



Breen wrapped up the Super 2000 world championship with a dominant victory in Spain

By David Evans

Despite winning his second consecutive world title, Irishman Craig Breen says that he faces an uphill struggle to secure a drive in next year's World Rally Championship.

The Ford Fiesta S2000 ace secured the Super 2000 World Rally Championship ahead of works Proton driver PG Andersson by taking a dominant class win – and sixth overall – on Rally Spain last weekend.

The title win marked a remarkable comeback for Breen after his best friend and co-driver Gareth Roberts was killed in a crash on the Targa Florio earlier this year.

Breen said: "I really couldn't have done this without everybody's support and good wishes. It's the perfect tribute to Gareth too and I am so happy to have won this title for him."

Breen's resolve

WRC drivers and team managers from all squads paid tribute to the 22-year-old's strength in bouncing back from the Targa Florio crash – and said Breen is now ready to step into a World Rally Car.

Outgoing Ford driver Jari-Matti Latvala said: "I need to give him respect. Some drivers would have stopped their career following the accident he had. That he still came back and had the speed, I have to give respect to him. Coming to win the title is even more special. It's been a very good performance. In the beginning of the year he was doing really good speed. Even though he had the accident it hadn't affected him for the speed. These big accidents can have an affect and if you don't get over it you can't get that pace back. He has."

WRC runner-up Mikko Hirvonen, who was also a friend of Roberts, added: "It can't have been easy for him after that happened. It's amazing that he continued – and that he was able to be competitive. It shows how he must be really, really strong. If he can get over that, mentally, there is nothing which can stop him now."

Hirvonen added that Breen's close-knit team had helped him through the season.

"They have gone through this together," said the Finn. "And I'm sure they are all happy for him to continue – I'm sure some of this was for Gareth as well; they decided to do it together and it came together like a dream. This world title is a lot down to Gareth, maybe there were three of them in the car."

Hirvonen's Citroën team-mate Sébastien Loeb added: "I have never been in that position and I don't want to be, so it's difficult to comment, but this result is very good for him. You can't really imagine how difficult the year has been for him."

Mature drive

After winning the WRC Academy title last season, Breen arrived at the final SWRC round of the year in Spain last weekend needing to stay ahead of Proton's P-G Andersson. When the Swede hit trouble on the opening day, Breen was left to defend a four-minute lead over the weekend.

His co-driver Paul Nagle, who has previously co-driven for Kris Meeke, said: "On Friday, the conditions were horrific. Craig's just a young fella, but he's got a very old head on those young shoulders and the way he drove the car slowly and sensibly on Friday was fantastic. I don't know many old drivers who could have shown that maturity."

Breen's future

Despite his success, Breen admitted he has a long winter ahead as he works on finding the cash for another WRC season – and the step to the next level.

"The situation is: I have nothing," said Breen. "I have zero budget, nothing to start from, nothing to work with. All I have is two support world titles to my name and a heart of gold to try to make it happen. I will try to work my arse off during the next couple of weeks and try and get to the start of the series."

"I'd love to be in a World Rally Car. I'd love to step up to win. I've got good experience of the European events but I need to broaden my experience and get to the long hauls. Okay, everyone's dream would be to do all 13 rounds in a World Rally Car but perhaps a limited programme is what I need to aim for. I just need to try to get the budget to do it."

Ford team principal Malcolm Wilson was full of praise for Breen, saying: "He's done the most professional job on this rally – a rally where we have seen plenty of drivers making plenty of mistakes. What he has done makes him a very special person and now he has to take that next step, he's ready for a World Rally Car. There's no question that he has the talent to be competing in the WRC, but he's now got to find the funding."

Academy success

Wilson noted that Breen's success was a boost for the WRC Academy, which will be renamed the Junior WRC Championship for next year. Breen's drive in the SWRC series was his prize for the Academy victory.

"It's a ringing endorsement of the Academy," said Wilson. "The training and the grounding from the Academy has helped pave the way for Craig."

Breen contested three SWRC rounds this season with Roberts, winning the opening round, the Monte Carlo Rally and finishing second in Sweden before they retired in Portugal. Nagle stepped into the Waterford driver's Fiesta S2000 on Rally Finland, Breen's first WRC round since the Targa Florio crash. The pair crashed on the final stage of the Jyväskylä rally, but won the three of the final rounds of the year.



Breen won first WRC Academy crown in 2011