

Pedrosa takes accolades in Japan

DANI Pedrosa powered to a home victory for Honda in an incident-packed Japanese Grand Prix at Motegi.

The Spaniard, who has come back well after missing three races earlier this season with a collarbone injury, benefited from an error by team-mate Casey Stoner to come through for his third win of 2011.

Pedrosa led home the Yamaha of reigning champion Jorge Lorenzo, while Stoner recovered from an error on a gravel trap to take third place.

Twelve months ago Pedrosa suffered agonies at the Motegi circuit when he picked up shoulder and ankle injuries in a

MOTOGP

By Staff Reporter

practice crash, but a year on he was in a league of his own after Stoner's error, taking victory by over seven seconds.

"I was alone in front with Lorenzo very close, but I tried to put my head down and push every lap to pull away," said Pedrosa.

"I'm really happy because at this track I've had a mix of good and bad results and some bad injuries, so come back one

year later and win in MotoGP is fantastic."

The outcome sees Stoner's lead in the MotoGP riders' standings cut to 40 points by Lorenzo with three rounds remaining. With 195 points, Pedrosa trails Stoner by 105 and was already out of the title race, but now just sits one point behind fellow Honda rider Andrea Dovizioso in the scrap for third.

Stoner made a clean start from pole position to lead into the first corner but there was drama moments later when Ducati's Valentino Rossi and Yamaha's Ben Spies got together in turn three.

Spies was able to recover his

bike and continue but Rossi's race was run as the Italian registered his first retirement of his disappointing debut campaign with Ducati.

Fifth became fourth when the Australian passed Ducati's Nicky Hayden, before dispatching Suzuki's Alvaro Bautista to salvage third.

"It's really disappointing as we had the bike to win here today," said Stoner.

"But in the end I guess I should be thankful that we were able to climb back up to a podium spot after other peoples misfortunes and mistakes on track. It was tough out there."



FIRST: Dani Pedrosa at the Japanese Grand Prix yesterday



IN GOOD FORM: Yamaha's Eugene Laverty

LAVERTY MOVES UP

YAMAHA'S Eugene Laverty has climbed to third place in the World Superbike Championship following a typically consistent performance at Magny-Cours in France yesterday.

Laverty finished fifth in the first race before improving to finish on the podium in third in race two on a day when Althea Ducati's Carlos Checa from Spain was crowned world champion after an awesome double triumph.

Northern Ireland star Laverty's team-mate, Marco Melandri – who will remain in the championship in 2012 after signing a deal with BMW – twice finished as the runner-up.

Laverty's solid haul of points saw him move above 2010 champion Max Biaggi from Italy by two points, who

MOTORCYCLING

By Staff Reporter

has missed the previous two rounds due to a foot injury.

Castrol Honda's Jonathan Rea, who won the first race at Imola in Italy last weekend, endured a disappointing day after failing to finish either race.

Laverty is determined to hold on to third place in the standings in his rookie year in World Superbikes at the final round at Portimao in Portugal next weekend, when Biaggi will make his comeback.

"They were two very tough races today," he said.

"I was fighting hard for a podium in race one but I was struggling quite a bit with the rear towards the end and it was either crash or settle for fifth and I chose the latter.

"In the second race the bike was feeling very strong. I tried to stay with Carlos and battle for a win but he's hard to beat this year and then Marco did a great last few laps and managed to overtake me," Laverty added.

"It's great to be back on the podium again and it's nice to have two Yamahas up there together.

"I'm delighted to be in third place in the championship but hopefully Max will be back in Portimao so we

can battle for third overall."

A dejected Rea, who qualified on pole position, fluffed his start in race one and was lying in seventh place in the early stages of the race before he touched the kerb at the final chicane at the end of lap four and crashed out.

The Ulsterman seized the lead in race two from pole on his CBR-1000RR Honda and remained in front for the first seven laps before a faulty crank sensor forced him to retire from the race on lap 13 to cap a miserable afternoon.

