

# The Algarve and Armagh beckon for Breen

■ Trevor McGrath

After a six week break in the World Rally Championship Craig Breen has a hectic two event schedule over the next two weeks.

First up next weekend is round three of the Super 2000 World Rally Championship in Portugal and then the following weekend Craig returns home to Ireland for his eagerly awaited maiden outing with the Santeloc Junior Rally team, in the Peugeot 207 S2000.

The World Rally Portugal forms round three of the Super 2000 World Rally Championship (SWRC).

Craig has made an impressive start to his campaign with victory in the opening round in Monte Carlo and second in February as the championship headed to Sweden.

The Waterford driver's reward for his early season dominance is an 18 point lead in the series.

The pattern from the Monte and Sweden is set to be broken next weekend as Proton Motorsport have nominated SWRC Portugal as their round to drop. This will leave the door open for Breen to extend his advantage but this is easier said

than done.

The Portuguese event will effectively mark the halfway point in the SWRC season for Craig. Breen has nominated round four in New Zealand as his dropped rally from the eight round series.

"Portugal is the first gravel event of the year it's vital that I keep the run going," said Breen before leaving for the Algarve. "Our win on the Monte was an incredible start and with P-G on home ground for round two we were really fighting for second place. I haven't changed my driving style this year but I do think I'm maturing as a driver. The Monte was a big learning curve and I'm delighted with my early season start."

World Rally Portugal has been a destination of mixed fortunes for Craig over his last two visits. In 2009 Breen, on his maiden WRC rally, took top honours.

Last season however on the opening round of the WRC Academy Breen gave a dominating performance but was thwarted near the end and went off the road on the final day and out of the rally.

Now with a clean slate the

academy champion has a great opportunity to extend his advantage at the top of the SWRC standings.

Less than a week after Rally Portugal, Craig will be back in Ireland to begin his exploits in the Peugeot 207 as part of the Sainteloc Junior Rally Team on the iconic 'Circuit of Ireland rally'.

The event this year forms round three of the IRC (Intercontinental Rally Challenge) and takes place on Friday and Saturday, the 6th and 7th April.

16 challenging tarmac stages in Counties Antrim, Down, Armagh, Tyrone and a short section in the Republic, with the Rally HQ based in Armagh City Hotel. The highlights however will be a spectacular 'Superspecial' stage to kick the rally off being held on Friday evening in the Titanic Quarter, Belfast City and is followed on Saturday with the Lisburn 'PowerStage' which will be run twice.

Craig is looking forward to the Circuit for more than one reason, "This year marks 20 years since my rallying hero Frank Meagher won



Craig Breen testing the Peugeot 207 for the first time

the event. It also marks the 10th anniversary since his tragic death. The rally will be my first driving

for Peugeot and Sainteloc Racing but it will also be very special as I remember my hero."