

Gold/Silver Star Final 2023

The BTRDA Gold/Silver star final returned north this year to the magnificent Gale Hall site at Melmerby. One of the best venues in the country, it has everything; grass, bracken and a few boggy bits too. What comes with this mountainside location however, is unpredictable weather, indeed the last time we were there for the 2015 final it was snowed off at lunchtime, and true to form, the days before the trial it was once again covered in snow. The forecast was for milder conditions on the day and on Saturday morning the snow had all but gone, although under a sticky surface the ground was still frozen.

A field of thirty-six including a strong contingent from Northern Ireland set off to tackle the 10 sections that the Northern Phoenix Club had laid out. The bookies had stopped taking money on Thomas Bricknell doing the double after he had secured the MSUK title back in the autumn. However this one-off event is unique in that it's the best man on the day that reaps the rewards and with several drivers hitting a bit of form at the end of the season it was certainly not a done deal. I think the majority of us were surprised at how much grip there was and apart from hill 1 which had a tricky cross camber to a steep turn at the 5 gate everything else was "on" in round one for those that were in the mood. Josh Veale, the victor the last time the final was held here, managed to get a little bit further than the rest on the aforementioned hill 1 to record a 3, his only score for the round, with no less than four drivers including Boyd Webster, Matt Sharp, our Chairman, Stuart Beare and Thomas a point behind. Harry Barr, from Northern Ireland, was one of three drivers dropping just 5 points so competitors from all the regions were in the mix.



Gold Star Winner Thomas Bricknell/Beth Carroll

As is often the case with this site, the passage of cars tends to alter the conditions automatically, so only minor adjustments to the hills were necessary. It was no surprise to see the scores start to climb throughout the second round; indeed one or two pinch points were becoming expensive. Dougie Parkinsons hill 4 was a case in point where the right turn at the 9 gate onto a slippery camber was causing mayhem. Both Matt and Richard Sharp, and Harry Barr were among two thirds of the field that were caught here, an expensive number to lose against the several who went on to climb the hill. Section 5 was



David Webster/ Suzanne Webster (somewhere)

another, which had a difficult turn at the 5 gate where once again the majority of the field failed. Ironically these pinch points were not necessarily starting position specific because throughout the field someone would come along and make it look annoyingly easy.

At the conclusion of the round local lad Mike Salton had posted a very impressive 8 points dropped which with a tidy first round put him in the lead on a total of 13. Hard on his heels was Thomas on 14, Josh, 19 and despite his troubles on Hill 4 Richard Sharp had only amassed 21. Trevor Aston was taking up the Irish Challenge a couple of points further back.

Round three, more traffic, more mud, more points, although mud wasn't the problem for poor old Mike Salton on Hill 10, ably marshalled by Dave Martin. As he completed the section and turned to come down, the car took off on the semi-frozen ground and hit a rabbit hole snapping one of the steering rods. With the paddock so far away, by the time he had returned and made a repair the hills he had missed had become far worse. Hills 5, 6, 7 and 8 were now particularly tricky and this is where the trial was pretty much won and lost. By dint of the running order, Josh was earlier across these hills and drove them superbly dropping a measly 3 points, Thomas on the other hand, 10 or so cars back had less attractive conditions to contend with but still managed to lose a paltry 6 points. This put the pair of them way out in front of the rest of the field and it was just a case of what they

had done elsewhere. Although he didn't know it, Josh was winning as he attempted his final section but a slippery cross camber on hill 3 caught him out and the 5 points he dropped was enough to give Thomas the win.

The results of this event are not published until the presentation dinner in the evening but what they showed us that Thomas had completed his double with a loss of 36, three ahead of Josh on 39. They were a good few points clear of Andy Wilks who claimed his best ever Goldstar finish in third place ahead of Ian Veale in fourth. Despite dropping 45 points in his last round Mike came home in fifth ahead of local man Andrew Woodhead. Trevor Aston maintained his good form to be best Northern Irishman.

The Silver star entry was very much dominated by Southern drivers with a couple of Irish contenders and just one Northerner so the odds were very much stacked against local man Jeff Armistead, especially as this was his first outing in the recently acquired Crossle. However at the conclusion of the first round it was Jeff who was tying for the lead with Alan Baker



Silver Star Winner Jeff Armistead/Stephen Postlethwaite

and Jason Daniel on just 14 points. Alan driving the venerable live axle Apex was having some tremendous climbs putting some the more exotic machinery around him to shame in the process. The battle for the lead continued through the second round and at the lunch break Jeff was just edging it over Alan, The latter hit back in the final round gaining a point on Jeff but it wasn't quite enough to overhaul the 3 point deficit he had after round two. So Jeff took the Silver Star crown with Alan a worthy runner up. Third place went to Alan Murton, with George Barnes next.

Great credit must go to the Northern Phoenix Car club for laying on an excellent trial in very testing conditions. Testament to this is that the cream of our crop of drivers came to the top, which is exactly as it should be; all in all a great weekend. And talking of great weekends,

there will be one next year, guaranteed, because we are off to Ireland for the final. I strongly recommend you start saving your pennies now because the last time we were there it was one of the best trials I have ever done and an evening to remember; one only the Irish can put on! Save the date now!!