

SPORT

Hockey's big title chase, rugby and football...

IT'S ALL INSIDE



Slow start but thrilling finish

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There was no shortage of drama in the lanes around Garstang when the Legend Fires North West Stages Rally hosted the opening round of the 2024 British Rally Championship.

Following Friday evening's ceremonial start on Garstang's High Street, where thousands of spectators soaked up the pre-rally atmosphere, Saturday saw competitors embark on the closed-road special stages to the east of the town in an event run in partnership with ND Civils and Kelmere.

Unfortunately the rally didn't start well as accidents in the opening pair of stages, at Beacon Fell and Long Knotts, caused delays and stage cancellations. Thankfully all of those involved in the accidents escaped unscathed.

Now running behind schedule, the third stage at Crossgill was stopped on safety grounds after a report requiring police attendance.

As always, rally organisers had to ensure there was no risk to competitors or spectators and a stage cancellation couldn't be avoided. Given the closed-road time limitations, the planned Hawthornth-



Rally winners Chris Ingram and Alex Kihurani in their VW Polo GTi R5 Photo: www.pro-rally.co.uk

waite and Nicky Nook stages then had to be cancelled.

Fortunately the afternoon's five stages all took place, albeit later than scheduled, and the VW Polo GTi R5 of Chris Ingram and Alex Kihurani was declared the winner.

They finished almost half a minute clear of William

Creighton and Liam Regan's Ford Fiesta Rally2, with the Toyota Yaris GR Rally2 of Meirion Evans and Jonathan Jackson completing the podium places.

There were some impressive performances from local drivers. Neil Roskell, from Preesall, co-driven by Welshman Dai Roberts, fin-

ished fifth in his Fiesta Rally2, while Hambleton's Simon Bowen and Bispham's Craig Simkiss brought their Ford Fiesta S2000T home in 13th place.

Quernmore's Darren Atkinson and Blackpool's Maty Daniels took the Class D Award as the fastest two-wheel drive competitors in

their Ford Escort Mk2, finishing 17th overall.

Garstang competitors also recorded notable results. Danny Cowell finished second in Class H in his Talbot Samba, while the Gardner brothers, Andrew and John, completed the course in their 1966 Morris Mini, the oldest car in the rally.

Defeats for Ridge and Garstang

Longridge Town suffered two 3-1 defeats in the North West Counties League over the past week, though led at home to Charnock Richard on Saturday.

Mitchell Marshall opened the scoring midway through the first half only for Charnock to equalise through Marcus Haydock two minutes before half-time.

The Chorley visitors are struggling to squeeze in all their fixtures but sealed victory in this one with goals from Brad Carsley in the 55th minute and Fenton Davies in the 64th.

The Ridge fell behind to Connor Martin's goal in the fifth minute at Prestwich Heys last Tuesday but equalised through Luke Smith in the 20th.

Two second-half goals by Matthew Davies secured victory for the Manchester club in their pursuit of a play-off spot.

Longridge are 20th in the Premier Division with four games left and are next in action at home to Squires Gate, who are a point below them, on Easter Monday.

Garstang were well beaten 5-1 at Ashton Athletic in First Division North on Saturday, when they were two down inside eight minutes.

Luke Barmby pulled one back immediately but it was 4-1 by half-time and Deklan Hill scored his second for mid-table Ashton in the second half.

Garstang, who are two points from safety with four matches left, face vital Easter home games against the two teams immediately above them.

They welcome Steeton on Saturday and AFC Blackpool on Monday.

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