

## MOTORSPORT MOTORCYCLE RACING

# Farmer family 'honoured' to receive special accolade in Keith's memory

BY CHRIS CALDWELL

THE late Keith Farmer was honoured at Friday night's Adelaide Motorcycle Insurance Irish Motorbike Awards.

The Clogher Bullet, who passed away suddenly in November last year, was highly regarded in Irish and British motorcycle racing circles and that showed with the standing ovation his brother David and sisters, Wendy Forsythe and Kathy Valentine, received when making their way to the stage to collect the Emporio Bathrooms Special Recognition Award on his behalf at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Belfast.

For the Farmer family, receiving the award on Keith's behalf was a bitter-sweet experience.

"It was tough [to receive the award]," admitted Keith's older brother, David.

"The warmth of the reception was something else and we were honoured that the Irish Motorbike Awards were thinking of him and that people still had him in their thoughts.

"It was very, very tough because it was such a shame that he couldn't be there to lift it himself, but we were very happy to do it for him."

Keith, who was only 35 at the time of his tragic passing, was a four-time British short-circuit champion, winning the British Junior Superstock title in 2011 and the National Superstock 1000 Championship the following year after joining Paul Bird's Kawasaki team. He then went on to



The family of four time British champion, Keith Farmer, who passed away in November 2022, brother David, and sisters Wendy and Kathy, accepted the Emporio Bathrooms Special Recognition Award at the Adelaide Irish Motorbike Awards in Belfast from sponsor representative, Mark Irwin, left, and Jeremy McWilliams, second from left. Photo: Stephen Davison.

prove his class by winning the British Supersport crown in 2017 on the Appleyard/Macadam Yamaha before winning the Superstock 1000 title for a second time in 2018, when he rode for Moneymore's Tyco BMW team.

Prior to his success on tarmac,

Keith was a champion in the mixed surface discipline of Supermoto racing where he honed his considerable skills before moving onto the short circuits where he made his name and cemented his reputation as one of the most versatile and talented

riders ever to emerge from these shores.

And it was that ability on two wheels as well as his sparkling personality and cheery smile that endeared him to so many, which was evident on Friday night, as his friend,

former MotoGP racer, Jeremy McWilliams, explained.

"My memory of Keith was a gentleman with an ever-lasting smile," he said. "Every time you saw him anywhere, he had a huge smile on his face. Anywhere he went, anywhere we went together, he was just met with the utmost respect. He was a gentleman and a competitor who won four Championships in three different categories, which I don't think has been done by anyone else.

"The one thing I have to say about Keith is he was the nicest, most gentle, down to earth person you could ever meet, but a completely fierce contender. He was a man with a big heart and we miss him dearly."

Meanwhile, several other local riders and teams were nominated for awards on the night. Castledearg teenager Cole McCullagh was commended in both the off road rider of the year category and the young rider section alongside title holder, Killyman's Cameron Dawson, and 12-year-old Cookstown High School pupil, Jack Burrows. Ballinamallard's Josh Elliott was shortlisted in the Irish short circuits rider of the year award and Cork's Mike Browne, who races for Dungannon-based Burrows Engineering/RK Racing was in the running for the road racer of the year award after a stellar year. The Burrows team, Cookstown's McAdoo Kawasaki Racing and Moneymore's TAS Racing were all shortlisted in the team of the year award too.

## MOTOCROSS

# Impressive Arenacross debut for Newmills' Daniel

BY CHRIS CALDWELL

TWO young Tyrone racers enjoyed the opening rounds of the 2023 Arenacross UK Tour at Belfast's SSE Arena over the weekend, although neither escaped without some drama.

Omagh's Lewis Spratt is competing in the series for the third time, and the reigning Irish high wheel 85cc champion achieved his pre-weekend goal of earning a podium, while 10-year-old Newmills lad, Daniel Devine, was making his debut and he did so impressively.

Having won the Cumbrain Championship



Daniel Devine prepares for the start of his T-racers AX65 Youth British Championship race at the Arenacross UK held in SSE Arena, Belfast, as Dad, Sean, looks on in the background.

65cc title last year, the P7 pupil at Cookstown's Holy Trinity Primary School went into the event with confidence and took to the big stage with relative ease.

He entered the arena as a complete novice in such a setting. And the rookie, who only took up the sport just over a year ago, was in contention from the off. His lap times were around half a second slower than the leaders and he enjoyed a top five finish before really turning on the style on Saturday.

Deciding to 'go for it' on the final day, he began doubling the whoops, rather than taking them one at a time as most of the 65cc riders were doing. That allowed him to cut his lap time and he qualified second, only for disaster to strike on the start line of the final race.

He was using a hole shot device, which locks the front suspension in place so the rider doesn't wheelie out of the start gate. Unfortunately, it didn't disengage and he spent the whole race without suspension, which made just riding the bike incredibly difficult.

But the gutsy lad stuck at it and despite having to absorb every bump his bike went over, he finished a stunning fourth overall on the day to sit comfortably in the top five overall going into this coming weekend's event in Aberdeen.

Fourteen year-old Spratt, meanwhile, who was racing in the big wheel 85cc class, went into proceedings keen to seal his maiden podium on the Tour and he did just that, finishing second overall on day two to take third place in the



Daniel Devine in action during his T-racers AX65 Youth British Championship race at the Arenacross UK held in SSE Arena, Belfast. Photos: Rod Neill

Championship ahead of the next event in Aberdeen. That result on Saturday was all the more impressive as it came after a heavy crash earlier in the day and after he had been almost taken out by a back marker the day before.

The Omagh High School pupil started impressively and looked set to achieve his goal of a podium on Friday only for one of the slower racers to swerve in front of him, causing him to crash from second place. Spratt managed to recover, remount his bike and battle back up to

seventh to finish fifth overall on the day.

Day two wasn't without drama either, with another rider almost taking him out on the whoops before a heavy landing on the big jump causing him to hit his chest heavily on his bike's handlebars. But despite some discomfort, he battled on and produced an impressive race to claim second overall on the day to move up to third in the standings.

The two lads will return to action in Aberdeen this coming Saturday and Sunday.