

Class act Breen storms to Willie Loughman Rally title

BY TREVOR MCGRATH

It's been an incredible start to the new motorsport season for Waterford's Craig Breen. He currently leads the Super 2000 World Rally Championship by 18 points after the opening two rounds and two weeks ago the Slieverue man picked up the '2011 Waterford person of the Year'. On Saturday though Breen returned to what he does best as he and his Welsh navigator Gareth Roberts took a dominating victory on the Carrick on Suir Motor Club, Willie Loughman Forest Rally.

Driving his Kel-Tech Engineering Ford Fiesta S2000, Craig set fastest stages times on all six tests running out with a final margin of 3 minutes and 21 seconds over Fermanagh's Garry Jennings. There was also rally class wins for Carrick Club member's Shay Power and John Rafter in there Mk 11 Ford Escort and Gemma Kerley partnered by Lynn Martin took their Subaru Imperza to the Ladies award. The event based in Carrraig Hotel in Carrick on Suir also saw Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell make a special appearance as she donned her race suit for a one off co driver experience with James Cole-

man.

Breen stamped his authority from the beginning as the event got underway with the 25 kilometre stage in the Gurteen stage near Kilsheelan on Saturday evening. Being the only car to break the 15 minute barrier they opened 34 sec lead over Fermanagh's, Garry Jennings. Breen then extended his advantage as the event moved to Portlaw for stages two and three to lead by over 50 seconds at the halfway point. At the Carrick service Breen commented, "I having a lot of fun out there. That first stage, 25km, in Gurteen was fantastic; both stages in Portlaw were very slippery so we didn't take any risks. Overall I'm just setting a controlled pace and the times are coming. I'm now looking forward to getting back out there for the night stages."

The second loop kicked off again with the 25km's of Gurteen and partnered as usual by Welsh man Gareth Roberts, Breen picked up where he left off by dominating the fastest times setting 14:57. There was no easing off over the final two tricky tests in Portlaw and the current SWRC leader bettered his first run times to finish off a perfect day by a winning margin



Craig Breen (right) and his co-driver, Gareth Roberts, celebrate after they won the Willie Loughman Forest Rally.

of 3 minutes and 21 seconds.

At the finish a delighted Breen said, "My priority at the moment is in the World Rally Championship but it's always great to take part in my home

event. I was honoured last June to win the Ravens Rock Rally and winning the Wm. Loughman Forest Rally here today has been very special. In 2008 I was co driving for my Dad when he

was the winner and I'm delighted to add my name to the winner's trophy.

We are using the event to prepare for round three of the SWRC in Portugal at the end of the Month and this was the perfect shakedown for the Algarve event." Craig rounded off by stating, "I want to thank the Carrick Motor Club for putting on such a great event, the format of evening and night stages shows their ingenuity and willingness to try something different. I also want to thank everyone who came out to support me here today."

Moving to the two-wheel drive section it was Carrick Club members Shay Power and John Rafter who took the honours as they got their new season off the a flier taking the class five win and top points in the TRITON SHOWERS South East Stages Championship. The Kilkenny crew are the reigning South East Stages champions and look set to fight for the title again this year.

It was also a great day for the lady crew of Gemma Kerley and Lynn Martin who took the ladies prize on their first day out in their new Subaru Impreza. Other Club Members who came up with the goods on their

home event were Paschal O'Shea and Robbie Hennessy (Escort Mk11) taking class honours coming home ahead of Pierce Doherty and Damien Lawlor. Pierce being hampered as he is carrying a lot of extra weight and needs to take a leaf from Gemma Kerley's book and hit the gym.

Apart from the competitive action there was a special guest appearance by Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell who partnered James Coleman in his Ford Escort Mk 11. The co driving experience was setup in conjunction with the Pat Kenny, RTE Radio One Radio Show, RTE's John Kenny, Motorsport journalist Martin Walsh and Motorsport Ireland.

Marie-Louise was ecstatic with her day in the cockpit with James and was enlightened with finding out the knowledge that goes into organising a motorsport event of this type. You can now listen to Marie-Louise's report with Pat Kenny by logging onto www.carrickonsuirmotorclub.com

At the finish on Saturday night Clerk of the Course, Barry Duggan was delighted with the event saying, "The rally has been a major success again this year. Forming part of Valvoline

National Forestry and Triton Showers Championship's has brought a top class entry here today. I think the night stages added a different type of challenge to the crews. Being a club member it was great to see Craig Breen taking such a convincing victory. Garry Jennings backed up his performance in Donegal and takes another maximum point's score in the National series. Shay Power and John Rafter showed their class taking the two-wheel drive honours among a very competitive section.

"I would like to thank our main sponsors; The Carrraig Hotel, Suirway Farm Machinery/Forklifts, it would not be possible to organise this type of event without their support. I would also like to pass on my gratitude to Ambulance and safety crews, An Garda Siochana; Carick on Suir, Portlaw (Sgt Jim Burke), Coillte (Kevin Power), Carrick on Suir Livestock Mart (Richie Curran), Curraghmore Estate, Fitzgerald Radio Communications, Motorsport Ireland, A special thank you to the marshals from both the Carrick Motor Club and our neighbouring motor club's and to finish the competitors who supported us today."