

# Round 1: Fallis/ McGovern Triumph on Micra Debut



The 2026 'PRG Trailers – Trailertek Micra Challenge' kicked off once again with Ballynahinch and District Motor Clubs' 'Race & Rally' sponsored Bishops court Stages Rally on March 7<sup>th</sup> - and what a start to the season it turned out to be. Accidents and mechanical failure ruled out half of the field – but Micra debutant Karl Fallis with Tony McGovern alongside proved to be both fast and consistent - and overcame their own issues to take the win.



Winners for this opening round were anticipated to come from the crews of Peter and Steven Dowds, who always go well at the Bishops court venue, or Ben Fallis/ Louise Mc Barron, last years Challenge runners up who have shown pace on all surfaces. Neither Jamie McLaughlin/ Katie Wilson nor Aidan O'Neill/ Ryan O'Neill could be ruled out however as both crews are picking up pace as they gain experience. The big unknowns however were Karl Fallis/ Tony McGovern and Marcus McElwee/ John Henderson who were both making their Challenge debuts. Karl had dipped his toes in the water on last year's Ulster Rally when he co-drove for Sean Foy and has since purchased the ex-Raymond Johnston, ex-Derek Crossen Kit Car in the close season. Marcus McElwee is an ex-J1000 Champion and was expected to go well also. He had the experienced Henderson as co-driver and his car had previously competed in the hands of his father Mark.

As the Stage 1 times came in, it was clear that we were in for some close competition with less than six seconds covering the top five Micras. Peter Dowds went fastest by 1.6 seconds – but it was Karl Fallis in second place – not Ben, with Aidan O'Neill putting in a cracking time to slot into third place. Karl then went one better on Stage 2, taking fastest time by 0.3 seconds over brother Ben – game on! The Fallis brothers were expected to push each other to the limits and so it proved. Just behind, Peter Dowds had a slight overshoot but hung on to third place overall.

The pattern was repeated on Stage 3 with Karl and Tony going fastest by 0.4 seconds over Ben and Louise to hold a 3.1 second lead. However Marcus McElwee started to show his pace and put in a third place time 0.7 seconds faster than Peter and Steven Dowds. There was concern in the Dowds camp however with an ominous noise coming from their Kit Car dogbox. The decision was taken to change it and the service crew exceeded their own expectations and had the box changed in 25 minutes with the car re-fettled and ready to go without penalty.

On Stage 4 the Kit Car of Karl Fallis/ Tony McGovern started to experience a power-sapping misfire and could only put in a fourth fastest time. Ben Fallis and fiancée Louise McBarron pounced to take advantage, setting a fastest time over Peter/Steven Dowds to take a 7.4 second lead over brother Karl. This was the third leader in 4 stages with all to play for. Their lead didn't last long however and it all went wrong on Stage 5. Their ex-Stephen Whitford Kit Car got out of shape not far from the start line - a rear wheel hit a kerb and in an instant the car rolled, landing heavily on its roof. Thankfully the crew were unharmed but their rally was over.

Sensing an opportunity Peter and Steven Dowds put in fastest times on Stages 5 and 6, taking time back from Karl Fallis, who had Crozier Motorsport working hard between stages to get his Kit Car running cleanly. Jamie McLaughlin/ Katie Wilson were third fastest on both Stage 5 and 6 and emerged in third place overall. Aidan O'Neill/ Ryan



O'Neill had held this position after Stage 5, but brake failure on Stage 6 resulted in them hitting a bank and ripping a rear wheel off - despite a desperate grab for the handbrake to rescue the situation.



Throughout the chaos Marcus McElwee/ John Henderson kept their heads and despite a slightly bent rear beam on their narrow track Micra, they set fastest times on Stages 7 and 8 – grabbing second place overall in the process. Two second fastest times for Karl Fallis/ Tony McGovern were enough however for them to secure the win and maximum points on their Challenge debut – a fantastic result.

Peter Dowds was another to join the retirement list as a damaged driveshaft forced retirement between Stages 7 and 8 – very disappointing after their service crews earlier efforts. Jamie McLaughlin/ Katie Wilson slotted into the final podium slot in third – they had been lying second going into the final stage but they took a cautious approach to the final stage given the retirements around them – but were pipped to second by the hard-charging McElwee.



Thanks again to all our sponsors for 2026: **PRG Trailers, Trailertek, Vanilla Black, Humphris Rallysport, Race & Rally, NM Engineering, Protyre Motorsport Ireland, Millers Oils** and final thanks to **BADMC** and all officials and marshals who make these events possible. Photographs courtesy of **North X North West Photography**. The next round is the demanding Circuit of Ireland on Saturday April 5<sup>th</sup>.

Challenge points after Round 1 are as follows:



Provisional Challenge Points  
After Round 1

RANK	Name	Race & Rally Bishopscoort Stages	Circuit of Ireland	Carryduff Forklift Rallye Lecale	Modern Tyres Ulster Rally	Trailer Parts & Spares Lakeland Stages	McKeivey Asbestos Bushwhacker Rally	TOTAL (BEST 4)
<b>OVERALL DRIVERS</b>								
1	Karl Fallis	15	-	-	-	-	-	15
2	Marcus McElwee	12	-	-	-	-	-	12
3	Jamie McLaughlin	10	-	-	-	-	-	10
4	Ben Fallis	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
4	Aidan J O'Neill	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
4	Peter Dowds	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
<b>OVERALL CODRIVERS</b>								
1	Tony McGovern	15	-	-	-	-	-	15
2	John Henderson	12	-	-	-	-	-	12
3	Katie Wilson	10	-	-	-	-	-	10
4	Steven Dowds	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
4	Ryan O'Neill	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
4	Louise McBarron	1	-	-	-	-	-	1

**Prize Draw at Round 1:**

£200 award	Marcus McElwee
£150 award	Jamie McLaughlin
£100 Race & Rally voucher	Ben Fallis
£100 Trailertek voucher	Peter Dowds
1 gallon of Miller Competition Oil	Karl Fallis