

Never Breen as Busy!

SAINTÉLOC
RACING



Now that was a hectic month! I tested the Peugeot 207 in France on the 20 March and I haven't stopped working since. After that test, I was home just with enough time to pack and get back on the road for SWRC Portugal, straight into recce, and then started the rally (sunny times in the Algarve...not!)

After that, I flew home, had a quick wash and clothes change, then headed to Armagh for the Circuit and my first event with Sainteloc. After finishing the Circuit, I was off to Austria for workshop number three in the FIA Institute Academy. My head is still spinning and my jet lag has jet lag!

Let's pick up with round three of the SWRC in Portugal, which for me turned out to be a wash out. We had a one day test on the Sunday before which was good but I noticed the surface was a little different than previous visits.

A long spell of dry weather had made the gravel roads very dusty and on the test stage we were cutting away the gravel very quickly and getting onto bed rock. We then noticed the same conditions on the event stages and this had the potential to pose a tyre issue.

The rally started with the Superspecial in Lisbon and I was happy to set quickest time. Then the first change from the norm... there were three stages on the way back south to Faro, all tackled in darkness.

Some rain was forecast but it didn't turn out to be much. We lost a good lump of time on the first proper stage when some water got into the spark plugs and the car didn't run properly for most of the stage. However, I finished the leg

in second place behind Haydon Paddon.

The rain that started on the Thursday evening turned into a torrential downpour overnight. As we started leg two on the Friday, the stages were transformed from gravel to mud.

The heavy rain never let up and during the initial Friday morning test, my Fiesta's engine stopped after going through a water splash. We managed to get her going again after removing the spark plugs and clearing the water, and carried on.

Then on the next stage, we hit another water splash. There was little water involved but the engine stopped again – it must have been caused by the angle of impact. This time there was no starting it and we were out.

So we had an early exit from the Algarve but there was no time to rest as I headed for my first event with Sainteloc Racing and Peugeot Sport at the Circuit of Ireland. It was great to be heading to an International event and not having to head to the airport!

We did a single day test in Monaghan on the Tuesday which I was pleased with but like a wise man once said, there's nothing like competition to see where you stand.

The 207 and the Fiesta are both S2000 spec machines but they're two different breeds. This is my

third year driving the Fiesta and it took time to refine the setup of the car. Maybe I was expecting too much to be on the pace out of the box, but I wanted to show my speed against the Skoda regulars, to my new team and most of all, to myself.

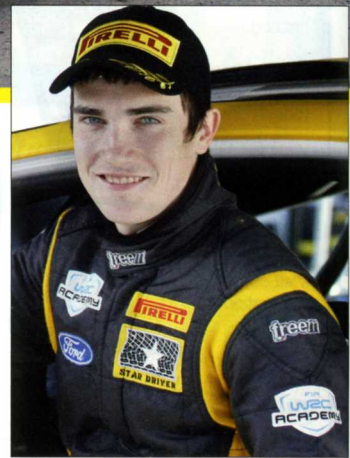
With the 'Titanic Superspecial' out of the way, we moved to the countryside for a double loop of two stages on the Friday evening. Typical Irish Easter weather of heavy showers made conditions and tyre choice difficult. From the start, I wasn't 100% confident in the car.

I was fourth at the end of the opening loop but then we suffered a fuel pump failure. Luckily we were able to get back to service but incurred a 90 second penalty in the process. We dropped from fourth to ninth, effectively ending any hopes of a top finish, but it opened the door of completing the event and using it as a test session.

As we stopped for the overnight halt, we were back up to seventh. The plan for day two was to get to grips with the car and climb as far as we could.

Saturday took in 10 stages and for us it was another day of acclimatising to the 207. We made new discoveries on every stage and tweaked our setup during each service halt. By the finish, we were fifth.

I want to take this opportunity to



thank everyone at Sainteloc Racing and Peugeot Sport. It was a privilege working with them and I'm eagerly looking forward to Corsica.

With the Circuit completed, I was off to Teesdorf, Austria for the third workshop in the FIA Institute Young Driver Excellence Academy. This workshop was about enhancing drivers' understanding of vehicle dynamics to better improve their skills.

On paper, it sounded good, but in practice it was great! It was one of the most informing and interesting weeks of my life. There were several 'light bulb' moments during the week, and so many tips and hints that I will most certainly carry with me each time I'm behind the wheel.

There were some great challenges there, and I really feel I have improved so much as a driver in those five days. Being part of the FIA Institute Young Driver Excellence Academy really has been a blessing, and I can't wait for the next workshop back at the Road Safety Training Centre in Teesdorf.

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