

Mixed Emotions

BY SAMMY HAMILL PHOTOS: TREVOR FOSTER, WILLIAM NEILL & FERGAL KELLY

The Ulster Rally brought a weekend of mixed emotions for Craig Breen.

He was, on the one hand, delighted and excited to be driving Peugeot's new R2 208, albeit as a zero car, but also acutely conscious of the fact that the little man, Gareth Roberts, who had played such a big part in getting him to this stage of his career, was absent.

"I'm really excited about the opportunity to be here with the 208 and the factory team but I can't forget all the hard work that Gareth put in

alongside me to get me to this point," he said before the start in Antrim.

He would have been feeling the pressure too of coming to Ulster on the back of successive major accidents – the one in which co-driver Roberts died in Sicily and the one which cost him a World Super 2000 victory in Finland.

The latter crash had left him sporting a brace on his left forearm while co-driver Paul Nagle was nursing a cracked rib.

The original plan was for Breen to take part in the British championship section of the rally – which he won in

2010 in his S2000 Ford Fiesta – but this was changed to a sweeper role when homologation of the 208 was postponed.

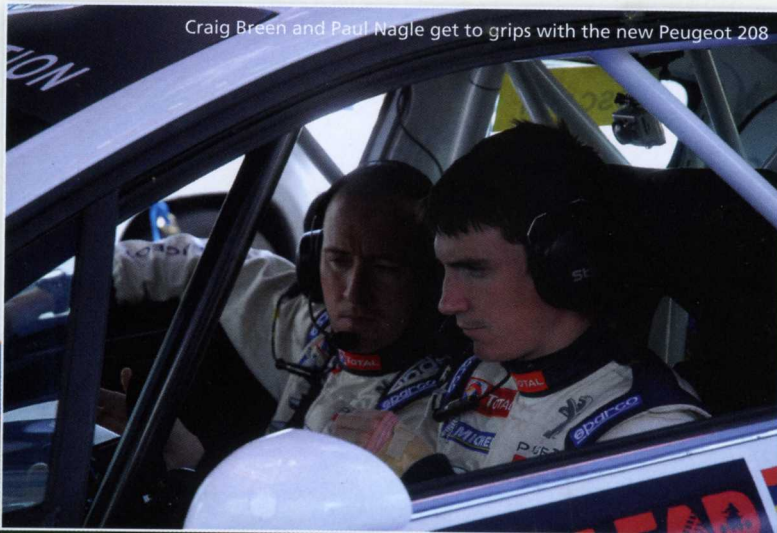
Even so, the stunning little car – probably the prettiest in the rally – appeared with the full trappings of the Peugeot Sport entourage and they treated the whole development exercise as if they were competing in the event.

Breen drove it in a thoroughly professional manner, quick enough to be towards the front end of the BRC field but mindful of the fact that this was a

test and development exercise, not

He was pleased with the progress they were able to make during the stages, commenting that he could feel the difference even little changes to the set up which were being made by Peugeot engineers.

"It is not easy to set up a new car on Irish tarmac but we made good progress with tiny improvements throughout the rally and I was finishing stages with a smile on face," he said. "It is a superb little car to drive – a perfect all round package."



Craig Breen and Paul Nagle get to grips with the new Peugeot 208



