

## MOTORSPORT

## EUROPEAN RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

# Johnston's 'Hungary' for a change of fortune

BY CHRIS CALDWELL

AARON Johnston and Oliver Solberg's last two outings have been beset with misfortune and the Fintona co-driver is hoping their luck will change in Hungary this weekend.

They will resume their European Rally Championship title quest behind the wheel of a Eurosol Racing Skoda Fabia Rally2 Evo, hoping to bounce back from the last two disappointing results.

Their unfortunate run started behind the wheel of their Volkswagen Po-

lo GTi R5 in which they suffered a mechanical issue that ended their hopes in the previous round of the ERC in Portugal following a monumental effort by their crew to basically rebuild the car following a collision with a tree during shakedown.

And last time out, their luck didn't improve. In Italy, at Rally Sardegna, the pair were caught out by a small jump which meant Solberg missed his braking point by a split second and their Skoda Fabia became beached, all but ending their charge for World Rally Championship points on that occa-

sion.

"It'll be a challenging weekend but I'm looking forward to it and looking forward to getting back into the European Championship after a disappointing weekend in Portugal after the fantastic work by the guys to get the car fixed and then the mechanical problem," Johnston said.

"That's just part of rallying but hopefully we have a little bit of a smoother event this weekend."

With neither of the young duo having competed at Rally Hungary before, they know they face a steep learning



Fintona's Aaron Johnston is preparing to tackle Rally Hungary this coming weekend.



Aaron Johnston and Oliver Solberg hope to re-ignite their European Rally Championship title charge in Hungary this weekend.

curve on the traditionally muddy and slippery tarmac stages.

But it's a challenge they will relish as they attempt to claw back some of the 42 points lead Alexey Lakanuk currently enjoys over them at the head of the ERC standings.

Solberg and Johnston, though, do retain a seven point advantage over Gregorie Munster in the Junior Championship.

"The conditions won't be easy but again it will be a good experience and good learning," added 25-year-old Johnston.

"It's all about seat time and mileage but of course we will try to get the best result we can, but we need to do all the stages, get through the rally and get the experience if we ever go back there, especially on a surface that Oliver doesn't have that much experience on.

"But of course, we are still in the fight for the overall championship, so we have to think about that too. We just have to do our best and see what happens.

"Looking at Hungary from previous years and with it being at the time of year that it's at, it's always very wet

and muddy and slippery, so I think it's the smartest crew that will be the winners at the end of the weekend.

"It's not just all about speed, you have to be within the margin of risk. If you have mud on the road or gravel or things like that, you have to be smart and drive to the conditions.

"We'll do our best to do that and mark it all down in the pace notes from the recce."

After Hungary, the remainder of Johnston and Solberg's season remains a little up in the air due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The next round of the WRC at Rally Ypres in Belgium has been cancelled, leaving the Monza event in December the likely finale of that series, while at present, Rally Islas Canarias and Spa remain the concluding rounds of the ERC should they go ahead.

"You just have to be grateful for every rally that is run for the rest of the year because it is just so uncertain between local governments and international travel," Johnston said.

"We'll give Hungary our best and after that we'll just have to see what way the world is for moving forward."

## IRISH MINIBIKE CHAMPIONSHIP

# Omagh's Jake seals top four finish

OMAGH'S Jake Johnston brought the curtain down on his first season in the Irish Minibike Championship in some style at Nutts Corner where he sealed a fourth placed overall finish in the BamBam Class.

The 2020 Irish Minibike Championship Season concluded exactly as it began - with a BAM at Nutts Corner where neither the morning drizzle nor an oil spill stoppage could dampen the spirit of the paddock and the finale was everything it promised to be - fast-paced, action-packed, down to the wire and mighty good craic!

The BamBammers took the honours of opening proceedings at round one on July 18th (the first motorsport event in Ireland following lockdown) and albeit unplanned, and as if by fate, took the final flag at the sixth and final IMC event of 2020.

Going into the finale, The VW Audi Bitz supported BamBam Class had a crowned champion in Buster Sherman-Boyd, but the race was still on for the remaining podium placings.

Max Robinson, Jack Hamilton and Alfie Flynn had it all to play for with only a few points separating the trio. Hamilton set a very fast pace from the offset, the clear

winner in all three races.

In Race one, Sherman-Boyd and Flynn battled hard for the runner-up spot in a race-long duel. While there was little to separate the pair, just 0.5 seconds at the line, Sherman-Boyd just nabbed it. Flynn has demonstrated great progression during his 'Rookie' season and has marked himself a serious contender for 2021. Six year-old Max Robinson had a lonely race running fourth, just losing the tow of the duel in front.

In races two and three there was little change at the front however a fall for Robinson in race three saw Omagh's Jake Johnston benefit with valuable points rewarding him with fourth overall on the day.

Tommy Ferris, Beau McCrory, Ryan Glasgow, Rachel Hamilton and sister Emily, Alyssa Curry, Cathal Casey and Shea Elliott all put in fantastic effort across the field.

The controlled class has shown promise for 2021 with no less than 18-point scorers. The Championship concluded with Buster Sherman-Boyd on 145pts, Jack Hamilton on 99pts and Alfie Flynn on 87pts.



Omagh's Jake Johnston in action on his TenTen BamBam machine at Nutts Corner.