

RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Waterford's Craig Breen to open new Season in Principality

(by Trevor McGrath)

Amidst turmoil within the World Rally Championship, the next step in the career of 2011 World Rally Academy Champion, Craig Breen will commence in the Principality of Monaco next week. But as Craig continues his build up to the new season the World Rally Championship itself lies under a cloud of controversy.

As late as last Friday, less than two weeks before the start of the Rally Monte Carlo, the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (Governing Body of World Motorsport) stepped in and served notice to terminate its contract with North One Sport, the Promoter of the FIA World Rally Championship. In a statement released last Sunday by the FIA, they said, "The FIA has sought urgent unequivocal assurances from NOS (North One Sport) that it could fulfil its contractual obligations and deliver the promotion of the upcoming Rally Monte Carlo and the Championship for 2012 and for the future. It is with regret and disappointment that no such assurance has been given to the FIA, and therefore the FIA has been driven to terminate its contract with NOS. NOS has conspicuously failed to deliver its contractual obligations and is in fundamental breach of contract."

The statement went on to read, "The FIA has now launched urgent top level discussions with several partners and suppliers to guarantee the key organisational and promotional components of the Championships, including timing and tracking, TV production and distribution, as well as sponsorship servicing are put in place."

When asked to comment on the current controversy Craig Breen said, "I have been monitoring the situation over the last few weeks but as I'm not aware of all the facts, it would be wrong of me to get involved. As a driver, all I can do is continue with my preparation for Monte Carlo and the start of a new season. My car left for Valence last Saturday and I fly to France on Wednesday (11th Jan). We have a programme of testing planned and then we carry out our recce, which is extensive because the rally is spread out over five days. This is my first time to take on the 'Monte' and it's a very specialised tarmac event."

After a three year absence from the WRC, Rallye Monte Carlo makes a welcome return to the World Rally Championship as the opening round. Setting out on the next step in his World Rallying career, Craig moves up to the four wheel drive class of Super 2000 (SWRC) based within the WRC and the Waterford driver is eager to get the season under way. "After winning the WRC Academy in November, I was still kept very busy with awards ceremony's here in Ireland and in India where I picked up my Academy Trophy and from there it was down to work on putting the logistics together for the 2012 event schedule. I did manage to recharge the batteries over Christmas but I had one eye on my trip to Monte Carlo for the opening round of the 2012 season and now with only a week to go I can't wait to get behind the wheel and get on that first stage."

The Super 2000 Championship that Craig will be taking part in during 2012 entails eight events based within the World Rally Championship and navigates throughout the continent of Europe and also takes in Rally of New Zealand in the Southern hemisphere.

2012 FIA Super 2000 World Rally Championship Event Calendar

1. Rallye Monte Carlo - January 17-22
2. Rally Sweden - February 9-12
3. Rally Portugal - March 29-April 1
4. Rally New Zealand - June 22-24
5. Rally Finland - August 2-5
6. Rally Great Britain - September 13-16
7. Rallye de France - October 4-7
8. Rally de Espana - November 8-11

On announcing the new schedule Craig did state however that he would not be making the trip to New Zealand. "I would love to be going to round four in Maori land but the logistics and costs of transporting the rallycar, recce car and service vehicles are huge, so I'll give that one a miss for this year. I will be concentrating on the other seven rounds and will be giving my all over the European events."