

2012 Mickey Thompson Tires ORANZ National Final

As an active racer, heading to the National Final at Hawkes Bay to watch rather than race felt unusual to say the least; but team Hall Motor Racing did just that; and boy was it worth it. What a race meeting! The weather was good, the competition top quality and the racing wicked.

Day one was short course racing. I might be bias, but the Class 3's were definitely the most enjoyable to watch; Wayne Moriarty winning three of the four class races completed with his tried and true racing combination. Steve Stokes and James Buchanan lead the charge against Moriarty with 'Stokesey' taking the fourth and final short course race ahead of Buchanan.

Class 1 was my next pick with good numbers and all the big boys of the North Island showing up and showing off their 'weapons of choice'. Tony McCall was unmatched and took little time to take the lead in all of the races. Challenged by Clive Lammers, Clive Thornton and Trevor Cooper, the tighter technical track played in to McCall's hands. Race three was heated with Thornton driving some interesting lines that made McCall's challenge for the lead a little challenging, sparking a verbal battle post-race.

My next pick was Class 5 with the local Hawkes Bay boys giving the Class good numbers and good competition for those travelling competitors. Greg-Carrington had prepared his new class 5 (my old car) for the meeting and it was real exciting to see the car out there going hard. Being Gregg's first meet with the car, there were no real expectations but he improved in every race. The leaders for the day were Dean Graham, Clint Demsen and Alistair Manning, all battling hard in close fort competition all day.

Class 8 - Awesome! The debut of Graham Steadman's Pro-Lite truck at a National event was nerve racking as Hall Motor Racing has a keen interest in the potential development of this kind of truck (there's one nearing completion in the shed). But boy did he deliver being the first two wheel drive home in each race – and not even pushing it; the truck handled brilliantly and cornered well. We are now looking forward to some seat time in our Pro-Lite. Martyn Van Der Wal's green monster was consistently good and took the honours.

Our very own Challenger Champion Wayne Rowe took out every race in the short course and in dominant fashion. It was awesome too witness. The problem was that there were only four competitors. What has happened to all the Challengers? At this stage a National Class Title was looking good.

Classes two four and six were packed together into one race. The dry conditions meant these trucks had reasonable pace and some close competition racing occurred.

Classes 10, 9 and 7 had one competitor in each class and so effectively raced themselves.

It was mid-afternoon by the time the three short course class races were complete and dust was determined a safety issue (it was dusty); no features were run and so a fourth and final class race was completed, pushing the day out a little longer than what was probably expected – racing finished closer to 5pm. But a great first days racing – I was chomping at the bit for more and looking forward to Day 2.

Day 2 – The enduro. One of the luxuries of not racing is the time you need to be at the track in the morning. By the time we arrived it was drivers briefing and all the sprints were completed.

I listened in at driver's briefing to find Hamish Lawlor had qualified quickest (Class 10) and that the starting grid would be four wide. Lawlor would have Tony McCall, Trevor Cooper and Vinnie Harvey (all Class 1) parked alongside him on the front row.

Drivers briefing over, I ventured to the top of the spectators area to see what I could see. Laid out over this extensive steep to rolling grass country was an awesome looking enduro course. I was absolutely amped and I wasn't even racing. I wished I was. What an awesome place!

Green flag dropped and McCall took the lead followed by Lammers, then Lawlor, then Harvey. This group of four opened out an early advantage over the rest of the field and within 3 laps the battle was for second and third between Lammers and Harvey with McCall pushing out to a good lead and Lawlor comfortably in fourth. Around lap 7 or 8 of the 19 lap (9km per lap) race, McCall's car failed with a fueling issue, handing the lead to Lammers, with Harvey, Lawlor, Steve Stokes and Mal Langley making up the Top 5. At about this time (as though inspired by the demise of McCall) the race picked up in pace with frontrunners Lammers and Harvey pushing each other hard to take the lead. Harvey was relentless and showed a clear power advantage on the open grass paddocks to take the lead from Lammers. Lawlor was clear in third as the battle for fourth and fifth between Langley and Stokes raged on.

Lawlor pitted for fuel and dropped back a couple of spots whilst 'Stokesey' snapped a front shock mount bolt allowing Langley to power ahead. By Lap 11 (60% threshold) following the race order had become difficult (doing it in my head) as drivers were having troubles in different locations all over the track which mixed the competitors up considerably. Without doubt the hard charging Vinnie Harvey was leading the race, and engine issues were plaguing Lammers, whilst Lawlor maintained consistently good pace and it was clear that Langley was charging hard along with Clive Thornton, Trevor Cooper and Wayne Moriarty.

At the end of the Enduro, Vinnie Harvey took out the win with a well-deserved run showing a glimpse of the capabilities of his car. The chequered flag dropped for Harvey capped off a great weekend of National Championship racing.

The Hawkes Bay Offroad Racing Club and their supporters put together a good event and have potentially secured this fantastic track venue for future events. The only hiccup of the enduro was that the track was blocked and the race stalled for about 15 – 20mins. As a racer, not many things are more frustrating than when a track is blocked during a race potentially affecting hours of hard work by a competitor to gain an advantage. An unforeseen issue perhaps but annoying none-the-less and something to seriously consider when preparing a race track.

Overall, the weekend was very good. Congratulations to the new class and overall champions.

NOVEMBER 11th 2012 – COUNTIES CLASSIC 2012 AND ANNIVERSARY MEET. NOW YOU'RE INSPIRED, WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!! – COUNTIES MANUKAU OFFROAD RACING CLUB

Nick Hall

Hall Motor Racing