

Girl power is the real driving force for Hazel

Accrington driver claims six awards in impressive 2011

By CHRIS FLANAGAN
Sports reporter

HAZEL Johnson may be a rare female in a male-dominated sport, but she knew from an early age that she was always going to take up driving competitively.

At the age of just 19, the Accrington motor sport enthusiast picked up honours in six championships this year as she starts to make her name in the autosolo and stage rally disciplines.

She has followed in the footsteps of her father Steve – a founder member of Accrington Motor Sport Club and Go Motorsport regional development officer, teaching road safety.

“The sport’s quite a big part of family life, it takes over a bit!” Johnson laughed.

I’ve won six awards and learned skills that have made me a better driver

Hazel Johnson

“I have grown up with it because my dad has probably been involved for about 30 years.

“I’ve been at the events since I was in nappies and I started marshalling when I was about nine.

“It’s something I’ve always enjoyed and my dad has never pushed me.

“It was always something I wanted to do and once he knew that he encouraged me.

“He has given me a lot of advice and taught me all the skills that I know.

“He has done less events this year to allow me the opportunity to compete.

“Being a female in a male dominated sport, obviously there are a lot more men involved than women.

“But it’s not been difficult because of that, there’s no stigma

RISING STAR Hazel Johnson with her Nissan Micra
Picture: ROBERT BINDER



attached. I’ve grown up knowing everyone involved so they have all been really helpful.”

Johnson started to drive last year and, like her father, has produced impressive performances in autosolo events, which involve a series of tests to measure precision driving skill – often involving negotiating a course marked out by traffic cones.

This year she has progressed to win the junior section of the



IN ACTION Johnson driving

ANWCC Autosolo Championship as well as first in class in the Junior PCA Championship. She was also first novice in the Autosolo Championship and third in her class overall.

Johnson also made her stage rally debut this year and won her class and the novice section in the SD34 Stage Rally Championship.

“It’s gone a lot better than I expected this year,” she said.

“I’m very happy with how it’s gone.

“I’ve won six awards and I’ve learned skills that have helped to make me a better driver on the road as well.”

Johnson is currently combining her driving with life as a student, studying drama at the University of Cumbria.

“I’m in my second year and I dance outside of university too, so I’d like to put that and

the drama to good use in the future,” she said.

“I’d like to become a qualified teacher in drama.”

But on the road, she has one aim – to try to surpass the achievements of her father one day.

“I’d like to compete in the British Autotest Championship,” Johnson said.

“I did one event earlier this year, an event run by Alwoodley Motor Club in the north east, that

was a learning experience because the car was a lot bigger and a lot heavier.

“My dad has competed in the British Autotest Championship and has done very well and has been runner up a few times.

“But he’s never won it so I’d like to beat him!”

PROUD FATHER Steve Johnson



PAST WINNER Ian Grindrod

Molyneux award up for grabs

AGM: The SD34 Motor Sport Group’s annual general meeting will be held in Chorley on Wednesday, January 18 at 8pm.

The meeting will be at the Hartwood Hall Hotel, near junction eight of the M61.

Nominations are now being welcomed for the Brian Molyneux Award, which honours a person who has made a significant contribution to motor sport.

Among the previous winners of the award are Accrington Motor Sport Club’s Steve Johnson and legendary Blackburn rally co-driver Ian Grindrod.

Trophies also need to be returned so they can be engraved with the names of 2011 winners.

Rally series

RALLY: The first round of the Inter-Club Table Top Rally Series will take place at the home of Clitheroe Motor Club on Tuesday, January 17 at 8.30pm.

The event will be held at Waddington Social Club and clubs can send as many teams of two – driver and navigator – as they wish.

Anyone needing further information can contact Maurice Ellison on 07788 723721.

Prize night

MEETING: The SD34 Motor Sport Group’s prize presentation night will take place at Blackburn Northern Sports Club on Friday, February 10 at 8pm.

The event, at the Pleckgate Road venue in Blackburn, will include pie and peas and costs £5 for admission. Anyone requiring further information can contact Terry Martin on 07816 184539.

Training day

RALLY: AN MSA Rally timekeeping training night will be held at Accrington Cricket Club on Friday, March 9.

Further information is at www.volunteersinmotor sport.co.uk.

Timekeeper gets major honour

WHALLEY’S Brian Snape has received the Motor Sports Association’s highest accolade in recognition of his contribution to the sport.

Snape has been awarded the Officiel d’Honneur, joining an elite band of 25 others who hold the title.

