

Josh Moffett's record-equalling hat-trick

Josh Moffett equalled an Irish rallying record by taking his third Triton Showers Motorsport Ireland National Rally Championship title at the Fastnet Rally on Sunday.

The Monaghan man victory means he equals records previously set by Declan Boyle and Niall Maguire as the only driver to win the Irish National title three times.

An inspired tyre choice on the opening loop – Moffett and his co-driver Keith Moriarty opted for full wets while his main championship rival Callum Devine and navigator Noel O'Sullivan were on slicks, meant the defending champions had ten seconds to spare over his main title rivals at the first service halt.

However, they were only in second place as local heroes Daniel Cronin and Donnchadh Burke topped the time sheets in their Volkswagen Polo R5.

Moffett got the grit between his teeth on the second loop, he overhauled Cronin and while Devine too was on a charge those early ten seconds were crucial to the title fight.

Over the final two stages, Moffett, Devine and Cronin all traded times – the final test was both a rally-winning and championship-winning shootout.

Ahead of that final test, Moffett held the upper hand, just 0.9 of a second the gap to Cronin, and Devine was a further 4.4 seconds adrift.

Moffett and Moriarty were fastest over the stage to take the win and championship.

Cronin and Burke were caught out in a late rain shower and slipped off the road. They lost the best part of 30 seconds in the incident and dropped to third overall. This promoted Devine to second place in both the rally and the championship.

Motorsport Ireland Rally Academy member and outgoing Billy Coleman award winner Eamon Kelly and co-driver Conor Mohan were fourth in their Volkswagen Polo R5 for much of the day.

They were caught out in the same place as Cronin but unlike their Polo R5 colleague, they lost a lot of time but eventually got going again.

Former Ford Escort exponents Eddie Doherty and Tom Murphy put in a stirring performance over the final loop. They were on a maiden outing in the new Skoda Fabia R5 and finished a creditable fourth overall.

Local heroes Cal McCarthy and Eric Calnan were fifth in their Citroen CR Rally 2, Donegal's Declan Gallagher and Gavin Doherty were the leading Modified entrants. The Toyota Starlet crew had not competed since the Donegal International Rally in June and were using the Bantry-based event as a test ahead of planned outings at the Donegal Harvest Rally and the Killarney Historic Rally. Their efforts were rewarded with sixth overall. The top overseas driver was Welsh man Steve Wood in his Citroen. He and co-driver Kenny Hull finished seventh, one place ahead of the top all-Ford Escort crew Conor Murphy and Sean Collins.

Colm Murphy and Don Montgomery won the Group N category in their Subaru Impreza taking ninth overall in the process.

The top ten was completed by Mayo's John Warren and Ruthann O'Connor in their Toyota Corolla.

The Triton National Rally Championship Awards Night will take place on Saturday 18th November in the Sheraton Hotel, Athlone.