nutt (Yamaha/NI); 3, J. Kennedy (Yamaha/RoI); 4, J. Day (Yamaha/Eng); 5, D. Frear (Yamaha/Eng); 6, M. Bilton (Yamaha/Eng); 7, M. Cringle (Yamaha/IoM); 8, L. Shand (Suzuki/Sco); 9, S. Lowes (Honda/Eng); 10, M. Pearson (Yamaha/NI). Irish: 11, G. Jeffers (Yamaha/NI); 13, A. Kirk (Suzuki/NI); 15, P. Greaney (Yamaha/RoI); 16, A. Hill (Kawasaki/RoI); 17, K. Jamison (Yamaha/NI); 20, M. Weldon (Yamaha/RoI); 23, P. Conway (Yamaha/RoI). Fastest lap: Seeley 93.64mph. 2nd race: Seeley 92.32mph; 2, Kennedy; 3, Cringle; 4, Frear; 5, Shand; 6, Bilton; 7, Pearson; 8, M. Sweeney (Yamaha/RoI); 9, J. Dye (Kawasaki/Eng); 10, Jamison. Irish: 11, Jeffers; 13, Kirk; 15, Greaney; 17, Conway; 18, Weldon. Fastest lap: Seeley 93.95mph.

MotoSix Sidecar, 1st race: 1, B. Peddar/R. Steadman (LCR Suzuki/Eng) 87.72mph; 2, J. Clarke/S. Graham (LCR Suzuki/NI); 3, S. Lawrie/J. Connel (LCR Suzuki/Sco); 4, T. Reeves/P. Farrance (LCR/NI); 5, B. & G. Davie (LCR Suzuki/Sco); 6, J. Farragher/P. Knapton (Yamaha/RoI); 7 B. & T. Birchall (LCR/Eng); 8, R. Hanks/D. Wells (Suzuki/IoM); 9, N. Kelly/J. O'Connor (Honda/IoM); 10, A. Williams/J. Hibbard (Derbyshire Suzuki/Wal). Irish: 24, S. Galligan/F. Woodlock (RoI); 15, A. Johnston/K. Young (LCR/NI); 16, K. & S. Mullen (Yamaha/RoI); 17, G. Kennedy/C. Smyth (Suzuki/NI). Fastest lap: Peddar/Steadman 90.09mph. 2nd race: 1, Peddar/Steadman 88.07mph; 2, Clarke/Graham; 3, Lawrie/Connel; 4, Reeves/Farrance; 5, Davie/Davie 6, S. Neary/S. Bond (Eng); 7, Farragher/Knapton; 8, Hanks/Wells; 9, Williams/Hibbard; 10, Kelly/O'Connor. Irish: 13, Mullen/Mullen; 14, Galligan/Woodlock; 15, Johnston/Young; 16, Kennedy/Smyth. Fastest lap: Peddar/Steadman 89.87mph.

Final MotoSix Nations points: 1, Northern Ireland 347; 2, England 443; 3, Scotland 516; 4, Republic of Ireland 569; 5, Isle of Man 667; 6, Wales 792.

Pro-Bike, 1st race: 1, A. Seeley (1000 Yamaha) 92.09mph; 2, G. Kinghan (1000 Suzuki); 3, D. Stewart (1000 Yamaha); 4, J. Storrar (1000 Suzuki); 5, D. Hipwell (600 Yamaha); 6, G. Hunt (1000 Honda); 7, P. Bevan (1000 Yamaha); 8, D. Fricker (1000 Yamaha); 9, M. Johnston (1000 Honda); 10, A. Czyzewski (1000 Suzuki). Fastest lap: Seeley 92.98mph. 2nd race: 1, Seeley 92.06mph; 2, Bevan; 3, Stewart; 4, M. Pearson (600 Honda); 5, R. Clarke (1000 Suzuki); 6, Czyzewski; 7, Hunt; 8, Hipwell; 9, B. Wilson (1000 Kawasaki); 10, Fricker. Fastest lap: Seeley 93.24mph.

Formula 600: 1, G. Jeffers (600 Yamaha) 88.88mph; 2, J. Caygill (600 Yamaha); 3, I. Mackman (600 Suzuki); 4, J. Simpson (600 Yamaha); 5, J. Lees (600 Yamaha); 6, D. Harrison (600 Honda). Fastest lap: Mackman 90.16mph.

Triple MotoSix Nations race victor Alastair Seeley guns the JMF Millsport Yamaha out of Melbourne Loop. *Photo by Jimmy Windows*