"This is not exactly what we expected after a strong performance in Imola and we were hoping to make up for the disappointment of that second race retirement," said

Rea.

"We kind of got half-way there with the pole position on Saturday, but race day was a completely different chapter.

"In race one, you know, I can put my hand up and say I got completely out of rhythm after I thought I'd jumped the start.

"Actually, when we checked the wheel speeds, it turned out that it wasn't a jump start – it was just a short movement.

"But I got swamped in the pack," Rea explained.

Yamaha's Chaz Davies won the World Supersport crown after finishing sixth yesterday, with his team-mate Luca Scassa taking the win.

KIRK CROWNED AT MONDELLO PARK

MOTORCYCLING

By Staff Reporter

IRISH Superbike contender Kirk Jamison was yesterday crowned the Adelaide Masters champion at a sodden Mondello Park in County Kildare.

Jamison was forced to pull out of the feature Masters 'Race of the Year', but he still lifted the coveted trophy for the first time to cap a hugely successful season to date.

Metzeler National Superstock contender Marshall Neill from Portadown won the Masters race by 12.5 seconds from Randalstown's Mathew Percy to pocket the winners' cheque for 3,000 euros, with British Supersport star Jack Kennedy from Dublin claiming the final place on the rostrum.

Jamison, who has already secured the Irish Superstock and Ulster Superbike short circuit titles, told News Letter Sport: "It feels brilliant to win it but it was a dreadful weekend at Mondello in terms of the weather.

"Conditions were awful and it was a case of trying to ride around and be safe, which is easier said than done.

"I could have been quicker but I didn't want to risk crashing, but we won it in the end, thank goodness," he added.

"I didn't finish the Masters race because I made the wrong tyre choice and was getting a few big slides.

"Half the track was wet and the other half dry and I just wasn't in the mood to take any unnecessary risks, so I pulled in."

On Saturday, Neill – who will ride for Wilson Craig Racing at the Sunflower Trophy meeting at Bishopscourt later this month – also took the chequered flag in the first of the weekend's three Irish Superbike races.

The County Armagh rider won comfortably from Kennedy, with Damien Byrne third and the top six completed by Gerard Kinghan, Percy and Mark Glasgow, with Jamison finishing seventh.

In the ISB class yesterday, Supersport hot-shot Kennedy notched a popular victory in front of his home crowd by 1.8 seconds from Byrne with Kinghan taking the final place on the rostrum.

Crucially, championship leader Jamison from Greyabbey was fourth, finishing ahead of main title rival Percy, who was fifth with Neill only 10th on this occasion.

In the second ISB race yesterday, Neill re-established his authority with another commanding win by over 12 seconds from Percy, with Paul Swords



TALENTED:
Yamaha's Kirk
Jamison

third, the impressive Byrne fourth, Jamison fifth and Kinghan in sixth.

With only one round of the Irish Superbike Championship remaining at the Sunflower Trophy meeting, Percy has all but conceded the title to Jamison, who holds a lead of 36 points.

"I can't stop smiling because I had a really good result in the Masters race and finished ahead of Jack Kennedy, who is one of the very top British Supersport riders," Percy said.

"I'm really over the moon to be honest.

"The weather was terrible all weekend but this has sort of made of for it.

"I closed a few points on Kirk Jamison in the Irish Superbike Championship but it wasn't enough," he added.

"The only way I'll beat Kirk is if he doesn't finish at the Sunflower

meeting, so it's a big ask but we won't stop trying until it's over."

Clogher's Keith Farmer dominated the Supersport races.

Farmer, who has wrapped up the National Superstock 600 Championship at his maiden attempt this season, won Saturday's restarted race by 2.3 seconds from former ISB champion Brian McCormack with Emmet O'Grady third and Jonny Buckley fourth ahead of Christian Elkin.

