

# Daly comes of age with win in Adare

By GERARD CROMWELL

KEITH Daly stands out from the other 80 or so cyclists who have just completed the Woodlands House Hotel 2-Day stage race in Adare on Sunday last.

The 17 year old Balrothery youngster has just had a shocking, Freddie Ljunberg-like red stripe added to his otherwise dark head of hair. But that's not the only difference between the Swords McNally Joinery rider and the rest of the peleton. At the end of two days of racing against senior opposition, Daly has come out on top and is the one wearing the yellow jersey of race winner.

'I'm absolutely delighted,' he says afterwards, 'This is my first ever stage race win and it's great.'

Having abandoned the 6-Day Junior Tour of Ireland with one day to go in mid-August, the second year junior (U/18) has been in super form of late, recording no less than four wins in the past few weeks including the Duane Delaney Memorial in Batterstown and the John McCormack Memorial in the Phoenix Park.

His good form came to the attention of the provincial selectors and he was chosen for the Leinster team in last weekends Woodlands House 2-Day. Apart from winning the race overall, Daly took 9th on the first stage, 6th in the stage two time trial and then won the final stage in Adare.

'I've had great form for the past month or so,' he says, 'I had hoped to be in going well for the Junior Tour in August but things just didn't seem to go my way, but it's really given me some good form for the end of season.'

Having started cycling as an under 12 with Balbriggan Cycling Club, Daly has progressed steadily each year, and indeed all of his wins in 2003 have been against senior opposition, which augers well for next season when he joins the senior ranks.

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Keith Daly. Pic courtesy of Swords CC .com

'Yeah, I'm looking forward to next year,' he says. 'I'll start the year as a second category and try and build myself up and hopefully progress to first category eventually.'

His use of the word 'eventually' shows that the youngster is not in any great rush to the top. Most first-year seniors begin the season with lofty expectations and are often overwhelmed by the rise in competition, many failing to even complete their first year with the 'big boys'.

Coached by Rush-based Aiden Hammond of Orwell Wheelers, Daly trains mainly on his own during the week and with the Swords club at weekends and is willing to bide his time in the senior ranks, gaining fitness and experience along the way.

'This year I had hoped to peak for the Gorey 3-Day and the Dunboyne 3-Day but the first one didn't go according to plan and the second one coincided with my Leaving Cert, but I will still be able to ride them next year so they will be targets again. I'll just take it slowly and see how it goes.'

With the season winding down, the Balrothery rider plans to ride just one more race, the Paddy Neary Memorial in Dundalk on Saturday next. 'I'll probably ride in Dundalk and then take a few weeks off, have a break, because you get sick of riding your bike if you don't.'

So what's with the hair?

'Well, my sister is a hairdresser and she did it for me in the house. It's nothing to do with Arsenal or football or anything like that. It's just something different, a bit of craic. It's a go-faster stripe!' he laughs. Maybe next year go-faster stripes will be all the craze in the cycling peleton. It certainly seems to have worked for Keith Daly!

• Colm Crawley of Stamullen M. Donnelly also finished in the placings in the Woodlands House 2-day in Adare at the weekend. Crawley took 3rd place on stage one and finished 03" behind Daly on the stage 2 time trial. Another good performance on stage 3 saw the Stamullen man finish 8th overall and take home the cup for first unplaced junior. Next weeks action takes place in Knockbridge, just outside Dundalk. the paddy Neary Memorial begins at 11.30am on Saturday next and will be a handicapped event promoted by Cuchullainn CC.