

Irvine wins Red Hand Trophy for second time.

The Ballymena Road Club – Northstone – race organising team was on duty again last Saturday when they promoted the Blair International Transport Red Hand Trophy road race at Broughshane.

The 54 entrants assembled at the Michelin athletic club on the Woodside road and they had a neutralised section to the official start on the Knockan road at Broughshane.

Almost immediately the pace shot up and a few riders lost contact inside the first three miles.

By the time the riders reached Clough, with just six miles covered, the successful breakaway group had already formed.

The leaders included Conor McAllister and Ryan Connor (Slane cycles), Stephen Gallagher (Cycle Premier), Micky Murray (Clan Eireann), Martyn Irvine (Giant) and Simon Williams (Basso).

By Corkey with twelve miles done their lead was 63 seconds. Ryan Connor, however, had dropped back. He was suffering from the after effects of a recent bout of flu and, although he felt well enough to start the race, he didn't have the legs to continue.

This group proved to be successful and by Ballycastle, at 27 miles, their lead was 1 minute 32 seconds.

The climb from Ballyvoy to the vanishing lakes saw the front five increase their advantage while the main field dropped a few riders on the climb and the toughest of this bunch then formed another eight rider chasing group.

These eight included Leo McAllister, Philip Bremner, Jonathan Dempsey (East Antrim), Cathal Smyth (Phoenix) John Heverin (Clann Eireann), Darren Weir (Team vision), Rory Devlin (North Pole) and Damian Lagan. The descent from the top of the climb saw the riders reach speeds of between 45 and 50 mph.

At Cushendall, with 42 miles completed, the front five led by 2 minutes 30 seconds over this eight rider group with the main field another 30 seconds adrift.

Then, as the riders negotiated Waterfoot, a funeral was taking place in the village. The five leaders had no problem and weren't impeded but, just before the rest of the race came into the village, the funeral procession moved off into the road. The commissaire stopped the chasing groups at this stage and they were held for 25 minutes before it was safe to proceed.

The eight riders were restarted with their 30 seconds advantage intact but there was no chance of a race win for anyone except the five out front.

Meanwhile back at the head of affairs there was a lot of sorting out still to be done and the final miles saw Martyn Irvine (Giant) build up a comfortable

solo lead which saw him first back to Broughshane in a race winning time of 2 hours 31 minutes 50 seconds. Irvine, who won the Red Hand in 2008, was 1 minute 16 seconds clear of Stephen Gallagher (the 2006 winner) with Simon Williams taking the third podium position just ahead of fourth placed Conor McAllister; both were 2 minutes 31 seconds behind. Fifth place went to Micky Murray at 5 minutes 15 seconds.

There was a half hour wait before sixth place was taken by Rory Devlin with Cathal Smyth 2 seconds behind him in seventh and Philip Bremner eighth another 33 seconds back. (9) Peter Williams (Orchard) (10) Gary Cranston (East Antrim) (11) Lawrence Watson (Foyle) (first A3) (12) Steven McAllister (Ballymoney) (first A2) Michelin's Uel Cunningham finished nineteenth and won the veteran's award.

Matthew Brennan was 24th and first junior while Simon Taggart also finished with this main group in 29th place to take the first unplaced Ballymena RC prize.

Race organiser, Hugh McCullough did a great job once again co-ordinating the event and he says a big "Well done" to everyone involved with Saturday's race, including Alan Blair for his continued sponsorship, the PSNI for their escort duties, all the race marshalls and race officials and to the ladies for the post race refreshments.

Many thanks too go to the Michelin AC who provided an excellent race HQ at very short notice.

Alan Blair rode to a fine victory in the H&M Wilson cup road race at Slight on Wednesday evening. This year's race formed part of the Bann Valley, Carn wheelers, Bann Wheelers and Ballymoney CC inter club race series and it attracted 74 riders.

They were set off in four groups with zero two four and six minutes handicaps. The front two groups came together at the start of the second lap of the Caddy circuit but groups three and four just couldn't overcome their starting handicap.

Forty seven riders were together on the fast approach to the finish and it was J Thompson (Bann Wheelers) who led them in from his Bann Wheelers club mate M Thompson. Alan Blair was third across the line and as he was the first Ballymena Road Club finisher he will have the honour of picking up the trophy at the club dinner in November. This was Alan's first club race trophy win, well done.

The rest of the inter club result reads – (4) R Young (Carn) (5) C McBride (Ballymoney) (6) M Kelly (Carn) (7) R Walsh (Carn) (8) A Madden

(Ballymoney) (9) W Stevens (Ballymoney) (10) R Downes. All 1 hour 5 minutes 18 seconds for 26 miles.

Club race result (1) Alan Blair 65.18 (2) Steven Carruthers (3) David Kennedy (4) Leo McCavana (5) Derek Dougan (6) Maeve Savage all same time. (7) Martin Ruddy (8) Adrian Kerr (9) Nigel Kernohan (10) Tommy Wilson (11) Matthew Brennan (12) Simon Taggart (13) Ryan Currie (14) Beresford Millar (15) Louise Fullerton (16) Peter Smyth

Youths

The BRC youth section race last week was held on Monday night when a 4.8 miles time trial took place from Broughshane to the Ecos roundabout and back. Adam Kerr was fastest with 12 minutes 34 seconds (2) Chris Surgeoner 13.39 (3) Josh Barr 14.39 (4) Emma Gordon 17.30

Ballymena road Club's tourists held their first "away for the day" tour last Sunday when their Tour of West Tyrone took place from Mountfield. Committee member Pius McKernan was the organiser and everyone had a very enjoyable day out. Many thanks to Pius's sister Philomena Sweeney and her husband Eamon for their hospitality and also to Marion McQuillan for the excellent post tour meal.

Calendar

Wednesday 18th May BRC 10 miles time trial Woodgreen 7pm. (also includes Ulster women's association league event)

Saturday 21st May Tommy Givan memorial road race Hillsborough 10am.

Wednesday 25th May A Bonar cup 25 miles road race Broughshane 7pm

Wednesday 25th May Clarke's tyres trophy BRC youth's 5 miles road race Broughshane 7pm.