

Breen's Poignant SWRC Victory



1ST SWRC. CRAIG BREEN & PAUL NAGLE



AL RAJHI 3RD AFTER SPEEDING OFFENCE

Craig Breen has moved back into FIA Super 2000 World Rally Championship title contention by becoming the third driver to win two rounds of this year's series following his dominant category victory at Wales Rally GB.

The result, Breen's first in the series since he and former co-driver Gareth Roberts triumphed on Rallye Monte-Carlo in January, puts the Irishman into joint second place in the title chase, eight points behind leader P-G Andersson.

Partnered by Killarney's Paul Nagle, the crew got off to the perfect start when on stage two they set their first fastest stage time within the SWRC class, taking over the category lead. Alastair Fisher held second at this point, although his challenge came to an end with damaged suspension on the following test.

Breen's position was further enhanced when title rival Hayden Paddon hit trouble with an ignition problem dropping 12 minutes. This was quickly followed by more good fortune for the Irish crew when championship leader P-G Andersson retired for the day after ripping a wheel off his Proton.

Driving the Kel-Tech Engineering Ford Fiesta S2000, Breen went on to record five fastest stage times within the class to lead Saudi Arabia's Yazeed Al Rajhi by more than one minute at the end of day one.

The Saturday leg consisted of seven stages and by the end of the day, Breen remained in total control with a lead of more than two minutes over Tom Cave. But that failed to tell the whole story...

An oil leak in Breen's Fiesta had forced a gearbox change at midday service and after a powersteering pipe leak was also discovered, the crew incurred more than one minute of penalties after leaving service late.

"The gearbox change went perfectly," Breen explained, "but when the guys put the 'box back in they noticed one of the powersteering pipes was damaged so it all had to come back out again."

As a result, the crew dropped back to the second position in the class, 12 seconds behind Al Rajhi. Over the afternoon loop, there was a see-saw battle between the two Fiesta drivers.

Breen drew first blood by taking back the lead on stage 10 but the Saudi driver hit back on SS11, recording his first fastest stage time of the weekend to move to top spot.

On the penultimate stage of the day, Craig turned the tables to move in front again. On a better tyre option, Al Rajhi looked to have had the final Saturday say when he went in front by 0.1 on the 'Celtic Manor' super special but there was one extra twist. On the liaison section back to final service, Al-Rajhi committed a speeding offence. That resulted in event officials imposing a five-minute time penalty, dropping him down to third overall.

So instead of waking to begin a final day battle for victory, Breen awoke with a two minute lead over Proton driver Tom Cave. Taking no risks, Breen and Nagle stayed out of trouble over the closing miles to secure an emotional victory ahead of Cave and Craig Parry, with Al Rajhi coming home in third.

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