

Armajaro MSA British Historic Rally Championship

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Round nine: Minilite Historic Somerset Stages

Patrick Watts and Elgan Davies were confirmed as champions on a dramatic final round of the 2006 Armajaro MSA British Historic Rally Championship, the Minilite Historic Somerset Stages (28 October).

Although their Sunbeam Tiger retired after taking a wrong split junction, the simultaneous retirement of the Porsche 911 of Steven Smith/John Nichols meant that Watts/Davies won the title.

Meanwhile, David Stokes/Guy Weaver and Neil Calvert/Michelle Calvert scored resounding category victories on the Minehead based rally.

Historic (category 1)

The fastest category 1 car on the opening stage was the MessageLabs-backed Lotus Cortina of Jonathan and Graham Gale. Unfortunately, a time-consuming off in Croydon was later followed by electrical dramas and their rally was over.

Meanwhile, Watts/Davies were getting into the groove but missed the split junction in stage three and put themselves out of the rally. They drove back to Minehead unaware that Smith/Nichols had retired four minutes earlier and so they had won the title even though their rally was over by 9.15am.

Now, it was the Calverts setting the pace in category 1 and they had a tremendous run to give their Lotus Cortina a memorable win. Not only did Neil secure third overall in the BHRC standings, but he also claimed his first overall win in 30 years of rallying. "We've had a super rally and Michelle has been superb on the notes," said a jubilant Calvert. It was also thought to be the first category 1 win for a Lotus Cortina since the start of the BHRC.

Non-BHRC crew Peter Stimson/Mark Baker were a fine second in their very rapid Ford Anglia, while Dave Foster/Terry March were third to give their Porsche 911 it's best result to date. "We thought we'd better take it steady on the last two runs up Porlock," admitted Foster.

After a season of mechanical dramas, class B2 victory was a timely result for Mike Barratt/Jody Watson (Mini Cooper). "Today has been very good, I'm very, very pleased," said Mike. Their win was over the Minis of Mike Bartlett/Fin MacKintosh and Alison Lock/Barbara Alexander, but the class lost Phil and Stuart Smith early on. They punctured on the opening stage and then had to dive off the next road section to avoid some spectators' cars and that took another tyre off the rim. With no spare left, they were out.

The battle for B1 in the championship and on the rally was resolved early on when Nick Pinkett/Caroline Lodge dropped five minutes with fuel pump failure. The similar Saab 96 of John Parker/Robert Harrison won clearly to clinch the class title. "I got the hang of the toll road by the fourth run," joked Parker.

Post-historic (category 2)

The rally was over almost before it started for Smith/Nichols, when the Porsche stopped after 200m of the opening stage. "It's called rallying and it can be cruel," said Smith with a smile. "I knew it was something trivial and I

spent 10 minutes trying to find it," he said after the problem was later diagnosed as a failed master switch solenoid.

Instead, Stokes/Weaver shot straight into a lead they would hold to the finish, but it wasn't an easy day for the Escort crew. On the opening two Porlock stages, a detached bonnet pin left the bonnet flapping and they had to back off on the faster sections, losing 15s in the process. Then, in the second loop of forest stages, a clutch problem developed that caused a couple of moments and cost half a minute

The clutch thrust bearing was on the way out, so they had to limp the final two Porlock stages. Somehow, they got the car through, but dropped more time.

"It was a very close call; we were very lucky to get to the finish," admitted David. Despite the problems, they still won by 31s from Graham Wilson/Keith Fellowes (Porsche 911). "That's a great result for us," said Wilson after his best finish of the season, heading Ernie Graham/Robin Kellard by just 5s. With another event planned in two weeks, they took a steady approach in their Escort.

Out with mechanical problems went Dave Dyer/Graham Wride after a strong start in their Escort, while second in C4 went to the Porsche of Paul Drinkall/Roy Brown after a day that almost ended with clutch failure. "We did the last two stages without a clutch and had to be pushed off the line at Porlock," admitted Drinkall. That result clinched the C4 championship award. Bob Gibbons and Stuart Cardell, back in the woods in their Escort RS2000 for the first time in six months, took class C3, while C2 was a straight fight between John Worthing/Bill Robertson and Vince Bristow/Dean Mitchell. It was always close, but Worthing/Robertson took the class by just 7s. "That was hard work, but a great end to the season," said Worthing.

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Issued by Paul Lawrence (tel 01952 510382) on behalf of the Historic Rally Car Register (www.hrccr.co.uk)