

Elgin Endurance Club, National Hare & Hound, Birkenhill, 19/05/2013

Opportunities for getting out on our bikes have been fairly thin on the ground so far this year. The traditional two opening rounds of the Scottish Enduro Championship at Lossie were given over to the British Championship, the Melville rounds in April were cancelled without reason and the SBEC Straiton round was cancelled due to a water logged course a week before it was due to run. On top of that our Championship Hare & Hound scheduled for 5th May had to be cancelled due to the loss of our parking area. The course at Birkenhill was the venue for the BEC test that we couldn't use due to police action at the time. Instead of the H&H, the club managed to organise a practice weekend that was well received by those who attended.

On hearing the news that yet another event had been called off EEC officials, Barry Hamilton and Kevin Gauld looked into the possibility of running the previously cancelled H&H at short notice. After checking out the interest from riders, Barry organised the paperwork side of things and it was confirmed. For the 3rd time in a couple of months Barry and Kevin again put up the course. Due to the limited parking, lack of mass start line and the short notice it was decided that the race would be non championship.

The course utilised previous trails through Birkenhill with some new routes through the tight trees and around the edge of the wood. The course was around 3-1/2 miles. Barry and Kevin had a good week of weather in the run up but the day before torrential rain lashed North East Scotland.

An entry of 50 riders arrived and signed on. Parking was cosy but it's surprising how many vans and trailers can be accommodated in a fairly tight space when required. It was good to see a full bus from Nairn and rumour has it that they tempted our chairman with a dram or two on Saturday night. Barry signed us on and Kevin and Craig Grigor took care of scrutineering. As always at EEC events Kevins riders' meeting prior to the 11am start was the highlight of the day.

The riders set off in their respective classes at 30 second intervals. From the off, the going is tough, a 150 yard section of rutted track with large exposed roots, branches, stumps and the occasional rock. A tight, left hand, nicely bermed uphill turn sends the riders towards some more roots and stumps before they're funnelled into a single line through the tight trees, a short downhill, then sharp right and up another obstacle strewn hill. The ground is slippery after the heavy rain of yesterday but there is grip to be found and the entry is soon spread out. The first part of the course is on the higher part of the wood and is reasonably well drained but the ground, in places, is loamy earth and it cuts up fairly quickly with unseen roots and stumps catching out the unwary. A couple of fairly steep, grippy climbs and one or two not so grippy descents take us out to the edge of the wood and the log obstacle. Previous years have seen a chicken run, but not this time, all riders have to tackle it. After the log another new section involves a tight 180 degree, downhill turn on some slippery mud followed by an off camber, muddy climb to another fallen tree, but this time there's a gap and few risk jumping it. More tight woods follow with ever deeper ruts developing, exposing more nasty roots and stumps to test stamina. The course appears to open up slightly for a few seconds but in no time it's the bumpy downhill that leads to the dark and gloomy bottom section. A single line, gauntlet of large roots that become more and more exposed as the day goes on. Ditches and muddy bridges add to the mix. Quicker riders have little choice other than be patient, there are very few places to pass in the tightest sections. Eventually the course opens up slightly and we're at the end of the lap. As the race unfolds the course evolves, some parts improve, and other parts deteriorate. There is absolutely nowhere on the lap where the rider can relax even for a few seconds, it is unrelenting.

EEC rider, Frazer Norrie demonstrated the skill, consistency and stamina that have earned him a place in our ISDE team this year. He took the win in the expert class with an impressive 15 laps and didn't even look tired.

Elgin veteran Derek Little shows no sign of slowing down and was equally impressive, also on 15 laps, taking 1st in the over 40 class.

This was Andrew Bisset's first competitive event since coming back from a major crash and serious injury at Monaughty last year. If anything, he has got better, putting in an impressive 14 laps and topping the clubman result with only Frazer and Derek ahead of him.

It's been a wee while since we've seen Gordon McGregor in a competitive event and it's good to see him on a bike again. A change from a Kawasaki thumper to a KTM smoker seems to have worked as he took 1st place in clubman B on 12 laps.

Finally, Chris Spellman took 1st place in sportsman on 10 laps.

Well done to all the riders, it was a really tough course and while it may not have been a championship event, the racing was superb and everyone enjoyed their day.

As always our sincerest thanks go to Mr & Mrs Simon Jackson, the landowners, for kindly allowing us the use of their land once again. On the day John, Eileen, Linda, Tricia and Colette took care of the lap scoring. Craig and Kevin scrutineered our bikes and Barry signed us all on. Many thanks, everyone appreciates what you do. Thanks also to all the riders who attended and made the day a success.

This event couldn't have run without the supreme effort by Club Chairman, Kevin Gauld and Club Secretary, Barry Hamilton. Paperwork etc.. aside, Barry and Kevin set the course with no help and have since taken the course down, again with no help.

With the event calendar all but disintegrating this year maybe all the clubs need to be looking at different approaches?