

# Iron willed Breen is crowned FIA WRC Academy champion

IT ALL came down to the last stage, in the last race on the last day and Slieverue rally ace, Craig Breen (pictured) showed nerves of steel to score a near unbelievable win in the FIA WRC Academy Championship. Breen was crowned World Rally Championship Academy Champion and claimed the top prize of 500,000 on Saturday in Wales at the end of Wales Rally Great Britain.

The 21-year-old coped with all the pressures to bring off the biggest win in recent Irish rallying history. There were nail-biting scenes at the end of the final stage as Craig crossed the finish line but then was required to wait until his nearest championship rival, Egon Kaur came through in a slower time. It became clear as Kaur neared

the end of the test that he was down on time. Breen, his co-driver Gareth Roberts (Wales) and the Breen supporters erupted.

The final event of the WRC Academy season set-up a showdown, winner take all as Egon Kaur (Estonia) on 92 points and Craig Breen (Ireland) on 72 points were the only two who could take the title.

The odds were still stacked against the Irish driver. He had to win the rally and if Kaur finish second, he was required to win 14 of the 17 stages that made up the event.

## Breen was flying

The final event of the six round WRC Academy series got under way on Thursday afternoon and

entailed a double run of the Great Orme tarmac stage in North Wales. Breen finished by setting his first fastest stage time of the weekend, taking the overall lead by 2.1 seconds.

On the first gravel test Breen extended his advantage to 26.8 seconds. Kaur was sixth, 53 seconds down.

Friday started early with the 19.72 kms of Gartheiniog. Craig set equal fastest time with Alastair Fisher on the morning opener.

Then over stages 5, 6 and 7 Breen was supreme, gaining time on everyone. In terms of the Academy Championship, Breen led. After the morning loop, Breen's fastest times had mounted to six from seven. Kaur's stage time on Gartheiniog

(SS4) moved him into third place, leaving Breen needing 11 stage win to become champion.

At the end of a hectic day, Breen was left needing five fastest stage times going into the last day of racing.

## Amazing

The final day was played out over a double loop of Hafren, Sweet Lamb and Myherin, three of the most famous 'special stages' in World Rallying. As the drama and pressure mounted, Breen went into the final stages needing a win. He got it!

"I can't find words to describe this moment," Breen said after stepping from his car. "It's the most amazing feeling to finally get here.

"I'd got into quite a good rhythm so I wasn't thinking too much about the stages. I was just trying to be fast and carry good speed. I've got a fantastic group of people in Ireland who believe in me just about as much as I believe in myself."

He said winning the money was a very small step on a big ladder and he couldn't wait for next season. And what of next season?

"We're going to be at the start line on Rallye Monte-Carlo in the S2000 ready to win," he smiled. "The prize has given me most of next year's budget. I can put my own budget to the following year so it's guaranteed two more years in the sport I love. What better prize could there be?"

