

# Craig Breen bound for Sicilian Rally

BY TREVOR MCGRATH

After two outings in this year's Intercontinental Rally challenge with French Team Sainteloc Racing, Irish rally driver Craig Breen has a bonus event next weekend in the IRC series. IRC Targa Florio-Rally Internazionale Di Sicilia, round five of the championship begins next Thursday on the Italian island of Sicily and Breen will take on the event driving a Peugeot 207 S2000 prepared by Italian team, HRT Motorsport. Do his last minute preparations before traveling to the Mediterranean Craig said, "I'm delighted to have the opportunity to take on another IRC event this year. I've already competed on the

Circuit of Ireland and Tour de Corse as part of my agreement with Sainteloc Racing and we still have the Geko Ypres Rally in Belgium and Sibiu Rally Romania to come with them but this is a nice bonus."

The Targa Florio (which replaces the Mecesk Rallye) is one of the oldest and most prestigious motorsport events in Italy. Created in 1906, the rally originally consisted of a road race around the whole of Sicily, but by the 1930s it had transformed into an 11 lap race around a 44.7 mile (72km) loop on public roads, called the Circuito delle Madonie. The Targa Florio was resurrected as a stage rally in 1978, and still uses sections of the Madonie

circuit.

Targa Florio-Rally Internazionale Di Sicilia, to give the event its full title, will present a tough test for the IRC regulars as they go up against the cream of the Italian championship on high-speed, undulating Tarmac stages east of Palermo, Sicily's capital city.

Because of the Mediterranean island's intense heat, the road surface is prone to softening, which makes the asphalt slippery and bumpy in nature as a result. Grip levels also change frequently, which increases the challenge facing the crews.

In keeping with the event's origins, the stages are effectively extended versions of race circuits with wide open

corners so a precise driving style and car set-up is vital in order to achieve optimal cornering and exit speeds. And because of the high speeds achieved, engines are subjected to significant stress levels.

The format of the modern-day Targa differs to other IRC rounds with the action contained within five different stage layouts: a single run over the Citta' Di Palermo stage on Thursday night, three passes over the Targa and Collesano stages on Friday and two runs over the Cefalu and Castelbuono stages on Saturday. The Collesano and Castelbuono stages haven't been used since the 1980s and are therefore uncharted territory for the leading contenders.

"Having started our odyssey with Sainteloc on home ground at the 'Circuit' (Circuit of Ireland) and then took on the iconic Tour de Corse. The Circuit was really used to acclimatise to the Peugeot but on the Tour de Corse I truly got to get to grips with the French machine and now I have next weekend's event further improve my abilities with the car. We will try very hard to put in a good result for the team and aim for a good points haul for our IRC campaign."



Waterford's Craig Breen is this week taking part in the Sicilian Rally.