

# Breen in exceptional form at Barum Czech Rally Zlin

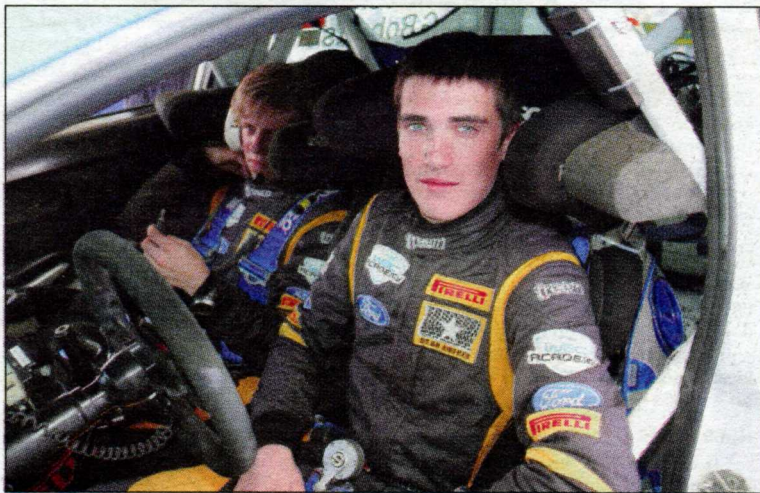
■ Trevor McGrath

Irish rally driver Craig Breen has sent ripples through the IRC Championship this weekend by taking seventh overall in the Barum Czech Rally Zlin today in the Czech Republic. Breen who claimed his maiden victory in the World Rally Academy just over a week ago in WRC Germany, reverted to his Keltech Engineering Ford Fiesta S2000 (4 Wheel Drive) for his first outing the IRC (International Rally Challenge) and gave a tremendous display on the asphalt surface in Eastern Europe.

After finishing the final stage Breen commented, "I'm a young guy from Waterford, Ireland. This is my first IRC event and it's great to be among the drivers that I saw on TV when I was young, I'm very happy to be here with them at the same level."

The action in Eastern Europe got underway on Friday night and the Waterford ace took a sensible approach over the opening super special stage held in the host City of Zlin by finishing equal 21st overall. The rally resumed on Saturday morning with a double loop of four stages. At midday service Breen had steadily climbed the leader board to 11th place. The afternoon loop was just as rewarding as by the end of the Saturday schedule Breen has moved up to 8th overall. On returning to the Zlin overnight halt Breen commented, "I took a steady approach on the Super Special last night to save my tyres, then this morning we gradually increased our pace."

Over the final two stages this evening, Breen set the sixth best and fifth best times respectively. "I'd a really good feeling over both. I got into a rhythm



Craig Breen during last weekend's Barum Czech Rally Zlin where he finished seventh overall.

and the times show our speed. I'm eight overnight but tomorrow will be another tough day with six stages."

Breen, who was placed 11th at the end of the Saturday Stages, immediately gained a place on the resumption this morning on stage 10 but reported, "The ride is really dangerous and I've had several adrenaline moments. I had to try and focus in order not to make mistakes. Everybody will have problems here, even if they slow down"

On to stage 11 and Craig held station in seventh setting eighth best time, he did state at the end of the test, "It's still a long way to the finish. We're enjoying it but changes between forest and open landscape are difficult".

On the final stage in the morning loop Craig narrowed the gap to Finnish

driver Toni Gardemeister who held 6th to 12.1s and in service said, "We did quite well at this stage. We managed without any big mistakes".

Over stage 13 there was change in order, but on the start line of the penultimate test (SS14) Gardemeister had a false start and picked up a ten-second penalty. At the end of the stage Craig said during his interview, "We won't speed up, only the final stage left and I don't want to make any mistakes". When informed about Gardemeister's penalty, Craig quickly answered, "You shouldn't have told me. Well, we'll try to beat him then". Craig final push didn't reward him, he did beat the Finnish driver by 2.9s over the closing test but it wasn't to be but the Irish driver impressed enough with his 7th overall.