The Morecambe Car Club secretary, from JW Turner Timing, has served motor sport over many years.

Snape is a member and a

former chairman of the MSA Timekeeping Advisory Panel.

He has acted as an official timekeeper at a wide range of rally events and has also devoted his time to mentoring countless trainee timekeepers.

The MSA’s Allan Dean-Lewis presented Snape with the prestigious award.

“It is a pleasure and a privilege to have the opportunity to make this very special presentation to Brian

Snape to recognise what he has done to assist the success and safety of our sport over many years, especially in the area of rally timekeeping,” he said.

“He joins an elite band of around 25 other people who hold the Officiel d’Honneur title, which says much for the respect that so many people hold for Brian in what has been a lifetime interest in our sport.”

Snape is also a member of the Rotary Club of Clitheroe.



PRIZE Brian Snape receives his award from Allan-Dean Lewis of the MSA

Sport

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Andy Cryer's Rovers review of the year

A 'chaotic' 12 months ■ 30/31

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Paterson is taking it steady

By CHRIS FLANAGAN
Sports reporter

BURNLEY striker Martin Paterson believes he has emerged from his injury problems with a new mental toughness after vowing to get his career back on track.

Paterson scored his first league goal in more than a year in the Clarets' 3-0 win at home to Doncaster Rovers on Boxing Day after being kept on the sidelines by persistent high problems.

"I don't have any weakness mentally, I'm brave enough to face anything after the year I've had," said the forward "I've just got to take it by every little step now, game by game, and do the best I can."

"I just want to play football. I'm 24 years of age and I just want to play."

Hazel shows girl power



DRIVING FORCE Accrington teenager Hazel Johnson has followed in her father's footsteps by enjoying success in the world of motor sport during an impressive 2011 ■ Read the story on page 29. Picture: ROBERT BINDER

Suarez banned for gesture

FOOTBALL: Luis Suarez has been banned by the Football Association for one match and fined £20,000 for a gesture made towards Fulham fans.

His club Liverpool have also been fined £20,000 for failing to control their players in the same match.



O'Neill gets N.I. job

FOOTBALL: Former Shamrock Rovers boss Michael O'Neill has been appointed as the new Northern Ireland manager.

O'Neill, who earned 33 caps for his country as a player, edged out two other former internationals in Jim Magilton and Iain Dowie for the job.

DO YOU AGREE?

Betfair face a £23m payout after they adjusted the in-race odds of a red-hot favourite to 29/1 – and got hammered by punters. Just goes to show that their insistence that it is more exciting in-play can backfire on them.

Sports reporter Matt Donlan

YOUR VIEW

LT What's your view on in-play gambling in sport?
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VENKY'S HAVE TO SPEND BIG

By CHRIS FLANAGAN
Sports reporter

BLACKBURN Rovers legend Mick McGrath says Venky's must spend £20m in January if they are serious about avoiding relegation – or sell the club to someone who will provide funds.

Venky's have given assurances that they will continue to fund Rovers, regardless of which division they are in next season, after the club posted an annual pre-tax loss of £18.6m.

But fans are now waiting to see whether the club's owners will also provide a significant transfer kitty during the transfer window, with Rovers currently bottom of the Premier League and in major danger of seeing their 11-year spell in the top flight come to an end.

McGrath, who made 312 appear-

Or owners must sell, warns legend McGrath



'THEY MUST SPEND' Rao brothers Left – Rovers legend Mick McGrath

ances for Rovers between 1954 and 1966 and was a highly respected member of the side that reached the

1960 FA Cup final, fears relegation could be a disaster for his former club and has urged Venky's to spend. Rovers boss Steve Kean was due to meet with director Vineeth Rao yesterday to further discuss plans for the transfer window, with Fulham striker Andy Johnson thought to be high on their list of priorities.

"I think if the owners were here at the games they would see that they need to spend money," said former Republic of Ireland international McGrath, who still lives in the area.

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Felix fails to qualify

STRONG MAN: Great Harwood-based strongman Mark Felix, 45, failed to qualify for the final of the World's Strongest Man after finishing in third place in his qualifying heat at Wingate University, North Carolina.

Stanley on Friday

FOOTBALL: Accrington Stanley's League Two trip to Torquay United has been brought forward 24 hours to Good Friday, April 6. Kick off is at 3pm.



We have much greater belief in him than a lot of people have who write about him

Kenny Dalgligh on Andy Carroll

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