

History in the making as new Legends are created

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The Legend Fires North West Stages Rally, in partnership with Simpson's Skoda, exceeded all expectations.

That's the view of the rally organisers who estimated Saturday's groundbreaking event attracted more than 7,000 fans – and that was in addition to around 5,000 who packed Garstang's High Street for Friday evening's ceremonial start.

The carnival atmosphere created at the start set a tone that continued throughout the following day, with the spectator zones on the Nicky Nook and Staynall special stages packed with fans as the event was staged on the roads of Wyre for the first time.

Some were hardened rally fans who travelled from all over the country, but most were locals witnessing a special stage rally for the first time.

The contest unfolding before them proved one of the closest in the rally's history, with the three cars taking the podium places after more than 50 miles, only separated by five seconds.

Carlisle's Peter Taylor and his Newcastle-based co-driver Andrew Roughead took the spoils in their Ford Fiesta WRC as Knutsford's Alex Laffey, co-driven by Stuart Loudon, claimed the

runners-up spot in their Ford Fiesta R5.

Preston's Neil Simpson and co-driver Michael Gibson took the final podium place in a Skoda Fabia R5.

Hopes for a win by a Wyre crew were pinned firmly on the shoulders of Hambleton duo Simon Bowen and Richard Robinson, who won the last running of the event in 2017 in their ex-Petter Solberg Subaru Impreza WRC.

They set the early pace with fastest times on all three opening stages, but a broken rear differential on the following Weeton stage saw them slip to 16th place.

Once that was replaced at the Myerscough College service halt, they set more fastest stage times, gaining 10 places before clutch failure finally put them paid to their rally.

Top finish on the day by a Blackpool South Shore Motor Club member came from John Stone, whose Legend Fires company are the rally's longstanding main sponsor.

Stone and co-driver Jack Morton had endured a trying day finding suitable suspension settings on their Ford Fiesta WRC.

Having survived a near roll on the final Staynall stage, right in front of a packed spectator area, they finished 11th.

South Shore crews were among the prizes, however, as Graham Butler and Chris O'Connor brought their GBR-nutrition.com Ford Escort RS1800 home first in the class



The Garstang start, and clockwise from top right: Wearden/Cross, the Benson Brothers, Bowen/Richardson and Gratrix/Reece Pics: www.pro-rally.co.uk



for historic cars.

More prizes came South Shore's way in the 1600cc class as Neil Wearden and Callum Cross finished second in the Head Dyke Garage Hyundai i20.

The Benson brothers, David and Steven, took the third in class awards in the Iain Gorrie Motor Engineer Honda Civic.

It didn't end there as South Shore's David Gratrix and Iain Reece also won third in class awards, theirs in the 2000cc category in their Renault Clio 182.

A host of other South Shore members made the finish, a superb effort given that a third of the 116 cars that started the rally failed to finish.

Adrian Atkinson and Paul Reader brought their Warden Construction Mitsubishi Lancer Evo6 home in 37th place.

That was three places ahead of Matt Daniels, who guided Manxman Sean Kelly home in his Lancer Evog.

Dave Riley and Gary Dillon finished 47th in their Lancer Evo4, while Chris Sharpe-

Simkiss helped Tim Metcalf finish 56th in an Escort Mk2.

It wasn't a good day, however, for Mark Holmes and Craig Simkiss.

They were forced into retirement on the rally's second stage, when the cambelt broke on their MG Metro 6R4.

Barry Armer was another who failed to finish after Michael Holland's Impreza developed an electrical issue.

All three of Warton's Lightning Motorsport Club's members made the finish.

Chris Melling and Andrew

Peak brought their BMW E30 home in 55th place, with Roy Wadsley and co-driver Mark Broadbent, finishing 61st in his Ford Escort Mk1.

As in previous years, the rally aims to raise significant sums for charitable causes – more than £120,000 has been in total.

The exact sum raised by this year's event alone won't be known until the final accounts are formalised but the organisers are quietly confident it will be in the region of £10,000.

12000
Total spectators
over Friday and
Saturday

Junior joy as Sharpstyle boxers win national titles

The National Junior and Cadet ABA Finals were staged at the Magma Centre in Rotherham, where three boxers from Blackpool's Sharpstyle ABC were in action.

Five fighters from the Bagot Street club had entered the tournament, three winning through the qualifiers in Littleborough to reach the finals.

They were Nelson Birchall in the 44kg cadet class, Frank Varey at 44kg open class and Jake Abrol at 60kg open class, while Jack Dadak and Levi Barnes narrowly missed out.

First up for Sharpstyle in the semi-finals was Birchall,

who won a split decision against Yorkshire champion John Kerrigan from Steel City ABC.

Varey faced an opponent a year older than himself in last year's champion Alby Hill from Chadwell St Mary's in Essex and Frank also won a split decision.

Abrol won all his rounds against Harry Hillier of Southampton ABC for a unanimous decision.

In the following day's finals, Birchall was up first against familiar foe Alfie Hedges of the Pinewood Starr gym in Berkshire.

Alfie had lost both their previous bouts narrowly but this time used good movement to evade attacks, countering nicely with fast combinations.

Birchall's movement made the difference as he won a split decision to be crowned national junior cadet champion.

Varey's opponent in the final was Bill Harbour from Greater London gym Bodyshots. Frank's fast feet and range were too much for the game Harbour.

Frank used his long jab to draw the attack, then neatly stepped out of range to counter. He forced a standing eight

count on his way to a unanimous decision and another title for Sharpstyle.

Abrol was up against Jude Moore of Downend ABC and was hoping to make it three out of three for Sharpstyle after a recent win over the Bristol fighter.

This time Moore was awarded the split decision, though Abrol's coaches felt he had won comfortably.

The three Sharpstyle finalists will all attend a European selection camp, hoping to claim places in the England junior team to compete in Romania in May.



Nelson Birchall and Frank Varey show their awards to clubmates