

Kerr extends lead in rally challenge

By George Topp

LANARKSHIRE teenager Alick Kerr (17), from Bothwell, extended his championship lead during the Scottish Rally, based in the forests around Dumfries.

Kerr now has a very healthy 11-point lead in the Brick & Steel Ecosse 205 Challenge midway through the series.

Andrew Smith, father of British Ladies Rally Champion Lorna, finished only 11 seconds in front of Kerr, with the pair trading stages throughout the day.

"I was happy to get the points from finishing second as it was my best result on gravel to date," said Kerr.

"I didn't do too well on the last gravel rally, so bouncing back with second place is a real bonus".

Kerr, who won the first round of the challenge, has been scoring consistently in his Leaker Direct-backed Peugeot 205, with three podiums from four rallies.

The car is co-driven by the experienced Tom Hynd, of Inverbervie, who has been guiding the youngster over the last three rallies.

"We've been working hard on the notes and we seem to have found a system that works well," said Hynd.

"We've certainly made very good progress with the change and I'm sure we can find even more time as we move forward."

The Ecosse 205 Challenge rolls into Duns for the Jim Clark Rally in July, which is held over closed public road, and Kerr will be hoping to perform well on his preferred surface, tarmac.

"I'm really looking forward to the Jim Clark though we'll be in the backyard of some of the Challenge top-runners," said Kerr.

"Obviously, local knowledge will be a big advantage for them but I'll be working hard to maintain my lead in the championship."

Also taking part in the Challenge section of the Scottish Rally was Cross-

ford schoolboy Jonathan Smith. His forest debut on the previous round didn't last beyond the opening stage when he rolled his Peugeot.

This time out the Clyde Valley teenager was determined to finish and after easing himself into the event over the opening two stages, he increased the pace over other stages.

However, a front-wheel puncture on stage six saw him having to drive four miles on a flat, and he had to settle for 47th overall in the Scottish, and 10th in class, still a respectable result for a young novice. "I've been taking it easy today," admitted the youngster, who is still at school.

"After the accident on the Granite, I really needed to get round and gain experience, so I'm happy to make it to the finish in one piece."

With Jonathan's speed and confidence increasing over the day, possibly helped by pre-event coaching from rallying's famous McRae family, his more experienced rivals are showing signs of concern ahead of the next Challenge round.

Another young county driver in action, this time in the main rally, was Kevin Ross, partnered by Kirsty Riddick in the Fly Zoom.Com/KR Tuning/SIC Bodyworks/ Atlantic Embroidery-Mitsubishi EVO 4.

The team had a bad start to the rally, with a puncture on the first stage losing some four minutes and dropping them to 90th.

Kevin responded by setting some incredible times, and despite another puncture eventually finished 29th overall.

Kevin said afterwards: "We just need a little luck to get us through a full rally without any problems."

"I am happy with the times but feel that I can still go quicker through the fast corners. I can't wait till the Jim Clark as I felt last year I was just getting to grips with the then new car when the rally was about to end. We did however finish 19th overall."

The team have suffered some costly repairs this year, with a blown engine on the first round and a gearbox disintegrating on a test day.