Farmer won the second 600 race from Cody Nally and McCormack and proved unstoppable as he took the honours in the third, with O'Grady second this time and Richie Ryan third.

The top six was completed by Buckley, Elkin and Alastair Kirk.

On Saturday, Gary Jeffers – one of the main challengers for the Supersport title – was badly injured

following a crash.

Jeffers was later transferred to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast after suffering a reported broken neck and back, although his injuries are not considered life threatening.

Isle of Man TT Sidecar competitors Tim Reeves and Gregory Cluze were triple winners in the British F1 Sidecar races at Mondello, with Michael Sweeney also notching a treble in the Lightweight Supertwins class.

Andrew Irwin had a runner-up finish and a third in the Supertwins races, while Richard Glasgow and Mark Kelly were the Pre-97 winners.

Meanwhile Mark Pollock, who sustained life-threatening injuries in a crash at the second round of the Masters series earlier this season, was a welcome guest at yesterday's finale as he continues his recuperation.

It was good to see him back at the meeting.



OUT: Kris Meeke

Meeke out after crash in France

RALLYING

By Ian Lynas

KRIS Meeke crashed out of the FIA World Rally Championship Rally of France on day two, thankfully neither himself nor his co-driver Paul Nagle were injured.

A major disappointment for the Mini works driver who is really now feeling the pressure as he competes at the top level of rallying

"This afternoon I just got caught out in one corner. I was a little bit faster than before.

"I had made a small adjustment to the pace note, tried to go a little bit faster in the corner, and that was too fast, so we simply understeered off the road.

"It was unfortunate, as I was not going out to try any harder. I was just going out to try and improve on this morning and build up my knowledge, but I got caught out.

"Yes just too fast, as simple as that. I was just a bit ambitious, and it was completely my mistake.

"I have to take it on the chin. I am probably my own worst enemy some times, as I want to be here competing with these guys. It is hard to just settle and learn, and I have to do that sometimes, but it ended up a bit soon for me this weekend.

"We have to pick ourselves up. Spain is going to be another learning event, as well as Rally GB, so we are going to have to settle ourselves for a few events and just get the experience before we can run with the guys at the front," commented the Dungannon driver.

Sebastien Ogier driving a works Citroen DS3 WRC, won the event for the first time following a close finish.

He fended off the challenge from Spaniard Dani Sordo in the second works Mini.

The final stage of the event was held in Sebastien Loeb's hometown of Hagenau.

The seven time World Rally Champion retired on Friday morning when his Citroen suffered a rare engine failure. This was Ogier's fifth win in 2011.

Eastwood claims the spoils after battle

KART racing's Ulster Championships is notorious for having a final race of the year with a sting in the tail and Saturday's final round was no exception.

Almost all classes went to the final race of the day for a championship decider but the highlight of the day was the Gary Ireland Memorial Race for the 125cc Rotax Max machines.

Pole driver Derek Wilson set off with an early class lead and was in confident form after winning the Pro

KARTING

Kart Race earlier in the day. Wilson's attempt at the much faster class however was short lived and by the end of the lap British Championship contender Charlie Eastwood from Belfast was in the lead from the third row of the grid.

Eastwood has been virtually unstoppable in this class any time he

has been in action this year. However in the final race of the Championship he had to settle for fourth and was clearly keen to win the feature race.

In fast pursuit was Championship leader Shane Daly but as the race progressed he too came under pressure from his fellow Championship contender Brian McCarte with Wilson dropping back to fifth.

By mid race, Eastwood was holding firm up front with McCarte managing to squeeze passed Daly and as the

race progressed Eastwood with McCarte chasing pulled ahead of the chase behind.

This particular race is like a Mini Enduro but Eastwood clearly had the edge and despite McCarte's best efforts Eastwood came home to a comfortable victory. McCarte's late surge also took him well ahead of Daly with passed Northern Ireland Champion Stuart Coey closing up in the final laps having to settle for fourth well ahead of Wilson in fifth.